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1

"Sisi, you are the only one in this taxi and I've been driving for a while now, are you sure you know where you're going?"

My heart thumps loud enough to jump out of my ribcage as the taxi driver finally asks the big question. Am I sure? I don't know. This is my first time here and I know he's going the extra mile for me and telling him that I have no clue of the place won't make anything easier. It's getting dark and with each heartbeat, it's hard to breathe.

"I... I'm new here bhuti and my aunt told me to get off at a garage, she'll be waiting for me there and I was told the route that the taxi takes, I'll see the garage..."

I fix my mask and look out the window feeling anxious as the taxi goes. He looks at me briefly through the mirror and set his eyes on the road again.

"I can see you are new here sis wam and if I was another driver, I'd have long left you on the side of the street... What's your name?"

I look down and play with my fingers. He's slowed down the taxi speed and is lighting his cigarette.

"Nobulali," I answer and look at him through the same mirror.

"Lali... You don't mind me smoking ne?"

I shake my head no and he nods. The smell of the cheap cigarette takes over the Quantum invading my nostrils and passing me from non-smoker to passive smoker.

"Can you call your Aunt... Lali," he puffs out the smoke as I shakingly dial the number again. Truth is, there's no aunt only a landlord but you never say such to strangers, especially Men in a new city.

The phone rings and an enthusiastic worried voice comes to the speaker.

"Sisi, you should've been here by now and I'm starting to worry it's getting late, how far are you?"

My cell phone speaker is too loud. The driver releases a chuckle before he asks for me to hand over the phone to him.

"I'll give the driver the phone ma, he'll tell how far I am,"

"Alright Sisi,"

I hand the driver the phone and I look outside at the city lights and I am filled with wonder and being tired from traveling night and day. They communicate in IsiXhosa and I have little understanding of the dialect. I do understand enough to communicate the basics without sounding too coconut, but growing up in Stellenbosch with white parents

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I had no other choice but hold fluency in Afrikaans.

My parents are white and no, they're not my biological parents, mine were killed in a car accident and I was only 3 months then. Eliza the nurse and her husband were always struggling to get a child and wanted one badly, so when I was stranded with only my name written on the clothing label, they legally adopted me. Me... a Black Child with coarse afro hair and zero white genes in me.... At least with what I know.

They decided to keep my name Nobulali and my first but I grew up being called "Joy" which is my second name and one that I don't want to use now that I'm in the new city.

"You know, you are quite slow for a doctor... Lali,"

I'm brought back from reality by the taxi driver handing me my cell phone back.

"Pardon?" I take the phone looking at him puzzled.

"They said you must take a taxi that'll drive you to Algoa Park and drop you off by spar but mntase this isn't a taxi to Algoa, you're at Njoli Sisi Nobulali,"

I don't even know how far I am from the place I was supposed to go but I feel too stupid to even call myself a doctor. Years in medical school yet I can't even know when I'm taking the wrong taxi... So much for wanting to assimilate in the culture of my people.

"Oh! good gracious... How do I get there? Where can I get taxis that go in the area? Please excuse my dumbass..."

I breathe and bite off the sides of my fingertips.

"Don't worry about it, I know where your aunt is and I'll drop you off at the gate..."

I feel a sense of relief overcomes me and I sit back and exhale.

"Thanks, and how much will it all cost? And please don't tell me that it's nothing..."

"Haa don't worry about it Lali... Just paying it forward. I was also helped by a taxi driver when I first came here knowing no one."

"Well, bless your heart.... And this may be going off but I didn't get your name..."

My nerves seem to calm a bit. I thought I'd have to ask the driver to take me to the nearest B&B and the extra costs would've emptied my wallet before I even start working.

He exhales and becomes silent for a good minute.

"You, you call me Dali..."

I take it in and digest it. He turns over his shoulder and gives me a brief smile of reassurance more so for him than myself.

I finally get a clear line of his faces. Full of scars by the neck... the days of struggle drawn on the map of scars filling his dark skin, he also needs a good bath. I'm not judging or anything because he's a hard worker but I must mention that his hygiene is questionable... Has he even eaten anything good the past hours he's been on the road? Oh god why am I even concerned about someone who makes three times my monthly pay in a matter of days. Taxi drivers are the real *wealthy* people if you ask me.

2

"Eliza was right. You are really beautiful Joy,"

"Thank you very much, Ma."

The landlord smiles as she welcomes me inside the house, I look around at what's to be my new home and smile briefly at her. Dali pushes the suitcases in and they chat something in IsiXhosa that I can't understand.

They laugh in-between as I'm still looking around the cosy home. The kitchen is small and opens to the dining and TV area. Two bedrooms and a small passage that leads to the bathroom and the backdoor. The walls are bright white with a touch of beach blue and silver appliances. It fits a young single doctor like myself.

"You like it Sisi?"

I'm brought back by the landlord; I turn and look at her with a smile. Dali is standing by the door looking around.

"It's clean and it screams me, I love it so much, thank you,"

"Of course, you are welcome to redecorate and move things around to make yourself more comfortable. Get a pet too,"

She's excited about me staying here than I seem to be. Eliza once mentioned that Brenda is a people's person.

"Thank you, Ma, though I'll probably spend half of my time at work,"

"Ahh, kanene you're a doctor, you hear that Dali?"

He nods and gives us a side smile.

"I did get some groceries ke mntanam, the keys are on the countertop. If you need anything, I'm a phone call away."

I nod and smile, she takes her bag and gives me a brief hug.

"Dali, take me home bhuti. UMyeni wam is probably panicking,"

Oh, so they do know each other. That's great, at least.

"Awu Mam Brenda, I'll follow you just now,"

She nods and bid goodbye for the last time.

"Uhm... thank you for getting me here safe," I say to Dali and he gives me another side smile.

"Your place is beautiful, when can I come over for tea?" He asks with his eyes wandering around.

Thank you... uhm, we'll have to see about that,"

He laughs at my response and puts his hands in his pockets.

"Okay... hope to see you around, Lali,"

Hope to see you too, Dali. But I don't say it out loud. I don't know him that well to be hoping to see his face again. I only

nod and he instruct me to lock the door after him. I nod again and we bid goodbye. I lock the door and take a deep breath.

Finally, I made it.

I throw myself on the couch and my eyes burn with tears. My heart clenches in pain, I don't fight it this time. I've been fighting it for too long, now I have the space to let it all out. I cry for the mother I lost. The family I almost had.

We were supposed to leave for London a month ago, we had everything planned with Jason. He was the most loving person I had ever met, Eliza approved of him but Thomas, the boy I grew up with who was loved dearly at home, he couldn't bear it. I didn't care. At some point they believed Thomas and I would be lovers but he was too arrogant for him and I to have anything further than being civil.

Jason and I were madly in love, nothing could keep us apart, not even the fact that we both had demanding jobs in Cape Town. We had our time and it was ours, we owned it. We loved each other, we lived in the moment and were the best moments. I don't think anyone is capable of loving me exactly like he did. And I'd never love anyone like I did him.

It was chilly like it is tonight when I received the call to rush back home from work. Chief of Surgery, Dr Mhlaba, who is one

to not give any favours, begged me that day to drop the scrubs and rush home.

I arrived to a crime scene, never in my life had I seen that much blood... as a surgeon that operates on people almost daily, that scene was new.

They didn't want to let me in, they begged me not to but I forced matters. I shouldn't have but I wanted to see it for myself. Now the image of Eliza and Jason stabbed to death still hangs so clear in my head. The police haven't found the killer nor any suspects. Deep in me, I know Thomas had a hand but he couldn't be charged with anything as he had a perfect alibi.

I wanted one last chance with both of them. To hold Eliza's frail old hands and kiss them for the last time, to thank her for raising me well. To hug Jason and let him know how much I love him, to dance with him and run my fingers through his black curly hair. Oh, how beautiful my love had been.

I changed that day. I felt stripped of everything I had and only left with the shell of me. There's not a single day I don't cry for them, I've hid it well but today, I can't. I let it out.

I feel lonely, I feel empty but I know I have to fight every day, fight for me and only me. I hope this city will help me heal or at least give me a reason to keep going. It's still dark in my corner and undecided whether I should keep this pregnancy or not.

3

The hard knock on the door makes me jump off the couch and stand in the middle of the room. For a moment, I look around lost and not knowing where I am. The knock goes again and I take a deep breath as I register my surrounding. I'm in PE, not Cape town. I got here last night...

"I'm coming... please,"

I look around and the suitcases are still by the door. Everything else is still untouched. I push the bags to the room and close the door. The knock goes again and I'm almost annoyed, I can't even see where my cell phone is at.

I walk to the door and open it, it's still dark outside but showing that the sun will rise soon. It's probably 4am in the morning. There's no one... I close it and immediately the knock comes again... it's coming from the backdoor, f*ck.

I grab the keys on the countertop and walk to open the backdoor. It's Dali... so early in the morning.

"Hi," I look so lost and him, looking like he's ready for the day.

"Good morning. You left your bag and cell phone in my taxi. It's been ringing nonstop...annoying," he says as he hands me the toiletry bag and cell phone.

"Thank you...my head was all over the place last night. Do you live in area?"

He chuckles.

"No, I only take a trip for school children who live in the area. These aren't our routes; we'd get killed if we take any passengers this side..."

It doesn't make sense to me, because, the road is still a road, no one owns it but I nod as if I know everything.

"Alright, I'll be needing something to take me to Dora Nginza Hospital at 10am, I didn't bring my car so... which taxis should I take?" I ask

"I can take you, or send someone to...." I stop him before he extends his kindness.

"NO, please don't. I just want to take taxis on my own so I can get used to the place and the surroundings without getting lost but I do appreciate you trying to help me."

He understands and then tells me which ones to take, apparently, where I'm at, the hospital is quite near I could even walk on good days even though it's not recommended because of the crimes that often happen.

"Be safe, Lali. I got strict orders from Mam Brenda to keep you safe. You two are close hey?" He asks and leans on the door frame.

"Mam Brenda was close with my mom, I wouldn't really call it close rather they were loyal to each other. And they would talk on the phone once a month or twice but Mom always said that if I were to move here, Brenda would be the one I should call...so..." I shrug my shoulders and he nod.

"Okay. I should get back on the road then, ubenosuku oluhle Lali,"

I smile, he's hoping I have a good day. I got that one, I know the basics.

"Have a good one yourself, and thanks again for bringing these," I hold up the bag and cell phone.

"It was no problem, I should go..." he says and I nod.

"Bye,"

He leaves. I close the door and lock it, throwing the bag on the couch and exhaling. I check the time and it's actually about to hit 5am. I missed calls from Lihla, she's probably calling to make sure I don't miss our appointment.

Dr. Lihlangene Mqhayi is a friend of mine from UCT, she's an OB/GYN and works at Dora Nginza Hospital. She's the one

handling my transfer from Redcross to here, and She's been doing it brilliantly. I call her back and she picks up immediately.

"Good morning, Joy,"

I almost vomit in my mouth. My stomach grumbles in hunger.

"Not a good one for me, Lihla. How are you?"

I walk to the kitchen and open the fridge; I can make a quick sandwich with what's in here. Brenda didn't do any little groceries; she got the whole fridge full.

"I am up and that's all that matters, I called to ask how far are you? You weren't answering my calls last night and I was getting worried."

I close the fridge and check the cupboards, there's more food.

"I arrived last night, my landlord welcomed me well and I just woke up hungry,"

"That's great. I was actually worried. Please don't forget the appointment. Be here before 10am, at least 15 or 30min earlier. So, we can get there on time."

I nod as if she can see me. I've worked in huge hospitals before and never was I nervous as I am now. Maybe it's because I won't be getting a phone-call from Eliza asking about my day.

"I will do,"

"Great, can't wait to see you, Joy,"

"I can't wait to see you too Lihla,"

The hours fly pretty quickly and I find myself stepping inside Lihla's office exhaling.

"How was it?" She asks with gleaming eyes.

"Better than I expected actually, I'm starting on Monday. I didn't know that you even told them about... the loss,"

I pull the chair and sit while placing my bag on her table. I had a meeting with the board on why should they hire me and asking me questions they typically do at interviews. Which is quite weird as the doctor that they need and they've already done the screening and asking about my work at my old hospital.

"They wanted a valid reason of you transferring from one of the best hospitals we have in the country and well... to a government one that's at the centre of townships. Not to mention how your work hours will be messed up and well, money? It's never enough. With your expertise, you could literally work anywhere in the world. So, I had to give them a reason,"

She looks at me with her big brown eyes that have dark lashes.

"It's okay. But I didn't want them to hand me the position simply because they feel pity. That makes it look like I'm only here to grieve, use this hospital as a rebound and then go back to the ones that are private and people pay big money for. I'm not here for that,"

I sigh and take off my blazer feeling hot.

"Even if you were, Joy, we appreciate the time you'll spend here and hope you'll also help us set up a research wing and just be of help to the community,"

She extends her arms to reach mine, I meet her halfway and we hold hands. She's wearing pink scrubs and her stethoscopes is around her neck. I know why she's doing this, holding my hands like this.

"Can we not

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Lihla," I beg and she shakes her head and hold my hands tighter.

"How are you holding up?"

I'm holding my tears. I can't cry again... not here, not now. We've always done this, it's our way of venting and being honest. She knows I need this but not now, at least.

"I miss Jason, Lihla. I miss him so much that it hurts, I wish I had more time with him. To hold him and to..." I stop and take a deep breath. She smiles and encourages me to go on. We've always teased her at school that she should've been a psychologist.

"I'm listening, Joy," she says ever so comforting.

"I'm pregnant Lihla, and I didn't even get to share the news with him. He'd have been so happy..." I sniff and exhale to hold the tears in.

"How far are you?"

"6 weeks... and...." I shake my head.

"Then that means you fell pregnant while he was alive. You got to spend the very first weeks of foetal formation with him. That should offer you some comfort...and you know I'm a science woman, but I bet he's smiling where he is,"

I chuckle to avoid the pain almost closing my throat and force a smile.

"We both know that when people die, they die and there's nothing beyond. We simply live with the narrative that in some mysterious dimension their spirits live on and are looking down at us feeling proud, we live with it because it gives us comfort. It makes us feel good and warm that wherever we are, the loved ones we lost are still here in spirit... it's all a lie we

orchestrated so that we get to cheat grief and carry on with our lives, to ease the guilt that overcomes us when a day passes without thinking or talking about them. It's human nature that we behave this way and unfortunately, it doesn't work on me..."

I smile at Lihla, move my hands away from hers to pat my face. She looks at me like she feels for me.

"Everything will be Okay, Lali. I will be here anytime you need to talk, okay?" I nod.

What I have loved about my dear friend Lihla, she never takes anything personal and that then allows me, as her friend to be most comfortable speaking to her. She's easy going and simply wants to listen, nothing else.

Her pager beeps as an indication that lunch is over for her and it's back to work. I get up as she does, take my blazer and bag.

"You'll be able to get home safe babe? Or I should call a cab?"

She's in doctor mode, speaking fast.

"Yes, yes. Don't worry, I also have to familiarise myself with the hospital. And with google maps, I won't get lost,"

She looks at me with a smile and then pulls me in for quick a hug.

"I love you, my friend. Make sure you get home, eat and then rest. I'll check you when I finish my shift okay... love you and have an indoor Friday... no alcohol."

I nod and smile at her. We walk out her office and I take the right side down the corridor to the lift; she takes the left one.

I exhale as I finally take a step outside. The sun shining bright and people coming in and out. The hospital grounds are quite steep and high, it's basically taking outdoor steps down and a long walk to the gates. It's going to be quite the exercise coming in and out of this hospital. It is beautiful, that I must mention.

I finally reach the security gate, I check my cell phone and put it in the bag. I didn't notice when I came in here that the hospital is opposite a high school.

A feeling of nostalgia engulfs me. I remember being young and about their age, having all these dreams. At one point, I thought I'd be an astronaut but my fear of loss of gravity just didn't allow me the courtesy. They're so young and have no idea how their lives might turn, I hope they at least choose happiness in all of it.

I take myself out of those thoughts as a black 2016 Hyundai i10 stops. I'm standing directionless outside the hospital exit gate.

The driver rolls down the window and I see a face that I have come to know... Dali.

I smile briefly.

"Please get in before these fools fine me for stopping Infront of their gates," he pleads and opens the door from inside.

I don't ask questions but get in with a witty smile. I close the door and he step on it immediately after.

"If I didn't know better, I'd say you are following me..."

He laughs. An actual laughter and not that side smile.

"Hayi, it's not even that. This time it's pure coincidence, I was here to drop a lady who is in labour, she's my neighbour kid."

"That's kind of you... and the taxi?"

"The taxis are with the others. I'm not on the road after 12pm Fridays. Just so you know," He seems happier too as he mentions this.

How funny that he just dropped a pregnant lady that's about to give birth and picked up another one. What a funny life.

"You give yourself a break?" I ask. Trying to understand his routine.

"Yes, to rest. Taxi industry isn't an easy one, we can't afford to slack off so that's why I give myself time to rest on Fridays,

when it's busy and they can hardly notice that I'm not on the road." he stops at a red light and looks at me with a smile, he's got a good set of teeth too.

"You're looking very beautiful Sisi... so yes, I give myself breaks on Friday because I can afford to, not many of us on the road can do that. And also, I have dinner with my sister every Friday, she works at Dora. You'll probably see her there, Mam Brenda did mention that you'll be working there too... if you think I'm being forward and knowing all your business,"

I smile and nod. He really did just compliment me and then carried on with the conversation as if he didn't just make me feel good.

"No, no, you're not being forward. It's actually good that she told you... you don't mind me taking my shoes off, right?"

He takes a left turn when the light turns green, I'm in the township. I can notice by the shops and funeral pallor being in the same line. There's another school and people crossing the roads with bonnets and flip-flops.

"Not at all..." He answers and I pull my shoes off. He takes my blazer and throws it in the backseat along with my bag.

"Where are we going?" I ask while untying the braids.

He smiles again and looks at me.

"Lose the tie or whatever that flower thing is called on your collar, unbutton the first two buttons and relax... I'll be taking you on a township tour. you don't have any allergies?"

I chuckle first at the instructions and then do as he says.

"Not a single one..."

"That's great... we'll get vetkoeks but we call them amagwinya here and then show you around. The streets are easy to understand, roll your window slightly down for fresh air, make sure the door is locked and let's play some soul music and drive around. What do you say?"

"Let's do it... I'm excited."

I almost jump at my sit as Dali laughs at the excitement written all over my face.

"We're now at Zwide and this side? Well just don't drive or walk alone at night... I live in the area and know almost everyone because I'm a driver. You're safe with me, Lali,"

I laugh and sit back as he explains every corner of the area. He's quite excited about doing all this.

Mam Brenda might have a hand in this but I

4

"Do you think that sometimes, we meet people because they have to play a certain role in our lives and then leave immediately after? Like they have a mission to accomplish and then leave. Even though we feel like we need them for longer time?"

I ask. We've driven around and stopped at a few food containers for hot chips and Russians, went to braai some meat and sat at a carwash talking about taxi shenanigans. He's very fun to be around, I met a few of his friends and he introduced me as someone He's babysitting... which we laugh at.

He parked the car at this long street, there's a church next to us and the sun is setting over the dark rain clouds. It's chilly but it's warm inside the car. The street really goes down and long, he said it's called Tonjeni or something like that but we're in the township. Elokshin is how he calls it and other they said it's Kasi, very interesting how each place has their own way of calling a certain area. It really differentiates the locals from visitors.

He looks over to my side as if preparing to give an answer to a strict teacher.

"People don't belong to us, Lali. We don't own anyone and so, they come and go as they please. Sometimes we are the cause

of their departure and other times, well, they simply leave on their own because as you say, mission is accomplished and there's not much that they need to do. Even that is, there are those who stay with us and don't leave until the moments of our last breath...."

I glance at him and then back to the street full of enthusiastic children playing mindlessly.

"Even in the case of death? Do you think that we lose people because their mission is accomplished?" I ask.

"Death is like a thief at night, unexpected but leaves the house a mayhem. It's part of our lives and we can't tell it when and when not to visit. We have to be okay with the fact that we cannot cheat death and can never dictate it on whether to visit or na. What's most important is cherishing the little moments we have with the people we love so that when the thief comes at night, we have no regrets on the time we spent with them."

"But don't you think that it's quite unfair for death to visit when we still need those people?"

"We can't explain to death that we still need these people, it doesn't understand our language. And whether their mission is accomplished or not, death, just like a thief, it doesn't care..." He says and exhales loudly.

There's silence after. It's comfortable silence but it's too loud for me. I want him to talk, it's better that way.

"What happened, Lali?" He asks after an eternity of silence.

I'm taken back and shocked for a split second.

"What happened where, Dali?"

"In Cape Town. Mam Brenda mentioned that you lost your mother and it was that. You are anxious and always looking around.... you were uncomfortable when we were braaiing and my friends came to sit with us... you were uneasy,"

I look at him and he is concerned. I didn't notice any of that, I was enjoying myself. Yes, I did feel overwhelmed by the people but it's nothing to write home about.

"I wasn't uncomfortable..." I try to force a smile but he's not convinced.

"But you weren't as free as you are with me in the car..."

He got me.

"I don't want to talk about it,"

"Okay... we'll drop it," he says and I exhale.

"Thank you..."

Jason would've done the opposite; I'd have to find it in me and say what's bothering me. He would beg and beg until I give up

and simply tell him. Dali, he's different. If I won't say anything at the given time, he's not going to beg. Did I just compare the two? I should be ashamed but it won't hurt anyone.

"Should I drive you home?"

"No..."

I answer too quickly. I don't want to go home... not yet anyway, I'm enjoying his company, more than I should.

"Okay," he says and then smiles.

"You haven't told me about yourself, we talked all day about our jobs and Mam Brenda surely gave you some information about me,"

I'm smiling as I ask this question, I don't know why but I'm smiling and I don't want to go anywhere but be here with him. It might be that I'm holding on to him because he distracts me from my thoughts and does it so well, I don't know but I like it.

"My name is Dali and you're Lali, which is short for Nobulali. We did tell each other something about ourselves... I know you're Doctor and well, I'm a taxi driver... that's something,"

He has such a cute smile. I keep saying.

"So, Dali is short for Daliwonga or Dalindyebo?"

"serif";mso-fareast-font-family:"Times New Roman";
color:#050505;mso-fareast-language:EN-ZA">He erupts in
laughter; I smile as I listen to his deep sounding laughter.

"No, Lali. It's short for Darling...."

He winks and I almost choke. Oh-oh.

"It's a lie, it's just Dali,"

I nod and he laughs again.

"If only you could see how flushed you look right now,"

"Compliments to my dark skin, otherwise I'd have been red if I
was anything close to Eliza's complexion. She was really white
and a beautiful woman..."

I feel an ache as I think about her. Oh, Eliza with her long grey
hair and face full of wrinkles but that never stopped her from
smiling and simply being happy to be alive even without her
husband George.

"You miss her, don't you?" He asks.

"Every single day," I answer.

He pulls me to him and my head rest on his left shoulder.

"You'll be okay..."

I hope for that day every time I wake up in the morning. We remain in the position without saying anything. We're comfortable.

"Is it okay if I kiss you?"

I ask holding my breath, my heart races and beats faster than ticking bomb. He holds my head up and I'm at close proximity of his face.

I want to touch his beard and pull his face to meet mine but I'm too scared of rejection.

"Are you sure?" He whispers and my whole body feels like it's been dipped in the heat used to melt gold.

"I am..." I'm losing my breath. He smiles and use his other arm to position my face.

Our lips meet and suddenly, I am transported to a whole new dimension. He's gentle, meaning and slow. His lips are soft and I can't even explain the warm fuzziness I'm feeling in my tummy.

I kiss him back and our lips dance in their own rhythm, it's emotionally charged more than anything else. It's comforting and feels like I've come home after being away for a long time, it's a feeling I don't ever want to lose. He lightly bites my bottom lip and pulls it. I release a soft moan and my other hand holds his cheek pulling him even closer, I don't want to stop now, he's making me forget about everything and I want it all.

He unbuttons my shirt and give my *tities* a light rub and then a squeeze. I want him and I want him now.

I'm panting as we break the kiss and look at each other. His eyes are looking ever sexy and needy of me.

"I need you... push back your seat," I instruct and he doesn't question anything but does as I say. I take off my shirt and he take off his. I'm stunned for a second at his body. It has old stiches... definitely no six pack, he has a small round belly and big arms... my slim body would use those as pillows every night.

He unbuckles his belt and I do mine and straddle him. I can feel his manhood on my thighs.

He pulls my waist closer and hold me tight as he buries his face on my tits. I moan as he licks and sucks on them with his beard adding to the sensation. He's devouring me like a breakfast plate of bacon and eggs. I'm lost in the world of pleasure I want him... I need him inside of me. I need to release the tension.

I cry as his fingers find their way down to my *coochie*, I move as I need friction.

"Dali, I need you to move," I beg.

"You're so hot... we don't have condoms..."

I feel him against my thighs, he's full and thick.

We don't have condoms, it's a risk. We should stop, and this is such a tight space.

"I don't want to stop, Dali..." I almost cry.

I reach down and remove his fingers; I pull his thing out and insert it on my wet *coochie*. The feeling of pleasure overcomes both of us as I sink in it and clamp my vaginal walls as it reaches deep inside me. I cry out loud and he shuts me with a kiss as he, himself, groans in me.

"Lali, the windows are tinted but they're not sound proof okay?"

I press my breast on his body and he use his hands to guide my movements.

We're both lost in the world of pleasure, I'm in ecstasy. This space is tight but making it hot. The idea that we could get caught intensifies the moment, I feel good. I'm chasing something, something that I seem to get closer to as I rock him. He's trying so hard to surpass his groans but fails at each attempt.

I let out a loud cry and my legs still at the reaping feel of my orgasm. It's so intense that I don't feel him flying me back to my seat and his head hit the steering wheel as he groans and *cums* holding his vest to catch it. I'm panting in my seat as pull my shirt to cover my body. That was mind-blowing.

He looks at me with a smile. Eyes full of lust.

"What did we just do?" He asks, still leaning on the steering wheel.

"We just had sex Dali. And we enjoyed it,"

I look at him and we laugh... almost like two friends who got high and are scared of going home.

5

So, we did it. In his car, without protection. On the second day that we meet, Am I that easy? Oh goodness I think I am. But there are no regrets, I loved every minute and second of it and I would do it again, chance given.

My only worry is where to from here, do we keep going or was it one day thing, I can't say one night stand because there's no way we're spending the night together. I look over to him, he is still leaning on the steering wheel, almost like he's tired and all he wants is a soft bed with clean linen after a good bath, of which, I have both.

"Dali..." I call him softly and the he moves his head back.

"Lali,"

"You're, okay?"

He chuckles at my question before exhaling and looking at me.

"Who would be? After what you just did to me,"

"But I didn't do anything..." I feel my face flaming up and fighting a smile.

"Lali.... you wrecked me. In fact, what you just did is mess me up..."

"It was good,"

"The best,"

We exhale and then fuss around trying to find our piece of clothing. After what feels like eternity, we are fully clothed and he rolls down his window and the sun has set. He fixes the seat and we both sit in silence.

"What do you need?" I ask. Breaking the silence.

"I feel like my body has been removed from tight bonds of something I can't name,"

He is really vocal about his feelings. I've noticed but that's not what im asking.

"Dali,"

He looks at me.

"What do you need?"

"What I need? Are you serious, Lali?"

He's amused by the question but I am not. I am almost losing my breath at the panic I feel rising. My left-hand shakes and I can't seem to control it.

"Dali... please, just answer the damn question,"

His face immediately changes from amused to concerned, he looks at my hand and then back to me with worried eyes.

"I'm going to drive you home,"

"Please..."

He's confused by my sudden change of attitude and I honestly can't explain it to him. I'm probably overreacting, or is it being anxious? I don't want him to fall for me, he has to be away from me because he's clearly showing signs of wanting something with me. I'm confused, more than anything. Maybe I am taking this a little too high, we had fun sex and it should be it but I feel anger brewing, I feel hurt that is mixed with wanting to be as far away from this man as possible. But I know very well that it's not regret, it's fear.

"We're here," he announces. That was quick... but no wait, this isn't where I stay?

"Dali, this isn't my house,"

"I know,"

"You know, and then why are we here?"

My left hand is still shaking.

"Surgeons have steady hands. Even in the case of tremor, they know how to steady themselves. That's to avoid a lot of things that could go wrong in the OR," he says and looks at me as he shuts the car and pull the key out of the ignition and gestures for me to get out of the car as he does.

"That's the basic rule you get taught in your undergrad class of MBChB, where are you going with this?" I ask confused.

He looks at me and huffs before unlocking his gate and we walk inside. The yard is clean, with neatly trimmed hedges and a healthy green lawn that has 2litre bottles full of water spread along it. I think we're at his house.

"They have high tolerance of emotional pain, and I say emotional because they hardly feel anything physical. But mentally and emotionally, they lose patients almost every day, some of them are young kids who had a bright future and some are good senior citizens who've enjoyed life. You aren't allowed to build a bond with a patient, you are quick to lose whatever feeling or hope you had for a patient to recover and you most certainly cannot promise a patient anything,"

He's saying a mouthful. He unlocks the door and we walk inside the house and it's through the kitchen. It's bigger than mine, that's for sure. Has white cupboards with a touch of red and white appliances.

"I know all that,"

He places the keys on top of the table and directs me to the tv area, it's not open plan like my house, but it's quite cosy. It screams that he lives alone, the mix matched colours and weird positioning of furniture. He has a mounted flat screen tv, black

couches against the wall and well, I can't even tell the colour of the curtain but it has caused the room to be dim.

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"serif";mso-fareast-font-family: "Times New Roman";color:#050505;mso-fareast-language:EN-ZA">"You have a very odd taste..." I mention as I look around and sit down. The couch is comfortable at least.

I know," he answers.

"Surgeons also work long hours..." I mention bringing him back to the conversation about my job. My hand is still shaking.

He pulls a black cube chair and sits directly Infront of me, taking my hands and placing them on my thighs.

"Good point, Lali. Now, how long have you been working as a surgeon..."

"What has that got...."

"Answer the question,"

I look at him and he is serious.

"I've worked enough years to know all that you've said... now, what's your point?"

He points my hand and we both watch it vibrate and jolt like it's been shocked by electricity. We watch it as if it's something mesmerising.

I finally get it. I get what he's been muttering this entire time, he is using the only language I'll understand.

"What happened in Cape Town? Rest on the couch, close your eyes and think,"

He takes my hand and give it a rub. I can't close my eyes and he can see it.

"I can't... I can't close my eyes, Dali,"

I panic and my hand shakes even more.

"Calm down, calm down, Lali... you're safe here, okay? With me, no one will come in. Don't be scared, you're safe with me. Now, close your eyes slowly and take deep breath,"

I'm safe. I chant in my head and breathe in and out, I close my eyes. And for the first time in weeks, it's not because I'm crying myself to sleep or got drunk and passed out on the floor. It's voluntary.

"There was too much blood, it was everywhere. On the walls, the fridge, the couches. Everything was covered in blood; the smell was as strong as the colour of it. It's something I'd usually smell in the OR, I never imagined that I would smell the blood

of my loved ones with them cold dead on the floor. I changed that day...."

There were signs of struggle too. Investigators say that, Eliza was stabbed first and the killer fought with Jason before he actually found a good spot to stab multiple times. It was never a mistake, the killer intended for cold blood. Jason had 15 stabs while Eliza fell with 7. It was ugly and gruesome.

"I lost both of them. My pillars and I felt lonely, they left me. They should've fought harder but didn't, they always claimed that they'll protect me Dali but the moment where I needed protection, they chose death."

"So, you blame them?"

He is calm. Why is this man calm or I sound crazy? I sound like I'm losing my mind.

"I obviously fault them for not fighting harder for their lives but I couldn't have controlled death. You said it yourself, it's like a thief at night, comes unexpected...."

"Surgeons don't cry... they hold in whatever they feel and release it when they're alone." He says and throws me completely out of line.

We don't. It's the hospital rule. It's the job and you do the job with no tears, otherwise, why did you study so many years, only to cry and wallow.

"Take me home Dali," I am not playing this game with him. Not here and definitely not right now.

"No, I'll take you home when your hand has stopped shaking."

I can't steady it; I can't pack away the stress.

I can't deal with emotions as if I'm at a job. My life is not a job and for so long, I've treated it as such. I don't know how to filter out the Job and live as Lali and not Dr. Joy Miller. I have to cry to release and not cry to keep in or press inside because Dr. Joy Miller is needed in the OR.

Before I am saving lives, I need to save mine first. I have to. I'm not a surgeon first but a human being that has feelings and emotions. Now, I get to be a human then a mother immediately after. A surgeon is the person that walks into the OR for an operation and as soon as she exits the hospital gate, she's Lali who sat at a car wash and had braaied meat.

"I didn't cry for them. Just like how I don't cry for my patients. I hate myself for having to hide my grief, I hate that I've got to be strong because people don't understand why am I hurt where, according to them, as a surgeon, I deal better with loss...." I shrug and I feel a huge lump in my throat. The pain is coming up and closing me up.

He pulls me in his embrace and I don't hesitate, I let it out as soon as my face hits his chest. I let it out, I let it all out. The

trying to seem like I'm dealing with the loss perfectly and the hate of being pitied.

"There's nothing more they could've done, Lali. Believe me when I say, they fought a good fight. You will be okay, you'll come to terms with everything. Whenever you need a good chat, you know where to find me."

He says and brushes my back. This is better than the one I had with Lihla.

I push off him a minute later and I mutter a thank you.

"I'll make us supper; the bathroom is on the right. It was pretty hot today, so the geyser has hot water. Don't use the bath salts, they gave me a horrible rash this other time. I'll bring you a t-shirt and shorts to wear. Take your time,"

I nod and I notice my hand isn't shaking anymore. He turns the tv on as I get up and head to the bathroom. I feel light.

6

"Good morning, Lali."

I yawn and stretch as I look at him with my morning eyes. He removes the braids off my face and smile.

"How did you sleep?"

"Peaceful, and you?"

"Same as you did,"

I don't even remember going to bed, all I remember is us having dinner then resting on the couch to watch some tv series. I must have zoned out and he carried me to bed. For the first time in weeks, I had a peaceful sleep, I didn't have to drug or cry myself to sleep. That's good.

"What do you eat in the morning? I didn't want to make something you're not used to eating,"

We didn't sleep in the same bed. I notice as I get up because the other side is cold and still untouched. He probably slept in the other one if he did at all.

"I eat anything, do you still have leftovers from last night?"

He chuckles and looks at me as if I am playing.

"I do... in the fridge,"

"I'll help myself with them, don't worry,"

He is stunned for a second

"No, you'll have to eat something soft first,"

"Dali, please. Don't try to be too accommodative. I'll have the left overs and you can make a whole English breakfast if you want, just don't count me in,"

He shakes his head as I get off the bed. He walks to the other side and helps with making the bed.

"Why do you insist on not telling me about yourself?" I ask

"Why do you insist on knowing about me, it's not like We're planning to get married..."

Why is he like this again? This man.

"Dali...."

"You know my name, what I do for a living and now you know where I live... you seem to know as much as you need to... I'm not a serial killer, that's for sure..."

He is getting irritable at the question and is annoyed at how he has to keep dodging it. I shut up and we finish making the bed. I head to the kitchen to warm up food and he gets in the bathroom to probably get ready for the day. I don't know and I honestly do not care at this point.

I take my tray of food and sit in front of the tv, there's a morning show playing but I don't care for it. I'm having a tiny feel of doubt at this situation I have with Dali. He's a good person but very secretive of his life, the comment of how we're not planning to get married was quite dismissive and I don't like it. He really can't have held my hand last night and touched me in places only to be cold and closed off the next day.

He walks in looking clean and fresh but his perfume is making my stomach turn. I lose appetite at the smell.

"You look disgusted," he comments as he passes by to the kitchen.

"You have a horrible taste of perfumes... it's not nice at all,"

I place my tray on the table as I almost gag...

He stands on the door frame separating the kitchen and the tv area.

"You don't like it?"

"No, I don't and I want to puke... I'm pregnant why would I like any perfume. I can't even stand my own..."

Oh, that pregnant part slipped my tongue... I gasp and look at him. He is confused and looks like he thinks he must have heard it wrong.

"Umithi?" He asks in shock.

I roll my eyes and nod.

"Ewe"

"And you didn't tell me? You let us have s*x without protection knowing very well that..."

"Oh, please save the lecture, I'm an adult. I knew what I was doing..."

He's annoying me and it's giving me a headache.

"Ahh... so you knew what you were doing, Lali! You knew!?"

Now, wait a minute. He better not be saying what I think he is. His tone is very much insinuating.

"Dali, you stop right there..."

"No, Lali. I won't, you didn't tell me you were pregnant. We had s*x without any protection and I only get to hear about it now!"

He is really annoying me. So bad.

"What should I have done... Hi Dali, my name is Nobulali and I'm a doctor who lost her family and because of her inability to cope and accept the loss, she moved to a whole new different city knowing no one while pregnant and cries herself to sleep everyday as the pain is too much. She is even considering aborting the thing she's carrying because she wants to get rid of every memory she shared with her fiancée. That's what you'd

have loved huh? when you refuse to tell me even the basic things about you? Oh please, Dali..."

I'm holding my tears and blinking too many times. I have to leave. I need to leave.

"It's still not the same Nobulali and you are being unreasonable,"

"It is exactly the same. It's just that you think I'm such an easy sl*t that had s*x with you because she wants someone to pin the pregnancy on... if only you knew how many times I attempted to take abortion pills for this thing inside of me. I have no love of it, it doesn't excite me that much I'd want to pin a pregnancy on the first man I sleep with.... that wouldn't happen at all Bhuti and you're actually the last man on the list of men I'd accuse of impregnating me."

I furiously get up from the couch and walk to the bedroom. I take off all his clothes and wear mine. I fix my braids and search for my purse... I can't find it and I'm panicking. I can't even see with blinking too much. F*ck, I'm going to leave it here because any minute I spend in this house, I'll hurt someone.

I get my cell phone and walk out, I don't even see him on my way out. I have no idea where I'm at but it's the township and at any street, there's a car or two passing by.

I take a left turn from his gate and another left at the corner. There's a busy road down. It's Saturday morning, there's not much of school children only working people.

I take another turn at a quiet street; I have no idea which direction I'm going but I'm hopeful that I'll turn somewhere I can sit and have coffee.

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"serif";mso-fareast-font-family: "Times New Roman";color:#050505;mso-fareast-language:EN-ZA">It's the township and no one can tell I'm not from around, I've dressed like the sister next door who just graduated and is going to her internship interview.

My phone rings and I answer it immediately. It's fear of walking a silent street without anything distracting me.

"Hello,"

"Nobulali..." It's Dali and he sounds defeated more than disappointed. He's calling me by my full name. I sigh.

"What?"

"I changed the shirt, and got rid of the perfume."

His tone sounds like he is annoyed yet hurt.

"And what has that got anything to do with me?"

"I want us to talk so you don't get annoyed at my perfume smell. To properly have a conversation but I search for you and you took your phone and walked out.... you barely know the streets here, yet you just left. You see how childish you're acting Nobulali?"

I feel an intense inner pain. I take a deep breath and look around in the street. I feel lost and alone, it hurts. So bad. I locate the name of the street I'm at through those silver number plucks people have outside their house.

"I'm at Sali street. I can see a park and the back of a school. Please come fetch me...." My voice is breaking.

"Give me a minute," He says without hesitating and I stand on the sideway as if I'm waiting for a friend.

I'm not strong yet and people are not always going to be there to help me. I need to learn how to stand on my own and it seems to be impossible. My left hand begins to shake uncontrollably.... there are children playing in the park, kids always wake up in the earliest of time to play, they have no worries. They are carefree and playing like they get paid to, the excitement can't be missed which is buried deep in the way they laugh.

I see his car approaching and I feel a sense of relief. He's the only person I'm close with who has an ear for listening but I seem to try push him away.

He stops the car Infront of me and gets out to pull me to his embrace.

I immediately break down and cry. He hugs me tight.

"I'm sorry, Lali." He whispers.

I feel like screaming at the excruciating emotional pain I feel. I can't scream because if I do, the people might come out and think I'm being abducted.

I thought I was progressing last night but I simply took two steps back. I miss them. I miss them too much that it hurts.

He lets go and opens the car door for me to get in.

I lean back on the seat and I feel the warm liquid of tears in my face.

He gets in his side and buckles my seat belt and his before driving.

The car is quiet, nothing is playing, not even the radio.

He's driven me to my house.

We both walk in and it's utter silence, I walk to one of the bedrooms.

I take off the clothes and wear the long t-shirt before climbing to the bed and hugging myself. I'm in tears, I'm pain and it's taking all of my energy. I miss them but I know they're never coming back. I have to move on and start living without them but it's so hard to let go. I can't do it, I'm not good at it.

The bedroom door creaks open and He walks in and climbs to the bed. He pulls me to him and plants a kiss on my forehead.

"What do you need? Tell me, Lali, what can I do to make you feel better?"

His eyes are red like he's been crying himself. His forehead veins are prominent like he's holding his cries inside. We both know what we need and he needs it more than I do... or maybe I do....

"I will give it to you Lali. What do you need?"

I take a deep breath and look at him. He nods as reassurance.

"I want it to feel rough but not too much, just enough to make me forget. I need to feel pleasurable pain... and I need it slow. Make love to me Dali, slow and rough.... bite, pull, dig..."

He is hesitant but I reach for his lips with mine and lightly bite and pull it.

"Don't hold back.... Dali,"

"We're going to hurt each other Lali," he whispers.

"We're helping each other. It's what we both need..."

He sneaks his hands to my thighs and grabs them, his fingers dig in and I moan in response, I want more. I want to feel it.

"Lali...." he exhales and shuts his eyes.

"Dali..." I pull him closer and moan loud near his ear as he grabs my butt.

We're both crossing a line we know we shouldn't. It's a risk.

I let out the last cry as he groans louder. My legs shake and I seem to lose my breath. We're both panting and holding hands that we're at the verge of bruising our palms. I feel better. With him next to me.

"I'm a taxi driver, I've lost more people I loved on the road through accidents and taxi wars. I once was in the army and that's where I learnt to take care of myself emotionally. I've gone to war; I've killed and I've had my people killed. I'm no therapist but I share the strategies I use when I had to deal with loss, I know death like God knows his people.

I lost both parents to a taxi accident, my sister works at the hospital you'll work at and she hates my guts because I chose this life for myself. Where this is the same line of work that maintained her when she was in university. I have no problem

with her but I'll have no one disrespect what I do and think I'll simply accept it. I love my job like she loves hers... I'm alive when I drive those taxis... it's a hard job but I love it, it's mine."

He looks at me to check if I am listening, I am.

"That's me, Nobulali. There's nothing extraordinary or beyond words about me. There's that."

"There's everything extraordinary in you. There's everything incredible. Dali,"

"Don't lie to try and feed yourself the bullshit that I'm beyond words. I'm human and there's every word to describe me and what I do."

He's not seeing what I see in him and it is shocking. For such a man who knows himself, he doesn't believe to be beyond words.

"You are incredible Dali," I affirm again.

"If you think I am, then you haven't lived enough,"

"Dali..."

"You need to rest, Lali,"

"Hold me, please

7

2 weeks later

I did it all. I was a well-behaved child, I listened to the parents, I followed the rules, I broke a few and I was allowed to because who would reprimand a well-behaved child. Excellence was expected from me to such a point I lived my life being excellent. I'm very competitive, to such an extent that my friends do not play any games with me or else it's a request for war.

I lived and breathed medicine and being the great surgeon in my field and I got it all. A supportive family, a good friend and I met a partner who was doing his own thing, excelling in it too. He proposed a year after we were together. We were in love, or so I thought.

I found his journal when I was unpacking my things. I had delayed reading it for such a long time but something gave me courage and I did.

Jason loved me but never in love. He felt as if I was using him as an emotional vessel, he called me an empty person who has no definition of herself apart from what she does. My personality is deeply rooted in the work that I do on a daily basis. He knew I loved him but I lived with a fantasy in my head that we were happy, I loved the idea of him but not him.

Finding this journal gave me a lot of closure in the way I'm mourning for him onwards. He felt used and was happy being used but it was also weighing him down. We were busy checking our check-lists that we really didn't live in the moment, which would explain the emptiness and void I felt at his absence. I had gotten used to things going my way that I came in with that same mindset in our relationship.

I used pain as a source of help. We did a lot of bondage and role playing in our bedroom, I needed to feel physical pain to know I'm alive as if it's a validation of being a full functioning human being. I felt seen whenever I feel physical pain, I felt alive.

It's called being a sadist. I find pleasure in pain; it excites me that a candle wax is burning my delicate skin. I find happiness in having nails dig deep on my back, it's a line I crossed with Dali the last time we got together.

Dali and I haven't talked nor seen since that day, he is busy and well, I'm always at the hospital. And honestly? His absence has allowed me to think better about what I want for myself; it has given me time to rethink and redraw the future I want to have.

The typical work, marry have a family, retire and die isn't one I want for myself. I want love more than anything, I want something exciting and most importantly, I want to live in the moment and explore what it means to be Nobulali and not Dr.

Joy Miller to which those are two different personalities that make up Nobulali Joy Miller. Me.

Living my life with purpose had to come with a difficult decision, a decision I took after hours and hours of introspection. I got rid of it, it was holding me back and making me feel bad about the journey that led to the pregnancy. It reminded me of the hours spent in the OR rather than being with my fiancée cooking dinner and sipping wine. Of which, I regret none of them but do regret having held back Jason. I had an abortion and I felt liberated and free and for the first time in my life.

I told Lihla but have not mentioned it to Dali. Lihla tried to talk me out of it but I had taken a decision and not even the rising of Jason from the dead would've changed my mind. I'm simply not ready to be a mother and I wouldn't have forced myself to have a child that I will later resent. I thought I was ready; I wasn't and that's okay with me.

"Dr Miller, would you like to have drinks with us?"

That would be Dr. Jonas, she's in psychiatry. She's been really welcoming ever since I began working here, I have seen her with Lihla a few times but we haven't said anything to each other, only smiles when we bump in the corridors.

"Hey, Dr. Jonas. I'm sorry but I cannot,"

"Ohw come on, your shift is over and it's a Friday. It's not just me... you know,"

I grab the files and slide them through the admin desk. She follows me as I walk to grab my bags and security card.

"I know you guys walk as a bunch but believe me, alcohol is the last thing on my head and I wouldn't be good company. Believe me,"

"Alright, but promise next weekend you're coming with us?"

I look at her and chuckle.

"You won't let go of this?" I ask and she shakes her head vigorously.

"Not until you promise something,"

"Alright Dr Jonas, I will join you next weekend. That makes you happy?"

I press the elevator button.

"Very much and I'll remind you for the whole week and please call me Amanda... it's after work," I nod and smile as the elevator dings open.

"Enjoy your Weekend Dr. Jonas,"

"Enjoys yours too Dr. Miller and please it's Amanda after work,"

I laugh as I step inside and she waves goodbye. I push the button and it takes me to the 1st floor. I still don't have my car, taking taxis after work seems to not be anything close to Taboo here, some of the nurses and caregivers walk to their houses which I reckon to be close but I'm still sceptical about the walking on my side. Even though I know the route, I'm still not comfortable.

I'm a walking dead person, haven't slept a wink in the past 24hrs. It's the job and being placed in casualty has its own challenges. Taking in emergency cases and all. The hospital is very different from the ones I had worked at, in terms of resources and the kind of people that come in. I'm used to the tiny kids I worked on at the children's hospital, this is quite something to get used to.

"Dr. Miller," someone shouts my name and I turn to see the security jogging towards me. I stand there and wait for him.

He reaches me and takes a breather first.

"Hello," I say.

"Sorry to call you like that Ma'am, there's a man that's been waiting for you on the second entrance,"

"Who is it? Is he Okay?"

"No... I mean yes, he's okay, it's just that he's been waiting since 5pm,"

The time is around 8pm now.

"Okay, didn't he mention his name?"

"He said it's Dali or something there."

I smile at the mention of his name.

"Of course, it is. Let's go,"

We walk back and then take a turn to the second entrance and there he is, sitting on the bench looking down on his cell phone.

"Thank you Bhuti,"

He nods and leave to his post.

I walk towards him, swaying my non-existent hips as he looks up from his cell phone. Our eyes meet and I fight with my knees from feeling weak and my heart jumping in excitement, what even is this that I'm feeling?

He stands up and puts his cell phone inside the pockets of his jeans.

"Hi

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" I say as I reach him and he simply smiles and envelops me in a hug, I drop the bags and hug him back. It's so welcoming and more of an 'I missed you'. He breaks the hug, picks up the bags and holds my hand.

"How are you?" He asks and we walk down the corridor to the exit.

"I'm okay, how are you?"

"Now that I've seen you? Much better,"

"How sweet is that Mr, very flattering, "

I laugh and roll my eyes.

"I really am good Dali, just tired from working, I haven't slept a wink,"

"Ahh poor thing, I'll rub your feet when we get to the house okay?"

I nod and smile as we walk outside and we reach the car. We get in and he begins to drive as I lean back and close my eyes for a minute. I don't even feel the ride but hear him waking me up. We're at his place, not mine.

He takes my bags and I grab the keys for the door. I walk inside he yard and unlock; a smell of fresh plums welcomes me in, the TV is playing. I turn the lights on and place the keys on top of the counter. He walks inside after me and locks the door, he drops my lunch bag on the kitchen counter and my other bag on top of the table in the tv room.

"I'll prep you something to eat and take out clothes for you to wear okay? Just take a bath and relax. I'll rub your feet after,"

I nod at the instructions.

"Dali..."

He turns ready to answer to anything I ask or request.

"Thank you,"

He chuckles.

"Don't be weird Lali..."

"Haibo?" He laughs and walks to the bedroom as I head to the bathroom.

I freshen up and untie the bun of the braids. I feel comfortable in his t-shirt and shorts.

He smiles as I walk out of the bathroom with my own clothes neatly folded, I place them on the smaller couch along with my bag.

"You look cute in my things," he mentions.

"I thought I looked sexy?"

He grins and bites his bottom lip.

"You do... Lali. You look sexy and sexy people have dinner first,"

I sit on the couch as he hands me my plate of food.

"And what's the second thing they do?"

I ask in a naughty tone and he can't help but smile sheepishly.

"You'll find out after that good plate of food... I'm going to bath too, you made me wait for hours in that hospital,"

"Me? No way Dali. You're the one who decided to go camp at my workplace when you should've called. Which would've really been easy,"

"I wanted to surprise you and I did,"

"That you did,"

He walks to the bathroom and leaves the door open as we continue talking about all things under the sun. Him telling me about his passengers and me talking about the crazy cases we get in the hospital. It all work talk until he finishes me and joins me for dinner while watching TV mindlessly.

"You should get thick bleach for these dishcloths, they're losing colour. And why the hell would you buy white dishcloths?"

I ask as we finish the dishes and I lotion my hands.

"I don't look at the colour Lali, I just buy any and keep it moving,"

"That explains the mismatch of colours happening in your house,"

I throw myself on the couch and he pulls the coffee table and sits on it, closing me in.

"You really should stop sitting on the table, we dine on it,"

"I don't care and you don't seem to mind anyway,"

He pulls both my legs to be on his lap.

"Dali!"

"I didn't say anything wrong,"

We both laugh and we look at each other. We're back here and it's time. This is the perfect time.

"How are you, Lali?" He asks as his hands brush my legs. I smile. I don't want to open any emotional doors today. I want bask in this warm feeling of us together but he's not letting it go.

"I had an abortion. It's actually been a week and something since I did and I know that I probably should be feeling guilty and sad but I am not, if anything, I feel brighter and free. I found Jason's journal and all this time I thought we were okay but he wasn't...."

"Lali, how are you?"

He asks the question again and for a moment I'm taken aback.

"I am okay, I feel like I'm in a good space mentally and ready for whatever this life has instore for me. I can identify my triggers and deal with them now..."

He smiles.

"That's what I wanted to hear Lali,"

"Okay. Dali you're confusing me now, aren't you mad about the abortion because you were quite dramatic when I told you I was pregnant... it basically slipped anyway,"

"Lali, it's not my place to tell you what to do with your life. You did what you did because you felt strongly that you weren't ready and I respect you for that. And yes, I was dramatic when you told me about your pregnancy because you said my perfume stink and I was offended. I spend so much money on that thing please,"

I burst out laughing and for a while I can actually feel it vibrating through my chest down to my lungs and stomach. It's a nice feeling.

"You are so stingy..."

"I'm not. You know I even gave it to the boys at the rank and bought a new one. Awyazi wena Lali,"

"You are so dramatic... and I want to ask, you mentioned that you always have dinner with your sister on Fridays, the one

who can't stand you, how do you go about that because it's Friday and I'm here,"

" She's been postponing since this month began and then later stopped sending messages and I stopped expecting her. Dinner on Fridays was something I always looked forward to even though she cannot stand me, for those hours

8

Even as bruised and battered as we come to be, we still find comfort in those who allow us to rest our heads on them. We still feel warm and fuzzy as they hold us tight after making love, killing the thoughts that we aren't worthy of something simple yet complex as love.

I lay awake next to this man who just laid me down on a bed of roses and led me to a whole new world of pleasure so gentle and sweetly, I almost cried at how good he made me feel.

The clock reads 3.30am, it's in the early morning and he's snoring lightly next to me whose face is wet with tears and heart is teared apart. I thought I was making progress, forgetting and moving on.

I've successfully removed myself from the chains of the surgeon, I leave her the minute I grab my security pass ready to head home. Yet, Nobulali can't seem to find peace, there's something heavy weighing me down. It's pushing me to silently cry in the early mornings of the day hoping the person next to me doesn't hear it.

I had believed, truly believed that Jason loved me wholeheartedly, I didn't know that he felt that way. I truly had no idea that I was using him as an emotional vessel, I acknowledged the fact that I get to feel alive whenever I feel

pain but it still can't explain his rejection. It still can't explain how he never felt the love and it was just an idea, a fantasy I held in my head.

I may agree that I did hold some idea but my love for him was as real as it can be. It hurts how I've given in to the theory of having created some form of image instead of being in touch with reality, yet the little time we spent together I was fully involved. This is confusing me and makes me more terrified.

I thought I had gone past this when I sat for hours and hours talking to myself and holding conversations with me. It saddens me how it's suddenly coming up again and wetting my face. I can't take any more of this now.

I wipe my tears and slowly get off Dali's hold, making sure that I'm not waking him. I walk to the kitchen and have a glass of water then move to lie on the couch. I'm tired of feeling like a mess, I'm tired of feeling useless and every strategy I use seems to backfire and it all comes back to me at 3am in the morning.

Maybe I'm sensitive, maybe I'm not cut out for any of this but it frustrates me how I cannot seem to be okay, all I want is to forget about Cape Town, forget about Jason and everything about him. To stop carrying this heavy load in me and simply let go of it. I can't. On my own, I can't do it and so, I lay awake on the couch hoping the hurt will stop and I'll get excited of the sun rising in the morning again.

"Lali..."

Dali's voice calls out from afar, I seem to have travelled to a distant land. I feel his touch immediately after, it's warm to my freezing cold body. As I come back again, I hear the noise of thunder and the rain. It's loud and it's cold.

"Love, come to bed..."

For a second my heart stops beating. I know it's him but he never calls me anything except Lali or when he's mad Nobulali, he doesn't even call me Joy. Love, we might be a bit overstepping now, aren't we?

"Come to bed, it's cold this side," he says as I open my eyes to meet his. I have no idea of the time but I am sure a few hours have passed.

"Work...." I whisper.

"You don't have work, Lali,"

I smile and nod before exhaling and taking his hand. Instead of getting up, I sit and cross my thighs.

"I want us to talk, something isn't sitting well with me, I want this space

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pull the table and close me in, Dali. If we go to the bedroom, I might do something crazy..."

He gets me instantly and pulls it again, getting too close.

"What do you feel?" He asks.

"I feel tired. I'm honestly and genuinely tired of feeling like crap. I'm tired of the tears, being confused and not knowing what the fuck am I doing in this world. I feel like shit Dali... that's how I feel. Like a mess and a ticking time bomb, a person who has no idea whether she's moving forward or taking steps back."

"What triggered you?"

"Jason's journal. Thinking if it was really fantasy or I truly did love him. He mentioned how he feel like I was in love with the idea of him, and I honestly believe that I was so obsessed with nuclear family I pulled him to this idea of mine... was the love ever real or I was truly using him?"

"Do you know why people journal, Lali?"

I nod.

"Good. You know that they journal what they feel at that moment, you cannot base your whole relationship on what he wrote one night when you cancelled dinner because you had to remove an appendix from a little kid. You can't disregard the

love you truly believe the both of you shared based on one page of a journal written when you burnt the mac and cheese because you were too tired from working and thought a little 5min nap wouldn't hurt. You loved Jason, and he loved you back. You know how he did it, I don't. So don't erase the happy moments you shared with him based on a page of a journal you read which was probably written while he was hurt because you forgot to pass by KFC for his chicken wings on your way back from home."

"He said I used him as an emotional vessel, he wrote that I was using him,"

"Did you vent to him or talk to him about your emotions?"

"Yes, I did a lot because I thought..."

"You thought he was your partner and he ought to know and support you when you're feeling low. Yes, I understand that and we all expect that from people we love. But not all of them have strategies in place to flush out what you tell them, they personalise it and end up feeding on it and you'll see them internalising everything and feeling like they live you, they live your life and cannot understand it when you now are happy without any emotional baggage. They begin to feel used as emotional vessels and they end up liking it, and as I mentioned, feeding on it,"

"It makes sense because we did a lot of bondage... anything that will inflict pain and feel in touch with reality... He had become a worst version of me and he didn't even realise it, oh my word,"

I'm truly in awe. I wouldn't have thought of it the way Dali puts it, we didn't have sessions where we'd sit and talk things out without me pouring it onto him and him internalising it.

"And Dali, I feel like I am doing the exact same thing to you... I feel like I am using you because I'm so scared of being alone,"

I honestly give it out. If I did it to Jason then surely, he is ought to feel the wrath sooner or later.

"I mentioned it to you that I was in the army and lost brothers there. I drive taxis and have seen people get killed in taxi wars right Infront of me. I have learnt a long time ago how to deal with the pressure, I learnt how to not internalise everything and have a definition of myself that doesn't include what I do. Having been in the army and now driving taxis is only a 2% of who I am, it's what I did. It belongs to a CV not inside me. So, you understand now?"

I nod and he pulls me to plant a forehead kiss.

"You are an amazing person Lali, your smile is beautiful, yes you are a little crazy and bossy. You are not scared of taking stand and playing the card first. I'd suggest you stick to the happy

memories you shared with your fiancée, a journal written in lonely hours shouldn't bother you and that's also another reason why you never read someone's journal... it's cold in here let's go to bed..."

I smile and feel like I've shed some weight off my shoulders. Jason and I shared happy memories and if I choose to wallow in the gruesome parts, I'd be defying myself of remembering him as the cute man with curly black hair that danced to Wanna Be by Spice girls.

9

"You slept well? It's quite windy and cold outside and the house really isn't that warm,"

Dali whispers as he kisses my face lightly then pulls me to his chest.

"I'm okay now," I snuggle closer. I'm glad to be off work for the day and not on standby. It is hell to be a doctor but I love it regardless. I feel alive and well with a scalpel on my steady hands but I also do love lying on a man's chest too. It's warmer than an OR.

"What is it that we're doing, Dali?"

I ask the avoided question because I want to know. He wouldn't be calming me down when I'm a mess only for what we have too simply be nothing.

"We're lying-in bed, under warm blankets on a rainy, windy and cold day. And we're both too warm to even get up and make food,"

That earns a laugh from me and his chest vibrates too.

"Dali, you know what I mean. And I heard you call me love last night or was I dreaming?"

"Oh, you mean what are we doing in that manner... mhhh let me think," there's silence for a strong second or two. "Tell me, Lali. What do you think we're doing?"

"No, no, Dali. that trick won't work in me, I asked first,"

I move and sit up to face him.

"We're two adults who like being in each other's spaces. We have sex and probably will be doing for more days. I care about us,"

I chuckle and shake my head. I guess we're doing just that. Two people who are good for each other and not labelling anything.

"Then if I want to go out on a date with someone else, how does that work?" I ask. Holding my teeth as he sits up too.

"You call me and I drive you and your date to the destination, "

He shrugs and I burst into laughter. He is not taking this anywhere near seriously.

"That should mean you have no problem with that?"

"Lali, there's no ground in what we're doing. We simply like and care for each other but we're allowed to look outside and find people we think we're compatible with. We're not tied..."

As he says that, it kind of stings. The image that he might have somebody else who he fucks like he does me and give

emotional sessions to at 3am in the morning. What if the person already exists and I'm the one being a fool and coming between a happy couple?

"I never asked that you're married," I say.

"I wouldn't have driven you around that night when you were lost and even did the courtesy of waiting for you to call Mam Brenda and further walk into your house if I were married."

He answers but it's a vague one.

"You would, because you hope that another man would do the same for your wife if she were stranded too." I defend.

"I'm not married, Lali. Never was, probably will never too,"

I nod and for a split second the mention of marriage seems to bother him but he brushes it off quickly.

"You have a story, don't you?" I question and he looks like I've just unzipped something he didn't want to show. But I'm glad I did because he smiles faintly as he nods.

"Tell me about it," I encourage.

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"serif";mso-fareast-font-family: "Times New Roman";color:#050505;mso-fareast-language:EN-ZA">"My parents were married pretty much their whole life. They loved

each other dearly, they did fight but it was the most perfect thing. They didn't fight like cats, no, no, they loved each other even through the disagreements. They were very clever; my mom was a high school teacher and Dad worked as a hotel Manager. Beautiful souls that died together, at the same time. In each other's arms." He smiles as he recalls the time.

"That's beautiful," I say which is clearly a lack of words at how he describes the perfect relationship her parents had.

"Very... and I once had that. A lady who respected me and loved me dearly, we were inseparable Lali. I thought that we'd grow old and grey together but hey, another man swept her off her feet and she never looked back. I had a hard time coming back from that because truly, we were in a good space. But she's happy with the man. So that kind of love comes only once in a person's lifetime Lali, that's why marriage is out of the plate for me. I did love and was loved once upon a time and that kind of love comes only once..."

I nod and share a smile at how he speaks fondly of his ex. He respects women and it shows in how he speaks of the person he loved.

"Were there others after her?" I ask.

"Yes, but nothing like her, they came and went and some were even ashamed of being seen with me in public because I'm the

taxi driver. Which I can never understand.... but hey, they were good women just not amazing enough."

He truly does respect women. It's how fondly he speaks of people he probably hurt and were hurt by them too. Not trying to burn them so he can seem as the one man who women have done wrong as he had no part in, it is quite remarkable. A good thing.

"You currently have someone?"

He looks at me and there's that smile again.

"Dr Miller, are you asking if maybe you're warming the bed for someone else? No, you are not. There isn't anyone Lali, only...." he stops and looks at me briefly before attempting to get off the bed but I hold him.

"Only who?" I ask. He just laughs

"Just let it go, Lali.

I look at him and he hugs me and kisses my forehead.

"We're good like this, Lali. Let's not complicate it by trying to label it. We're good for each other like this and we simply enjoy each other's company,"

I nod.

"Friends it is," I say.

"Good friends, Nobulali,"

He says and I pull the blanket to cover my back as I nod.

"Good friends."

He exhales.

We're good friends, ones that pick each other from a workplace. Get excited to see each other, hug and then further kiss and make love. Friends who are emotionally available for each other and friends who'd jump if the other called in the middle of the night asking for help. We're friends but not just any friends, We're good friends.

We can't claim a relationship because that'll be the end of us. A relationship will be a bad label for us and so, we claim friends because it's easy then to look for other lovers and tell each other we're friends without hurting or destroying us.

"Now that we're friends..." he stops me with his hand then shushes me.

"Don't overthink it. Lali,"

He plants another forehead kiss before getting on top of me, already removing the piece of clothing and kissing me all over. We're good friends who happen to kiss each other.

We spent the whole rainy, windy and cold weekend together, I would be lying to say I didn't enjoy it, I loved every minute of it. Dali is such an incredible person; he doesn't seem he had that fun in him but he showed me more this weekend. Like everything else, when the weather clears and duty calls, the bubble pops. We get off the little cosy place where we'd act as if we're a couple to simply be good friends and go with it.

I can only be setting myself on fire with this man, it's a dangerous game that we are playing and it's going to end badly for the both of us. No two sane people sleep and emotionally connect to each other then call it a friendship. The labels themselves, I think are the danger.

I left his house early in the morning, he was preparing for his day at the taxi rank, I had to take an uber back. The day is quite chilly and drizzling but it's nothing to cry home about. I have an afternoon shift which will probably last the whole week. I love my job but I love being in the arms of a man too. Especially with the approaching winter season. There's a car parked right outside my yard as I walk in, I'm not expecting any visitors and so, like anyone would, I don't pay any attention. I unlocked the door and walked in. I dropped my bag as I hold my chest in shock of the figure sitting on the couch like he fucking owns it.

"Hello, Joy," he says with a grin and sips on the wine. I'm still too stunned to even utter a word. I close the door and look at him as my insides are boiling with anger. I never thought I'd hate someone like this but the one who is sitting on my couch? I loathe him.

"For someone who grew up with parents who owned a wine farm, you have a horrible taste,"

His vile smirk has me looking at him disgustingly. What a pig.

"Why are you here? Thomas," The words come out as convincing as I want them to. "I'm not even getting a hello back, Joy,"

"You didn't even have the manners to wait outside the house, you had to get inside and make yourself feel comfortable. You know I could call the police on you? Thomas,"

I walk towards him and he gets up. Taller than I am, with his suit and sneakers looking like a rejected member of the ANC.

"Baby... call the police and say what? No one saw me coming in. And by their knowing, I'm in Camps Bay enjoying my life,"

He winks and I take a step back.

"You have an Alibi. Exactly like how you had one when you murdered my fiancée and mother? You never stop being corny, now do you?" I raise the question and he chuckle.

"You still believe that crap?"

"You are nothing but a son of a b*tch Thomas!"

I move to the kitchen area and start searching for something in the drawer. Something, whatever it is that's sharp.

"Oh no darling, you don't...." he heads toward me and I'm cornered with nowhere else to run. He restrains both my hands on my back and presses himself against me while breathing heavily right above my ears.

"I see you still like playing dirty," he plants a light kiss on my neck making me shake violently but he presses my stomach against the kitchen counter and we both face the window.

"Shhh... shhh, I don't want to hurt you Joy, I'd never do that. I love you too much,"

"You're psychopath, Thomas. You know nothing about love," I shout.

"You never said that when you were riding me like a crazy woman... wasn't it love that got you pregnant?"

My heart freezes and for a split second before I feel a rush of heat. He's being delusional.

"You didn't get me pregnant; I was already pregnant and *fucken* let go of me..."

He let go at the request. I turn and face him; he has a confused look and before I know it.... I'm pulled up and placed on top of the kitchen counter before I'm attacked with a hot kiss. Our lips smash. It's hot, filled with guilt and long overdue lust. He begins to rip off my clothes and I forcefully remove his and tear his shirt before exposing his alluring torso. I run my hands and lock him in with my legs as he lightly chokes me and kisses me deeply. He tightens his grip on my waist and I'm moaning as he groans.

I eye my surgical scissors and lock him tightly in with my legs and reach for the cold silver scissors and with all my might, I launch it at his nape.

The stab earns a loud groan from him, I quickly hold him with my legs and slightly tilt his neck to the opposite direction of the stab. I have him closed in as I deepen the scissors and twist them as if digging for something. The blood comes spurting out like I burst a vein, he immediately turns red and halts the movement.

"Don't fight it sweetheart. I'm a certified surgeon we both used to clean dead bodies, you taught me which parts to aim for. This is for Jason and Eliza, pity you won't join them, yet... I hope you have your donor card with you. It's enough to have you die at the table,"

I twist again then pull the scissors out and push him off me. I watch him fall on the floor with blood already staining the white tiles. I exhale.

"That was easy, Thomas. I thought you were quite the fighter," I hop off the counter and twist my wrists and exhale.

I have legally killed and never questioned. I've had patients die on the table and with Thomas, well, I did not kill him but he will die soon but that's beside the point. The point is, I don't feel any guilt about what I did to Thomas. I hug myself and rock back and forth.

"Ma'am, are you sure we can't call anyone? Your house is now a crime scene and you've co-operated with the entire team, there's no need to be holding you at the station..."

The sirens are triggering. The noise of everyone at this police station has me feeling anxious. I wipe the tears and look at the officer.

"My... my friend is coming to get me..." immediately after saying that Lihla walks inside and heads straight to me. I throw myself at her and begin to sob.

Hurting Thomas doesn't remove the feeling of loss, it has only made it worse. Lihla begins to question the officer and he explains but I'm not focused on that. The pain I'm feeling is unbearable, it runs deeper, it feels like the day I walked into a

house full of police, paramedics, forensics, with two dead bodies.

I've lost so much in such a short space of time, I'm a grieving mess that finds joy in a man who is simply hurting her yet makes her feel like the most loved woman on earth. The man claims to only be friends and if only he knew. It's agony and pain but still, I choose to wake up in the morning and hope for a better day.

"My love, what happened?" Lihla asks while soothing me like a baby, we're in the backseat of her car and my head is resting on her lap.

"Thomas, he broke in my house Lihla, the same man I ran away from in Cape Town found me, he boasted about how he'd kill me without everyone knowing." I sniff

"He began to threaten me, Lihla. Saying so many horrible things about... Jason, Eliza. A fight broke out and I accidentally stabbed him with my surgical scissors, I swear Lihla, I didn't want to hurt him but I only wanted to get him out of my house... to leave me and let me be,"

Lihla rubs my back and I wince at the light sting it causes to my back bruises.

"I'm sorry my Love, I am so sorry... no one has to go through that, ever. Being tormented like that? Where is his ass?"

"They took him to the hospital. The police also found the records of my every move in his car, pictures of me not paying attention. He was stalking me, Lihla..."

"Shh... that's enough talking now. I'm sorry love, you're safe with me. Shhhh,"

I rest on her lap. I could kill all humans in the world but it'll never bring back my loved ones. I'm alone and nothing cures that except for accepting that I'm about to journey life without my cheerleaders and supporters. People who actually made my days brighten up.

After what feels like eternity I get up from her lap and drink the bottled water.

"I have clean scrubs at the hospital, I need to work or else I'll go crazy..." I tell her. "Joy, I don't think that-" I stop her halfway

"People call me Nobulali now, and my hands are perfectly fine. I need to work. Save lives..."

She didn't fight me the second time. She nods and moves to the driver's seat and heads to the hospital. We're surgeons. The Job doesn't care whether you just attempted murder or not, people's lives are at stake.

We spend our years searching for something. Something bigger, something greater, something better. We live with a sense that somewhere out here, in the world, in the midst of the universe are our best forms.

We reach these great parts that are deeply embedded within us through imagination and dreaming. We sit through midnight only to dream of a perfect life full of peace and no struggle. We hold on to the hope of heaven as an escape because we do not see ourselves worthy of earth.

We live to believe in something divine, we even dress it up as our next best seasons as if our now forms are toxic. We constantly try to remove the negative, we spend too much time focusing on the hostility of ourselves that we forget to swim in the positive. I, Nobulali have fallen into the trap of trying to find perfection.

I have fallen into the unending cycle of constantly starting over. Starting over as if what happened isn't worthy of being celebrated or mourned for. I forgot to live and fell into the trap of trying to perfect this and that before you take a leap into something else.

Today marks 2 months since Thomas died on that surgical table with me leading the operation. There was a complication and I called it, 10.37pm, his time of death.

I had accomplished nothing with him dead, I dropped the charges against him which truly, were supposed to be pressed against me.

I asked for a fresh start, I was granted one. I moved to one of the townships closest to the hospital, I'm renting a house. Even though Mam Brenda begged me for days, I simply couldn't return back to that one even as it was cleaned to the core.

My house is a 30min walk to my place of work, I've met a couple of people. The neighbours are amazing, except for the dogs that bark non-stop, every day after midnight.

Dali and I, well for the sake of the two of us. We decided to stop having sleepovers which is quite funny because he has a key to my house and I have his. Sometimes during the week, he sleeps over and all the time, we spend hours talking about our work and random things. Never us and sex. Even the 2am emotional sessions have faded.

"My sister has invited me for a dinner party at her house, she's having her colleagues over and She said I can come with you," he dropped this on me one random night.

I had to ask if he was sure and he nodded and honestly, as I'm sitting on this chair fixing my make-up ready to meet his family member, I'm anxious.

He walks in the room and sits on the bed. He's ready, looking handsome as he can be while holding the keys of the Hyundai. I fix the brow and throw the brush back in the make-up kit. I get up and stand in front of him

"How do I look?"

I pat my weave as his eyes scan me,

"Gorgeous, umhle Lali," He smiles and looks at me.

I exhale.

"Thank you,"

I place my arms around his shoulders and he tilts his head backwards looking at me. His aftershave smells good, I'm taken.

"Tell me again, why aren't we a couple?"

I ask ever so softly. He lets out a light breath that I feel landing swiftly on the hairs of my skin.

"Because. We want different things, Lali. I'm not a good man,"

"But you've been good to me," My heart aches. He exhales and I sit in his lap as he wraps his arms around my waist. "We want

different things, yes. But we can't seem to stay away from each other. Somehow, we always find our way back and...."

There's abrupt silence in the room.

"I'm going to hurt you. I don't want to hurt you, you're too precious. Lali,"

"What if I want you to hurt me..."

He looks at me with a smirk.

"Find your mates, Lali."

He attempts to get up but I hold him.

"If that's how you wanna play? Game on. Dali,"

I get up and take a look at myself in the mirror for the last time. He chuckles and gets up from the bed jingling the keys.

"To the dinner party, Madam,"

I laugh and walk out first, swaying my hips side to side. I'm wearing my best pair of jeans with a black ankle boot and a graphic t-shirt. This man will regret this.

The drive to the suburbs is long because of traffic, it's a friday and everyone is trying to get out and be seen. The streets are full of people holding packs of alcohol.

We finally make it and it's actually a whole braai set up, not a dinner party. These shoes are going to kill me.

Everyone is dressed casually, I don't feel underdressed or overdressed and well, Dali is in his jeans and sneakers with a crisp white shirt. He shaved for this, this means a lot to him and he's actually feeling anxious. His sister asked to not be embarrassed at this party, such *bitch* if you ask me.

The house is beautiful, it's on a steep area and the neighbourhood is actually quite chilled, there are children running around as we walk to the house. The music is loud too and there are laughs here and there, it seems like she invited the whole hospital, I even spotted Lihla. I wave at her and she waves back with a smile.

Dali leads me inside and a woman with a long ponytail walks toward us with a smile. It's the sister, she's got his eyes. Oh, my goodness, they look so much alike. She's a beautiful woman. The *bitch* is pretty.

He smiles as she greets us and welcomes us with a hug.

"I reckon you must be Lali?" I nod then hand her the bottle of wine with a smile.

"I'm Somi, we work at the same hospital but I'm in dental care, so we'd hardly even bump into each other," I nod again and she chuckles

"Oh yes, of course, dentistry is on a whole other wing of the hospital. You look gorgeous of course,"

She does a little twirl that sends us into comfortable laughter and pulls Dali for a quick hug.

"And thank you two for the bottle, please feel comfortable. There are drinks and some finger foods... oh Dali, the boys are in the braai area,"

He nods and plants a light kiss on the cheek before smirking and walking to the backyard, I'm left burning with a smile. Somi takes my hand and leads me to the lounge area.

"You two are together?" She asks as we approach the space full of women drinking. "No, not at all,"

"It's better that way... his girlfriend is here and would love it if the kisses would... they'd just stop, of course you don't mind right?"

I look at her and confusion washes over my face but quickly mask it with a fake smile and nod vigorously. "Trust me, no more kisses

We reach everyone and she introduces me as her colleague and Lihla's friend. Not as Dali's plus one.

"And, she brought a bottle of wine with,"

There are cheers and one of the ladies gets up from the chair to check the wine. She looks so amazed and quite in awe of the bottle.

"Somi, this is the 1963 Miller's Club wine. Do you know how expensive and limited this bottle is... Ace of spades doesn't even stand a chance on this one,"

She's a wine connoisseur, no doubt about it. Her eyes land on me and she extends her hand.

"Hi, I'm Zidane and you have a great taste in wine, how did you find this?"

I would say my surname is Miller and my parents successfully ran a wine farm that produces the best wines but that would be boasting and kind of throwing things off.

"I just happen to know people who know people," I smile and she nods.

"Those are some wealthy people you know. Girl, hook me up and sorry to fangirl over this, it's a collector's item and I've lived in the western cape for a while, so..."

"You know your wines, girl I know,"

We laugh and it feels nice to connect with people, I'm introduced to everyone and Zidane isn't leaving my side at all. Lihla finally walks in and oh my goodness she's drunk. She stumbles and laughs.

"How long has she been drinking?" I whisper to Zidane

"She came in here tipsy and well, got drunk in the midst..."

She answers and we both look at her coming, she drops on the couch we're occupying with Zidane. She hugs me and kisses me on the cheek, she's really wasted.

"Look at you love, all drunk and gone..." I pat her hair and help her sit up.

"She's wallowing over the gynae that dropped her last Saturday," Somi says and there's laughter in the room.

"He dropped me for a student nurse, imagine... A student nurse," Lihla says and the room erupts in laughter.

"Not to say there's anything wrong with a student nurse but girl.... you might have gone cold," Somi says as she hands me my drink. There's laughs again and everyone starts narrating how it all went down. I begin to feel like I have no personality at the hospital.

"At least I'm not fucking a taxi driver," Lihla throws it in the air like that and everyone chant an "ooh" as if they're choir. I'm feeling offended but at the same time, the shade must not be for me because only Dali and I know about Dali and I.

"There's absolutely nothing wrong with sleeping with a taxi driver," I come in defence but I get laughs in return.

"Girl... the same people who f*ck these teenagers they drive to school? Ma'am you better retract that statement because there's everything wrong," one lady says. I've forgotten her

name. They laugh in unison again, my eyes land on Somi and her face is masking the offence she feels.

The laughs halts and everyone sips on their drinks, I turn and see a slender girl approaching. She's probably my size with long dreadlocks, she has a little girl on her hip.

"Lisa, you're here, finally," Somi shouts in excitement.

Heads turn to her direction; she walks with so much confidence and grace. Head high up, beautiful pair of *tities*.

Everyone utters a loud hello. She hugs Somi briefly.

"This is Lisa everybody, my brother's girlfriend,"

She smiles with her perfect set of teeth; I see what he probably saw at her. I feel my stomach twirl. I get up from the couch and walk toward them, Somi gives me a deadly stare.

"Hey, I'm Lali. I'm Lihla's best friend," I extend my hand, instead she pulls me in a hug.

"I guess he loves them slim," She whispers to my ear.

"He sure does..." I whisper back and smile as we break the hug.

"Nice to meet you Lali," she smiles.

"Likewise," I moved to Somi's side, "Where can I find the bathroom?"

I ask with a smile, perfectly hiding how sad I feel. He brought me all the way here to flaunt his girlfriend to my face. Must be nice.

"Down the hall, on your right," she answers and I nod and head the direction she gave.

The noise of the ladies' welcoming Lisa is high again. There are laughs and sounds of excitement.

I get in the bathroom, do my business and walk out after washing my hands and patting my weave a couple of times.

"Hey..." his voice startles me as I close the bathroom door.

"Hi," I answer.

"Are you still good?" He asks and I nod.

"I'm good, Dali. Enjoying to be here,"

"I want you to meet someone," He's beaming with a smile. He looks genuinely excited; I've met her already. She's drop dead gorgeous and I would worship the ground she walks on myself. Her long dreadlocks make her look like a *bad bitch* who'd have you beg her to release you from shackles of pleasure.

"The person must be very special... you are beaming," He nods.

"She is... and you'll love her too,"

He takes my hands and leads me to the kitchen and there she is again, pouring herself a glass of rosé, doing it so perfectly. If there was a wine pouring contest, she'd be number one. He lets go of my hand and goes to her side and sneaks his hand around her waist. She smiles and he kisses her on the shoulders.

My throat feels like it's holding something, something heavy and like a ball of hurt. I feel naked and embarrassed. But I manage to smile, trying to pull some form of strength from the fact that they look happy together.

"Lali, this is my person, Lisa,"

"We've already met, honey," she says.

They share a look together and he wipes the non-existent sweat off the bridge of his nose.

"You two look beautiful together, I should mention,"

She nods and they kiss again, briefly but enough for me to hold my breath and smile like I don't feel hurt.

"Thank you Lali." To Lisa, "He's the good friend I always tell you about,"

It was love, I felt it. It was real and it was sincere, I tried to push it away but all I'm left with is a heart that feels like a surgeon opened it up with a scalpel. I feel a lump in my throat but as they say, we mask it away Infront of people yet feeling the worst. I thought I had a chance, I played hide and seek because I thought I wasn't ready, he wasn't ready. I feel worse because I already slept with him, I took off my clothes for him. I opened up to him and there's no taking back the emotional session, there's no forgetting how good he made me feel. At first, it was just a way to rid pain but it grew to admiration and strong love. Maybe if I had told him the first time that I wanted to be his, all this could have been avoided.

I glance to their section and they're all up in arms, he adores her. I've been in his arms and the way he's holding her indicates that. It's love and it's the one I felt too, the one that made me go mental, one that had me feeling weak and going crazy. It was love from the first moment, it was love that we shared but I was too hurt to feel it.

"They're so cute together, don't you agree?" Her tone is mocking, I look back at her and nod.

"Your brother knows how to choose," I compliment and she nods before passing the salad plate to my side.

"That he does," she says.

I smile and Lihla taps me, I attend to her.

"I need to breathe..." she says, almost breathless.

"Are you feeling hot?" I ask and she nods.

I get up with her and we excuse ourselves from the party, it's raining outside and everybody is inside the house. Drinks and food are flying, some are playing games and others are hooking up, it's fun but only if my heart wasn't sore.

We walk outside and Lihla removes herself from me and goes to vomit on the side of the lawn just outside the yard. I grab a bottle of water from the table on the veranda and go hand it to her.

"You, okay?" I ask, she's breathing heavily with tears in between. She drinks the water and goes again; I hold her weave back.

I hand her a tissue and she wipe her mouth and rinse it the water.

"I thought that we were good, you know. Me and Steven, I..." She goes again before she even finishes her sentence. I brush her back; I know exactly how she feels.

She does the wiping and rinsing again. She pulls her car keys out of the jacket and hands them to me.

We walk to her car down the street and she takes the passenger seat as I take the driver's.

"How is that we have accomplished so much yet have fucked up lives? Like we are good at what we do but when it comes to love... we aren't," I pose the question as I adjust the seat.

"Because all men are simply bastards who deserve to die a painful death, those bloody conniving, blood suckers of people. Oh, but we love them as they are!" Lihla looks at me and we burst into laughter like two women on crack.

I exhale.

"Men are hoes,"

"Bitches"

"First generation of satan,"

"Vultures!!"

They are a negative energy that is truly not needed.

"You know what could help? Hook up with one of the men here and screw them for the night, release one with another," Lihla comments and I laugh.

"That's what you were tryna do?" I ask and she nods.

"But I got drunk early.... how dumb,"

I laugh at her frustration; she seems to be out of the woods.

"The night is still young sis; we can go with the plan..." I shrug and she sits up

"I love that guy who's with Lisa... he's hot,"

"He's off-limits,"

I must have said it too quickly because she looks at me and I look at her. We stare at each other for a good minute.

"Okay, I've been screwing him a couple of months back. I didn't know how I fell in love but I did. We've been really going well and I had no idea he has a girlfriend, oh god... I'm such a mess and don't dare look at me like that."

She's smiling like I just told her I won the lottery.

"That's why you've been off the whole evening... you fell for a taxi driver. Girl, and I was here thinking I couldn't stand a chance with Bill gates, you heard he divorced right?"

I shake my head and laugh, honestly, Lihlangene has a mind of her own.

"How does Bill Gates enter the conversation?" I shake my head faking frustration.

"serif";mso-fareast-font-family: "Times New Roman";color:#050505;mso-fareast-language:EN-ZA">"He enters because I'd do with some old rich white man. And if Lali

could drop her standards and fall for some taxi driver then girl, I can be Mrs Gates. The world is full of possibilities..."

She laughs and I roll my eyes.

"Being a Taxi driver is what he does... doesn't affect me in any way,"

I sound exactly like him.

"Girl, you are renting a house in the township, what's not clicking there? You tryna fit in. And let me tell you friend, that man ain't worth dropping your standards for,"

She mentions and pulls her bag from the back seat.

"You don't know him like I do, Lihla. You really, really don't,"

She searches for something in it.

"But I know you, and well enough to know that you are letting a broke ass man break your heart,"

She takes out her make-up bag and place it on the dashboard.

"He's not broke..." I say.

"He's not rich man either..." she pulls out a face brush.

"I have enough money Lihla, and honestly, the love I feel for him makes me even forget about how much he makes and all that..." She stops brushing her face and looks at me with a smile.

"You are a gone girl. You're so taken by him you can't even hear yourself," she waves the brush like a wand.

I roll my eyes feeling my cheeks getting hot.

"Shut up, Lihla. And I moved to the township because it's closer to my work place and traffic here in the morning is a full-time job with overtime. And I simply want to assimilate into the culture of my people. please."

"I don't buy that shit, we both know you moved to the township because of him and.... no don't even try to stop me, you don't give a rat's ass about traffic my love. He's got you good... it's not a bad thing but it's quite fucked up that you did all that only for him to lock in Rasta,"

She turns her head back to the mirror as she blends the product.

"I honestly had no idea he had a girlfriend; I don't even know how long it has been since they've been together..."

"That my girl means put in your best foot forward and get you man back... ain't no woman with locks about to take your sit. Cement yourself ma'am and make sure the pressure is felt."

I honestly feel empowered, Lali is one hell of a person. Dali said to me he doesn't have a girlfriend, this is probably new and is reason enough to claim, I met him first than she did and that boy is mine.

"His *dick* is probably that good, you are so swiped you don't even care about the price..." Lihla says and then burst into laughter, I follow her and we truly sound like two people who had space muffins.

....

After what feels like forever, she finishes her makeup. She's looking gorgeous and all hot, she fixes her hair and then smiles at me.

"You are one hell of a pretty lady," i compliment.

She smiles and even blushes.

"Thank you so much, I think I'm good now, we can head back to the party,"

She packs back her things to the bag and then look at me with a smile.

"She's bisexual and I wouldn't say no at sucking those *tities*"

She randomly says throwing me off the conversation.

"What?" I am lost, confused and have absolutely no idea what she's on about.

She rolls her eyes and opens the car door.

"Do I have to teach you everything?" She asks, seemingly annoyed at my lack of comprehension.

"Yes!"

"Lisa, she's bisexual..."

I am amazed.

"I won't be asking how you know or whatever but you do girls too?" I ask and she exhales disappointment.

"It's a good thing that you moved to the township. Eating vegetables once doesn't make you vegan, Lali. I'm no lesbian but I like my girls tall, slim and with locks. And by the way, I could do with some feminine touch tonight,"

She winks and I gasp. Too much information please.

"Lihla!!" I shout.

"Girl, close that mouth and go get your man,"

I have one hell of a best friend. I shake my head as she laughs and gets out of the car. It's a party, we should enjoy ourselves.

13

Mondays are supposed to be fun and make you feel energetic, ready for the week and motivated. Blasting music and feeling happy to be back at work, but since I've walked into this wing of the hospital, I've been dragging my feet. Yawning and feeling so much uninterested in everything but most of all, very tired.

The weather is bad today, I saw that it pulled a number of roofs on the shacks that are within the radius of the hospital and in some parts; people are fighting floods. When I was in Cape Town, I had the knowledge that some people are fighting floods and electricity outage when the weather is bad, to such a point, community halls are used to accommodate them. It's something I knew but never really saw in real time and even met the people who are devastated, call it being privileged.

This city is now connecting me to people, helping me understand that while I sat in my cosy warm place, some people are fighting real struggles out there and it's not even in their might to hold the situation. It takes knowing that someone dear to you lost all their belongings due to heavy rains followed by strong winds and thunder, it helps with having the heart to help and not try to be just the saviour of the day. It makes you understand why they take to the streets and fight the incompetent, corrupt government. It takes being on

the ground with them to truly understand what they're going through.

And I felt it too because I'm now dragging my feet and thinking of the children who are unable to go to school because their uniform is wet. Their houses are damaged beyond repair.

I don't have any surgeries this morning, I only do rounds and check on my patients before retiring to the doctor's lounge and throw myself on the couch exhaling loud. I'm the only one in here, so I stretch my legs on the couch and look up the tiled ceiling with faint lines.

"Good morning, Dr. Miller,"

A deep manly voice greets before I hear the cranking of coffee mugs and the kettle being turned on.

"Not a good one from me but hey... Good morning Dr."

I return lazily not even looking at the person, I'm still staring deep into the ceiling as if it holds some secrets for me. But in all honesty, it does hold secrets. Not mine to say, but the architectures. I'd like to believe the people who detailed the making of this ceiling have stories to tell.

I breath in and out still fascinated by the faint lines forming a pattern of their own as the bright light reflect on to them.

"Good morning, Miller,"

Another voice distracts me from my deep philosophic thinking and that can only be Dr. Jonas. She's always chippy and happy like she feeds on serotonin every hour.

"Dr. Jonas! How was your weekend?"

I'm still not looking at anyone but the ceiling, like the lines have hypnotised me.

"It was okay, there's not much to tell and yours?" She asks and sits on the couch opposite mine with a long sigh. Not even half into the day and the doctors are feeling it.

"The boy I was having sex with has his own girlfriend and I'm telling you this because it's been haunting me...." I exhale and finally take my eyes off the ceiling and look at her. She doesn't look at all surprised as she stretches her own legs with her eyes closed shut.

"That's Port Elizabeth men for you, Welcome to the city, Miller. Here, you don't find men to love but men to use for sex and money or they use you,"

"What is that supposed to even make me feel, Jonas?" I growl and return my gaze to the ceiling.

"If I should ask... what happened? Like, how did you find out and all?" The nameless doctor with a deep voice asks.

I turn to look at him and he's actually good looking with glasses on, dark hair, brown eyes with a jawline for weeks. He's definitely the type I like to devour at night. I glance over to his left hand and there's a wedding band... he's off limits. I don't do married men.

I turn back to my ceiling before I try to construct a full sentence but too distracted. He sits on the same couch I'm resting on; the couch is enough to accommodate about 10 if not 12 persons. I bring both hands to my belly as I get ready to summarise the story.

"We were at a party, he brought a girl and introduced her as her long-term girlfriend and then when I confronted him, he was a basic bitch and told me how the girl was there long before I came and all that nonsense..."

"Miller, you were a rebound?" Jonas asks before bursting into laughter and I can feel the nameless doctor with a deep voice trying to hold in his. I release first and he follows after and apologise. Doesn't even have to.

"I was a rebound, Jonas, used as an "in the meantime" my real love and I are fixing things, let me just have you... how stupid of me,"

It's laughter again and I feel another shadow walking in, the nameless doctor fixes the way he's sitting. I glance at him and whoever walked in, he has a massive crush on them.

"Hello, People. What a good Monday,"

That can only be Lihla And what the hell is she doing on this side of the hospital where she should be checking vaginas and babies. They all greet her back and she comes to sit directly next to my upper body, pushing me to change my position and lay on the side. She's smiling like she's not the same person who was wasted at a party.

"Hi... Hi. Hello Lihla,"

Arg poor guy is stammering, now he has her full attention and one of the things Lihla does is pay attention to the approach of the person first as the appeal doesn't stand longer than that. Not my maths but Lihla's, she believes that you are able to tell whether to go out with a guy or not, simply on the approach.

"You... you look beautiful today..." He says nervously and pats his head. Dr Jonas growls on the side like a lion before standing up rolling her eyes to the nameless doctor. She sighs and places her hands at the bridge of her nose.

"Lihla, Junior likes you and he's been dying to ask you out but you've been busy getting your heart broken in pieces by Steven to even care. And my advice, don't go out with him, he...." she

halt as she feels she's said to much and shrugs her shoulders.
Poor boy dies in embarrassment.

"Lihla... Dr Mqhayi, it's no-t, n-ot even like that...." he stammers

"We'll go out this Friday night and you're paying," Lihla interrupts him and he's looking like he could throw himself out if the window.

"Of course, I'll pick you up,"

They seem to have forgotten about the people occupying the room. Me and Jonas who goes to make herself a cup of coffee. The nameless doctor nods multiple times before exiting the lounge altogether.

We burst in laughter and it's short lived as we get emergency pagers, the stupid thing beeping non-stop.

"As the great medicine philosopher once said, we are doctors and those people never rest but will forever be underappreciated," Lihla yell loudly as we rush down the corridors heading to casualty. There must be an incoming, a quiet morning means a long day.

"Lihlangene, shut up..." Dr. Jonas says to her. We laugh because we all know Lihla likes coming up with stupid quotes and credit them to this so-called great medicine philosopher.

We go down the stairs and immediately, the whole floor is full of people. It's loud, there are tears and nurses and going up and down trying to help everybody. Care givers and doctors, it's almost full.

We are hands on trying to save lives as efficiently and as quick as possible. It's hard when you are one body but 10 more bodies are at need and you do not know who's more urgent than who.

My heart almost stops as I hear that there's a taxi war, I did notice the roads were awfully quiet this morning when I walked up to the hospital, but I told myself I was the one early. This, now, explains a lot and the fact that we're short staffed, the taxi drivers closed most roads.

I am focusing on the task at hand but at the same time distracted, I'm thinking of him. If he's safe or not. I know that I shouldn't be bothering myself with him but I am. Dali did take care of me in my low days, he gave me emotional support when I couldn't get through the days of the loss. He did hurt me but I hope wherever he is, he's safe and sound.

My eyes scan the room, there are raging bullet wounds, stabs, being beaten up. Some were involved in car accident, buses got burnt and cars collided with each other. With the heavy showers and cold weather, it's almost impossible to check who

and who should be sent to the ICU. There are too many patients.

The floors are getting dirtier by the minute and the cleaning staff is not at all impressed... I should've been a psychologist.

"Dr Miller, we've got incoming. Airstrip. The patient suffered multiple gun shots and will most likely need surgery. Please head there

I'll take over here for you. My heart launches to my stomach. I throw the gloves to the waste bin and rush to the rooftop like a maniac. I get there, almost breathless and stand next to another doctor and 2 nurses as we watch the helicopter approach to land. The minute it hits the ground, the stretcher is out and we're running toward it with the paramedic already screaming out.

I glance at the person and my brain immediately rules out my existence to only medical person. It's blank, I have no other thoughts but to save him. I'm not freezing or shaking, but doing what I should do, performing the best.

There's noise everywhere, it's busy. Reality is blocked and there's no space to be thinking about food or water or rest, we're saving lives. Working around the clock that we forget we even have to pee. Our bodies are used to it, we're trained to be like that. We're surgeons that keep the hand steady while

stitching gun wounds of a person we could potentially lose in a minute. We're doing chest compressions and charging hearts to keep on beating.

It's the job. It's what we spent years in medical school for, in intern and practical years. It's the job and we do the job to the best of our ability. There's no time to mourn a heartbreak or a loss, you flush it out quickly and move. Tears aren't required, only our abilities. We sneeze out big textbook names and use large injections, we connect drips and cut skin to make way for fixing what's disturbing the full functioning of the human body. We are health professionals.

"Dr Miller..."

Somebody taps me lightly on the shoulder as I finish the stitch and place the needle to the side. My scrubs and gloves are all bloody, the operation room is quiet except for the stable beeping ECG.

"Yes." I answer with a low tone as I step back from the patient.

"Your shift ended hours ago...."

I chuckle and glance at the nurse. I'm probably a code red because I've been here the whole day and the clock reads midnight. I've been working without a break and I can feel my body is catching up with me.

"I am aware of that but the hospital needed all of us hands on..."

She nods and gives me a light smile.

"Definitely aware of that, but you need to rest for a bit and you unfortunately cannot perform another surgery..."

"Yes, yes. The hospital regulations, I know." I yawn, feeling the whole day coming onto my shoulders bad.

"We'll finish up here. Go grab something to eat and possibly lie down..."

She smiles at me again. I feel bad that I don't know her name and I cannot read her name tag because she doesn't have any, I nod and walk out of the operation room feeling like I'm carrying a whole truck.

I change and instead of walking to the doctor's lounge to lie down, I head down the corridor and turn to the private wards. The hospital is quiet with only machines making the sound, it's midnight anyway.

I make my way inside the ward; I pull the chair and sit next to his bed. I slump on the chair and everything comes back. Seeing him lying there on that stretcher looking helpless and almost like he could not make it. He was shot 3 times with a head injury in all. We almost lost him but he pulled through. Dali, his line of work is extremely unsafe and today proved that.

"Have you eaten anything? You look drained...." He asks ever so softly and raspy. I exhale and look at him slowly open his eyes; he tries to turn his head to the side but winces at the pain it comes with.

"The one person we should be concerned about here is you..." I answer as I adjust his bed for his back comfort.

"Thank you... But you're also the doctor, Lali, and the nurse who's been coming in and out of here kept telling me you were in surgery and you said I should rest,"

I nod and he side smiles. After he was airlifted here and we spent hours trying to bring him back to life, I requested a private ward for him and a special nurse to help make sure he rests and doesn't try to move a lot. It's good to see that was followed through. I went to that extreme because I can and that it's him.

"I did ask her to make sure you rest..." I slump back to the chair, it's comfortable so I put my feet up and lie at an angle to rest my head but still look at him. I exhale, I'm really tired.

"You need a warm bath, food and then a comfortable bed, the chair cannot replace all that..." he says and I feel an ache in my heart because that's what he'd have me do. I smile lightly.

"I'll be good here..." I exhale and then look at him, "You scared me today,"

He looks at me, looking regretful.

"I'm sorry," he says.

"Your job is not safe, Dali."

"It's not always like that,"

I shake my head not liking how he's still defending it while he almost died.

"But still, you're too young to die,"

"I'm most certainly not young Lali, but I do have a life to live if that's what you mean,"

That's exactly what I mean. He could do so much with his life, yet chose something that's so risky and extremely dangerous. I do understand people need transport but it's not always sweet seeing people you know lose their lives because of the line of work they're on. It's devastating to say the least.

There's silence in the room and for the first time in the day, it all comes back to me. I feel all the emotions I had locked out, I'm in touch with reality again and no longer the medicine robot x surgeon. The tiredness, exhaustion, emotional and mental pain. It's all come back and needs full attention.

"The nurse said I'll be using crutches," He distracts me from my thoughts again.

"You'll actually be on wheel-chair for about 3 weeks or so to heal your back. You'll be attending physiotherapy twice a week and do some home exercises,"

"So, I can't use my legs anytime soon?" Explain it simpler, Lali,"

"You'll be using a wheelchair for the time being, you'll need to hire a helper for it all or maybe move to a home where they have health professionals care for you 24/7. You'll have to not think about going back to driving taxis for at least, the next six months to a year... you'll need to fully recover first,"

He nods and then looks to the other side of the room.

"Life has a funny way of humbling us. I'm sorry I was rude to you, Lali..."

"We're past that. Don't think anything of it, Dali,"

I feel more like a sac, tired with my limbs sore. It's quite chilly in here and I don't even have a blanket. I close my eyes, the beeping machine creating a soft harmonic tune patting me to sleep. It has been a long day, exhausting me in all parts and draining me to the core, but it's the job.

I must've dozed off as when I wake up, I'm covered with a grey throw that smells like daisies. The light penetrating the window has me wincing, I notice that the bed is made and the room looks nothing like it was yesterday. I jump up as the nurse walks in, my heart is racing and I'm sweating with every second. An

empty hospital bed that was previously occupied can only mean two things, he's moved or he's dead and I'm hoping with all that I have in, it's the former.

"What happened?" I ask her without greeting as I can taste the panic through the tip of my tongue. She looks at me like she's the carrier of bad news, she gives me the same face I give a family when I report death. I shake my head at her and she closes the door lightly.

"He's in ICU, it's not looking good, Dr. Miller,"

"What!? What happened? I was here the whole night and..." I start pacing back and forth trying to think back. I heard nothing, I slept through it all, my brain was on a shut down the whole night.

"Please don't panic. You were tired and wouldn't have heard anything, I caught him in time,"

I sit down and I remember this feeling. I remember the pain of loss and how it feels like someone pulling your insides out with the ribcage fighting the pull. It's intense and almost like a heart attack but it's not, it's pain that can't be understood by anyone else but me, the person feeling it. Dali can't do this to me, not now, he has to pull through. He has to.

We fall in love easily... we meet, go out a few times, get to know if we're compatible or not and from there, we get this rushing feeling of love and in we go. We get lost in this story we're writing, this sandcastle we're building now that the sun is out. We're suddenly removed from the world and the only thing that matters is the two of us.

Falling in love is dangerous. It can blind us of so many things yet it can open our worlds to new endless possibilities. We end up saying we will figure it out on the way but truth is, there's never figuring out love or life. We simply dive in blindly hoping the waters are deep enough to accommodate us without hitting our heads on the barrier.

I've fallen in love with him, and I've fallen in love alone. I dived in solo and hoped he'll see that the cynicism won't lead him anywhere. Hoping he'll see that I'm not drowning but floating and waiting for him to join in. But that's all that it is, Hope and nothing more.

"He was moved to intensive care early this morning, the doctors in charge are saying he is critical but stable? That's all you can say about him? That my brother is critical but stable which doesn't even make sense!"

That's Somi, going up and down the casualty shouting me about not knowing enough information about her brother. This is not a morning I was hoping for... certainly not after the day I had yesterday.

"What would you want me to tell you then? Because I clearly have no clue! I'm off your brother's case, I can only tell you what the nurses told me too. And please, you're scaring the patients here, you can't be loud!"

I close the stitch of the patient and write on their chart. There are more incoming victims of the taxi war and it doesn't seem like it is going to end anytime soon. They are fighting about routes and that is something I absolutely have no clue about because to me, it's just a road and can't they share? I tell you... absolutely no understanding and I don't care to.

Somi huffs and pulls me to the side as I get up. I don't know what she wants from me. She basically drags me to the women's restroom and close the door... now, hospital restrooms aren't the cleanest. Especially in this hospital.

"It's smelly in here... Somi, what is it!?"

"My brother messed with some dangerous people. Those three-gun shots were aiming for cold blood and I wouldn't be surprised if they would come in here to finish the job."

She breathes in and looks around; her face changes and she drag me out of the restroom probably realising that it stinks.

"What do you mean by that Somi?" I ask as we walk down the corridor and she pushes me inside the closet with clean hospital bed sheets and all.

There's no one inside.

"Listen, Lisa got involved with some dangerous people and they are leaders of a different taxi association. One that is responsible for the death of my parents and had been coming for the one Dali is under for years, all in the name that they - Dali's association- have more routes more than them. We all know it's never about that but the fact that Dali did something I can't tell you about to them. What causes this war now, isn't only the routes but because... uhm, Lisa is a girlfriend of the leader and he found out that Dali has been sleeping with Lisa..."

She takes a deep breath and looks at me...

"So, you mean to tell me Dali got shot all because he was screwing another man's girlfriend?" I chuckle, feeling hurt because there I am worrying about someone who got shot because of his stupidity.

Somi exhales again.

"Nobulali, I'll need you to get this, okay? Listen,"

I nod and wait for her.

"Lisa is a collateral, she was caught in a crossfire when she fell for another man. Bandezi is a taxi leader of another association that-" I cut her off and reply, "Has been beefing with Dali's for years... yes, yes, I got that part."

She nods

"Good. So, Lisa moved on from Dali to Bandezi and since then, Dali has never been okay. All he wanted was his Lisa and she was done with him, he didn't even care for the fact that Lisa moved on with the man that killed our parents. He was in love and he... I could say he healed but not really. Now, in the past few weeks they reunited at a party somewhere and rekindled their love or whatever. Lisa basically sold Dali fairy-tale dreams and my brother - well uDali has a weakness at love Lali. He fell for it but that turned out to be a coil of Lisa. She never broke up with Bandezi, he was cheating and they had problems and then she thought why not return the same but do it with Dali as he is weak toward her and well Bandezi and Dali are practically enemies..."

She breathes in and out again and I'm simply shook, disappointed and downright disgusted. I cannot compete with that. I cannot pull Dali to forget about Lisa. He is convinced that she is the love of his life.

"And how did Bandezi find out about it all?"

I ask her and she holds her forehead and looks at me.

"He caught them in bed at his house. Dali left with her after the party at my house and it was so dumb of him to even allow Lisa to lead her to Bandezi's house..."

"And how's Lisa? Is she okay?" I ask in worry because this Bandezi man seems to be dangerous.

She chuckles and looks at me.

"I do not know and I do not care. But what you should know is that Dali crossed the line and now there's a war. I am telling you to be safe and not let anybody know that you're close with him. They know I'm his sister but they'll never do anything to me because of my husband. You are new here, I'm sure they've seen you and they will corner you. I was here to simply tell you that. This isn't merely about routes but it is deeper than that and you should not act like Mother Teresa when it comes to my brother.... you will update me if there's any change in his condition. The only time I wish to be updated is when he's either dead or being discharged, otherwise, I don't want anything. Okay?"

I nod and she exits the closet

leaving me in shock.

I never wanted to be caught between wires of taxi violence. I highly doubt I am except for the part that I'm his doctor and nothing more. Yes, again, I dived solo and the hope that he would soon join proves to be nothing more than just hope. It'll never happen. Dali has one person he loves and that unfortunately will not be changing anytime soon. I should simply accept and move on. But how does one move on? How do you just stop loving a person? I guess I have to be one to figure it all out.

I walk out of the closet and take an elevator up to intensive care. I am defeated... I am numb. I don't know how to feel, I was seen as nothing more in Dali's eyes. I was fooled with the great sex, the good talking and maybe he thought I could replace Lisa. He thought getting someone who had physical features similar to that of his beloved would somehow heal him but I'm not Lisa at the end of the day.

I am not the girl he fell in love with and now has difficulties getting over, I'll never be her... and it pains me that I'll never match up to that standard no matter how hard I try, it'll only make me desperate.

I change scrubs as I arrive in the ICU wing and get into protective gear. I sanitize and walk in the ward.

There's already someone standing beside him, he is very much near his head and almost touching him. He has very broad

shoulders, a big man who looks something near to *The Rock* but scarier.

"I wouldn't recommend doing that," I say as I fully enter the room.

He has a mask on but I can see the bruises and faded stitches in his face.

He huffs and nods as he removes his hand looking at me, no, scanning me. He places his hand behind his waist and looks at me as I check Dali's chart.

"Sorry... you are his doctor?" His voice is deep, it vibrates in my stomach and I almost drop the chart at the effect it has on me. My heart skips a beat as the adrenaline rushes through.

"Uhm-Yes, I operated on him when he came in- yesterday and I... I am simply doing a follow-up. I'm Dr Miller..." I place the chart down and look at him and he nods. He knows the effect his voice has on me that's for sure because there's a spark in his eyes.

"Are you... ar-are you family? To--to- the patient?" I ask him... I'm glitching and I hate this. He huffs and lowers his mask to reveal his smirk. He is handsome.

"No, not at all- Dr Miller,"

His voice rumbles my insides that I start to feel hot but I'm still maintaining eye contact which is quite brave of me. I nod and exhales.

"I don't think you should be here then Mr, it's only family or health professionals who should be by his side,"

He nods

"Of course, Doc, of course, I should leave,"

His voice. Oh, my word his voice is doing things it shouldn't be doing to me. It's sending jolts down my spine and I can't even control myself. I'm melting at the presence of this man I don't know the name of.

He moves around and he stands behind me, he places his hand on my figure. I almost jump... which amuses him and he comes even closer to my ear. I catch a whiff of his perfume and it smells expensive and very manly. Now, I could dive in that.

"I love my women independent and strong. I'm a lion and I believe I've just found my lioness... Doc,"

His big hand is holding my waist with so much ownership, he is too close and that I'm going through different emotions. I want him to bend me over right here, right now and take it all. I want to scream and yell daddy while he does forbidden things in me.

"The lioness is trying to work..." I answer.

This earns a light laugh from him that weakens my knees. I'm ready to fall deep in.

"Bold... I like it. Dinner is on me tonight, Dr Miller,"

He says and just like that. I'm invited to dinner.

"Will there be wine?" I ask him.

"And much more... Doc. I will fetch you at 7pm,"

"You don't even know where I live,"

"Ouw but I know you are Dr Miller. See you then and... don't make me wait."

I turn to look at him and I catch his wink and side smile. I feel like air has just been sucked out of me.

He lets me go and exits the ward, leaving me in awe of our encounter... did I just agree to dinner a man I don't even know? Yes, I did. Will I be attending? Without a doubt.

Dali is still stable but he is not out of the woods yet, I hold his hands briefly before leaving his side to go check on other patients.

I have a date with a man who referred to himself as a lion.

There's a belief that women have to always keep their legs closed, not be too outgoing because men will not be interested in them. Or that a woman's body is God's temple... all that is done to shade and shame us when we choose to liberate ourselves. When we choose our own path and not one that is decided by society. There's a disgusting phenomenon that if you agree to a date with a man the first hour you meet him, you are a "loose and easy" woman. When the men do the same, they are suddenly heroes and people who know how to court their women, A funny thing with our society. It is sick to say the least and I, Nobulali Joy Miller, will not conform to. I choose to live my life the way I see fit.

"So, you really are going out with the guy you barely know?"

There, I said it. Lihla is asking for umpteenth time now and it is annoying.

"Yes, Lihlangene. Call me a *bitch*, I do not care...."

I fix my hair and makeup for one last time before checking myself in the full-length mirror.

"You are chasing something that I don't know... if you weren't so rich, I'd say you're chasing after his money..." I chuckle and pull out my purse to compliment my outfit. I have a short silk

black dress on that's showing my chest. Black strappy heels and some jewellery. I look and smell divine.

"There's nothing wrong with chasing money but everything wrong to judge a woman simply because she decided to throw caution to the wind and go out. I mean, I do get the worrying about safety part but really, all other comments are not needed my friend. They are rude. okay?"

She throws her arms in the air and smirks.

"Fine, fine, I got it all. But truly, be safe and enjoy yourself..."

"Now, that's the positivity I need. I'm a single woman and I'm having fun...okay?"

She chuckles and then there's a knock on the door. Lihla jumps off the bed and practically jogs to the front door. She opens as I walk out the bedroom and her jaw drop to the floor. Okay, this is my lion. The man is all 16 flavours of handsomeness.

"Here for Dr Miller," he says.

Lihla nods and I walk to the door.

"Here she is... and please, bring her back before midnight," Lihla threatens and I laugh. He simply nods and extends his hand to take mine.

"Doc,"

"Hello, here I am ready..." I answer

"I guess they forgot about my existence... which is fine because anyway, I'm just a tiny little thing..."

The drama of this girl.

"I'll see you at Midnight Lihlangene," I laugh and she nods letting me out.

"You look stunning, doc," He compliments and I smile.

"Thank you, you are playing quite the part yourself,"

I say and he simply smirks. He has jeans on with sneakers and a black t-shirt. He has a sleeve tattoo making him look all dangerous and sexy. Oh, my goodness does he smell heavenly.... I truly feel like a lioness in his hold. We walk to his car and he's driving a white range rover... big car for a big man. I love.

"So, where are we heading?" I ask as he gets on his side and pulls his seat belt. Ohw my god, this man is truly a dream.

"To our date Ms Miller," his voice roars as he starts the car. Truly a lion.

"Okay... Mr I-don't-know-your-name"

I chuckle and so does he.

"Is that your way of asking for my name? Quite sneaky Ms Miller,"

"So, tell me..." I say as we pass a red light and the route he takes is to the national road. I think we're going somewhere fancy with dining tables and dim lights.

"Call me Zin, it's what everybody calls me. My full name is Zinene by the way,"

His voice, his voice is sending tingles in every part of my body. It should be illegal for a man with such low register to speak anywhere else other than the bedroom It is making me lose my morals and want to jump on him immediately. Which would truly be a dream.

"Okay, Mr Zin it is. And please, call me Joy or Nobulali. Let's lose Dr Miller for the time being..."

He nods at my request.

"Nobulali, beautiful name and so is the bearer,"

He just said my name in the most beautiful and sexy way there is, this man's goal is to kill me with his voice before my time.

"Thank you..."

I smile and the rest of the ride he has me talking about my work and myself, he keeps nodding and agreeing here and there. He gives me space to simply talk my rubbish without holding

myself, I notice he is not much of a conversationalist or maybe I am used to Dali who I'd have long conversations with and not once feel like I am boring. Maybe I am looking into this with eyes that simply wish it was Dali who was next to me. Maybe the man simply just value silence.

I then keep quiet for the rest of the ride to this place.

When we arrive, we're parked outside what I can make out to be a private luxury hotel, one that is reserved for A-listers. It's beautiful, very much and reminds me of Cape Town... I avoid such places because of this. I frown and simply freeze in my seat... nothing can save me now; I simply have to suck it up and go with it.

"We're here..." he announces and I nod trying to calm my nerves down.

"It looks beautiful..." I say.

"I own it..." He winks and I simply look at him with a plain face.

"Oh! okay,"

"Okay? Just, okay?" He asks and laughs. Yes, that's why he was quiet, he is the arrogant hot jerk that flashes his monies around. Wouldn't be too surprised if he would pull out gold chains and wear them.

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"serif";mso-fareast-font-family: "Times New Roman";color:#050505;mso-fareast-language:EN-ZA">"Yes, Mr Zin. Just okay... I've seen better. Now are we going to have our dinner or we'll spend our date in the car?"

He is quite taken aback by my answer and he is confused. Knew it... arrogant jerk ass probably spending his dad's monies or family trust.

"Uhm. okay, Miss Miller,"

We walk inside the hotel and it is all sorts of gorgeousness, it is absolutely stunning with a beautiful glass centrepiece. I have to give it to them, they have quite the taste in luxury. I am offered a champagne glass when we enter which I of course decline politely, I can't drink anything before I've had something to eat.

We head for the elevator with everyone greeting us and passing by with a smile. It's either they got paid or the management in this hotel treats them really well, it could also be that they are crushing on this man I'm holding hands with.

He is quite the date but his attitude? I might be judging way too early but I know I rub him the wrong way.

The lift takes us to the rooftop restaurant which is dim with beautiful low lights and an orchestra playing good old classical music. There are other people in here and our table is near the glass wall that feeds us a beautiful view of the coastline and the

beach, absolutely stunning. The lights of the city are another win.

"This is stunningly beautiful, breath-taking if you ask me. Wow," I announce as we sit down with our waitress for the night welcoming us and introducing herself.

"I am glad you like it," He smiles, obviously happy with his pick.

We order our starter and drinks as we get into a conversation about the place and him showing me landmarks which I obviously cannot see. I am taken by the warmth and privacy of this restaurant, the ambiance and simply the hospitality of it.

The chat is lousy, he tells me about the owners and everything that went into buying this place. Right down to the negotiation meeting and lousy jokes and lecturer about closing a deal. See, I know a lot about closing a deal because I grew up with such parents who were business people and it doesn't excite me when people bring work or business talk into a date table.

No... let's talk about how you'll bend me over and rip my dress off me tonight. I did not come all the way to have this beautiful beast of a sexy voice talk business with me. Let's talk something else other than that... show me how freaky you can get for God's sake let's gossip about the people around. What in the varsity date is this thing I'm in.

The food arrives and we thank the waitress we indulge and It is mouth-watering, delicious and flavoured. Good food and wine too but the conversation? Kill me now because I wish to swap this man for something else. All he is talking about is himself and the business he owns, the contacts and connections. Is this a LinkedIn date? Are we on LinkedIn right now? Because I swear to God this man all he wants to talk about is capital, the stock market and such.

I keep agreeing and laughing lightly, he has nothing to offer other than his monies. This man is treating a date like a business meeting. I know doctors who would sit the entire conversation and talk about their qualification and how great it is, I simply did not think it was the same for other people who make more money. They have no life if it is like that then.

We have all three meals and we sit a little bit and watch the now singing artist. Her voice is so pure, soothing like the beach waves at night. So, pleasing to the ear, I am fully taken by her artistry.

"You know we're paying her 20k for this performance? Just for this hour at that. I am telling you; these artists are making money." He says and I roll my eyes. That's all he could say about the singer? How much she's walking away with. Wow.

"You really have no life outside business huh?" I ask and he nervously laughs, I'm even annoyed by his voice at this point.

"Money is life baby,"

"Yes, it is, not denying that but you don't know how to live life WITH the money you have. You have all the money in the world and work hard for it, no one disputes that but you aren't living your life. Let me tell you something, I come from- probably the richest family. We're drinking wine made in my yard, this is from Miller's club winery and only four of these bottles were left and you were probably gifted this by a friend of yours and you basically carried it to the restaurant so we could be served it. I am telling you this so you can know I have very good relationship with money and you trying to convince me you have money this whole night was a turn off... I doubt you even own this hotel because a man who is secure and has his own monies never feel the need to flaunt it. Now Mr Zin, don't worry about the bill, I'll pay for it with my private wealth card and I hope this will be the last time we ever, like ever have to sit like this and talk and eat. I will be taking a cab home and thank you to the unfortunately waste of time of a date." I gulp the last remains of the wine and pick the bill paper then get up to pay by the counter. I leave him there and not even hold the elevator as he rushes to me, probably wounded.

I fortunately get the hotel cab immediately I make it out of the hotel and it's a man. I greet him and let him know where I am heading, he nods and starts the car. After what feels like forever, he announces that we're here and I pay him and a hefty tip on top. I walk into the yard, lock the gate and into my house and lock the security gate and door before I hear him start his car.

I exhale and I turn to a white man sitting on my couch eating my strawberries and cream.

"And who the fuck are you? And what are you doing in my house?" I question in a drunken state.

"Steven. Lihla's boyfriend and she said you went on a date and was not going to be back until midnight..."he says unbothered "Babe, she's back" he shouts and Lihla comes out of the spare bedroom wearing my gown. She laughs and I walk to the couch and throw myself next to Steven and grab the strawberry bowl from him.

"Why now?" He asks fake crying.

"Steven in the bedroom now!" Lihla says and he gets up and leave Lihla to occupy his place.

"That bad?" She asks and I nod.

"Why do men be so perfect Lihla, have everything but there's that one flaw... one that messes up everything.

I cry as I throw my head back.

"That's why you pick your rotten apple with caution the move to the side..." she says and wraps her arms to hug me.

"That man was 16 flavours of wrong and I never, never want to ever meet him again or else I'll stab his neck because how in the world do you have a great body, a sexy voice, monies and still not live life. Like still be an arrogant ass jerk that boasts about himself the entire night? Lihla all I wanted was a little groove on... not a business meeting man. Hay sies, men!!"

"Rubbish my friend. Advocates of satan! Bad apples,"

I groan in frustration.

"All I could think of was how Dali would've liked to the place... my friend, matters of the heart? ayii!"

"Baffles me too Joy, they kick me in the face too. But it is what is it."

"It is what it is, indeed. I miss the simplicity of that man, can you believe he took me on a township tour that I had a blast on, it was something simple my friend but I enjoyed every single minute... arghh why can't others be like him, love the simplicity and be content," I turn to Lihla who looks like I just asked her where they print monies. She smiles and shakes her head at me.

"You really love Dali hey? I have never seen you like this before,"

"I do... I won't deny that but I also have to move on from him," I reply and she nods this time and places both her hands on my thighs.

"Then my dear, stop looking for Dali in the men you go out with. Everyone comes with their own charms and searching for Dali in all these men, it is not going to do you any good,"

"When did you become so wise?" We laugh and enjoy the strawberries as we chat about other things that do not concern my love life or men.

It's been a month, a month of repeated routines. Go to work, sleep, eat, bath and then repeat in the morning. I have spent my off days in Dali's room hoping for change but nothing, it is unhealthy that I do this but I can't stop.

It's my off-day today and it's a Friday. People party and have fun on a Friday but I'm here, wearing my scrubs and holding his hand telling him of the many stories I do when I visit. His hospital room has become a place where I offload and update him on my life. He can hear me but can't respond, he can't even squeeze my hand or anything close to that, he's just lying there surrounded by monitors and beeping sounds.

The door opens and it's the nurse, I've had more than enough time.

"Dr. Miller,"

I nod and then wipe the tears on my face with my palm. I kiss his forehead and then walk out.

"Will he ever be okay? It's been a month now," I say to no one in particular but myself but I guess the nurse thought I was asking her.

"We can only pray Doc and hope for the better. At least his body is responding to the new treatment but when will he wake up is what we're unsure of."

I nod. Honestly, I know everything. I administered the new treatment plan, it's just that I'm impatient. I want him to walk down these hallways and hug me. Tell me silly stories and comfort me on my worst days but I guess Lihla was right, I am grasping on straws because he made it clear before that he was not looking for a relationship. I think it's time I placed Dali aside and move on, maybe doing that would push me out of my misery.

"Hey watch it!" A strong baritone warns.

I raise my head and my eyes meet the most gorgeous man I've ever set my eyes on. He looks very annoyed at the porter who just bumped into him.

"Aw, sorry boss. Sorry mlungu"

"Zijonge kwedini marn!" He warns again and immediately annoys me.

"If you weren't on your phone then you clearly would've seen him coming, this is a hospital not a playground for kids!" I say and the porter looks at me like I just delivered myself to the devil.

"Hayi Doc, there's no need for that. I also didn't see him coming, I should move," The porter hurriedly pushes the cart and the man places his cell phone in his pocket and chuckles.

I feel his eyes watching me as I pass him.

"You know, if it was a playground I wouldn't be here. I don't do playgrounds too sis wam,"

I huff and then turn to face him. He's wearing jeans with sneakers and a black hoodie. He is still elegant in that casual look.

"Well, you didn't have to call that man 'Ikwedini', having no respect for others is a sign of insecurity and your type thrives by making others fear them. Unfortunately, I'm not the kind that is easily intimidated. Next time, have some decency and respect,"

I look him up and down before I move down the hallway and turn towards the stairs that lead to casualty. I am off-duty but spending some time at the hospital is better than my lonely house. Which is actually an insult because Lihla has made it home, I don't mind being around her because she cooks and cleans and keeps me company. However, when I'm off work, she's usually working.

"Go home, Dr Miller... it's a Friday,"

That would be Justine from H.R

"I am home, Justine,"

I chortle and raises my eyes to see him walking side by side with that black hoodie man. Who, when his eyes meet mine, he stops walking.

"Justine, I'll have a word with Dr Miller here."

He has his hands in his pocket. Justine nods and moves saying his goodbye to me.

"So, You're Dr Miller," he smiles and I shake my head.

"And you are the jerk who disrespects workers. Yes,"

He chuckles and the looks at me briefly.

"Dr Miller, walk with me please,"

He says and I place the chart down and we walk towards the exit.

"You know it is wrong to judge people and decide their character based on one encounter?"

"I'd like to believe I'm the most qualified person to know that,"

I glance at him for a second a look of confusion overwhelms him.

"Because I'm a doctor and we are trained to never diagnose a problem without thorough assess first."

He nods

"Right, right. And you did that, you dissected my whole personality without knowing the cause of my reaction. A friend of mine just got admitted here and I'm not feeling well and because of that, I'm irritated."

I don't get it either way. Calling a worker by "boy" is disrespect and no one should be subjected to that.

"Still, you were rude and did not apologise. You are bound to be bumped by things because this is a hospital,"

I shake my head and he hold the glass door as we exit the hospital and walk towards the parking. I might as well just get into my car and drive home.

"I'm sorry Dr Miller,"

I just chuckle.

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"serif";mso-fareast-font-family: "Times New Roman";color:#050505;mso-fareast-language:EN-ZA">"I'm not the person you should say that to."

"Well, how the hell will I find that porter in this huge hospital? You are not being real with me right now,"

"I don't know. Figure it our Mr Irritated."

He laughs. Like a real laugh that comes from his chest. He laughs so hard that we have to stop as he recovered.

"You are funny, doctor,"

"They do say laughter is the best medicine,"

That earns another round of laughter that he shakes his head to stop himself.

"That you are 100% correct. So, say I find that man and apologise to him, will you give me your numbers?"

Now, that was fast. I stand and glance at him

"You really do not waste time, do you?"

"I am a busy man Dr Miller," He takes out his cell phone and type something. "So what do you say?"

"Alright, that'll do," I answer and he then turns the screen of his phone to my face. It's an apology text, sent and delivered.

"You tricked me!"

I release a laugh and he does too.

"I did not, that porter is my nephew and I got him the job because we couldn't deal with his spoilt behind anymore. A man must hustle for his money and he is not an exception."

I would be lying if I say I'm not impressed. I pull out my cell phone from my scrubs pocket. I unlock it and hand it to him and he hands me his and we exchange numbers in the hospital parking lot.

"My name is Nobulali," I say as I save the number and hand it to him.

"I'm Zenzele but you'll find me there saved as Uncle Zen so that your man doesn't catch anything,"

He winks and I can't help but smile. Sneaky man.

"So, in all the girls you meet you are saved as Uncle Zen?"

"Mhh-hh we are jealous already, Sis Nobulali there are no other girls but I know there's a man in your life because no pretty girl like you would be single,"

"You'd be shocked." I reply and he dramatically acts shocked.

"Don't tell me..."

I nod and he frowns for a second.

"Well, you must be troublesome. I'll call you later Doc, Justine must be panicking in the car. He is such a mama's baby,"

"You and Justine are friends?"

"Related, he's the cousin."

I nod.

"Don't be a stranger Miss Nobulali. See you around..."

He winks and then we part ways as I walk to my car. I drive home and arrive to an empty house. Lihla left a note saying she's heading to Steven's place for the weekend. I'm all alone like the loser I am.

I finally take off the scrubs and change into loungewear with loafers after a warm bath. I pull a packet of popcorns and scroll through Netflix searching for something to watch. I finally land on a cheesy romance movie and watch it for the rest of the evening.

I must have dozed off because I'm awakened by a screeching sound of my ringtone, for a second, I'm lost and have no knowledge of where I am. I quickly shake out of that universe and reach for it and answer it immediately. It's Uncle Zen.

"Miss Nobulali,"

"Uncle Zen,"

He chuckles and then exhales.

"I didn't think you'd pick up, girls like you block a number faster than a speed of light,"

"Well, I guess you are lucky,"

"I guess I am, tell me. What are you doing this lazy Friday?"

It is indeed a lazy Friday.

"Watching Netflix, what else does a doctor do on her off-day?"

"The doctor can join me in watching the sea waves crash from the balcony of my house."

That is not a bad idea at all. I check the time and it's only past 8pm.

"Uncle Zen, are you inviting me to your house?"

"I guess I am," He chuckles "Look, I don't normally do this but you've intrigued me and I'd like to get to know you. I'm bad at courting women and I don't want to scare you away but please, can you join me in my house to watch the sea waves crash?"

I am flattered.

"Yes, I would love that very much."

"I will have someone fetch you, just send me your address."

I quickly get up the couch and run to the bathroom as I tell him the address and directing him to my place. We drop the call and I scramble with last minute make-up and getting ready. By the time the car hoots outside I've already finished and ready to go. I smile passing the mirror and lock my house.

There's a Polo parked right outside my gate, I know as hell the neighbours are watching and it's none of their business.

I get in the back and greet the driver. The car is playing some deep house and I have no interest in.

I text Zen letting him know that the car arrived.

He was not lying about a beach house, we're in this humongous house with views of the ocean that are to die for. There are beautiful lights everywhere it is like scenes from a beach festival. I'm shocked because I was fetched by a mere polo vivo yet he lives in this haven of a place. It's in fact, a palace.

He welcomes me inside and thereafter leads me to the rooftop where there's dinner and a bottle of wine. Indeed, we can see the waves crashing from up here. I make myself comfortable and pour a glass of chapel sweet rosé as he opts for a bottle of water. He has changed from jeans and hoodie to cotton shorts and a sports t-shirt with slides. He's comfortable.

"Your place is beautiful," I comment as I place the glass down.

"Thank you, I actually just moved in a month ago but I'm hardly here. Blue Water Bay is not for a guy like me, I prefer to be in New Brighton. I guess that's where you'd call the ghetto in your girlish lingo." He downs his bottle and then looks at me with a smile

"That explains why I was fetched in a Polo Vivo, you can take the guy out of the township but not the township,"

He groans at my comment

"Well, let me explain that. Sbu was around your area and I asked him to pass by because it would've taken me long to

actually send a driver from here. So I am sorry that you were fetched in such a car..."

He keeps blinking his eyes like he's feeling a little stretched.

"Well First, Zen, I love money and I've been swimming in money since I was a baby but that doesn't not mean I look down on people or I'm a classist. It is that, being fetched by such a car and thereafter be surprised by such a beautiful beach house is completely contrasting the two. And I understand now that you say a friend was in the area and called them... I don't judge but hey, it is what it is. I also live in a basic township area and I'm a doctor that makes enough money to rent a penthouse in summerstrand."

He nods and he's still smiling and that blinking- gosh if only he could stop.

"You are intriguing Miss Nobulali, I like you... a lot."

"You are quite the character yourself,"

And there's a moment where my eyes sit on his and for a minute, he doesn't blink but completely drawn like he is memorising my face for later.

"Shall we eat, uhm, I'm kind of hungry,"

I voice out and he nods while still keeping his glance on me.

"Of course, of course... dinner, let's eat."

We spend the hour just eating and laughing, he is more laid back and I'm the one doing the talking. We talk about art and wine and about ourselves. He's a big brother to four siblings, both his parents are still alive and reside in East London, they own multiple businesses including the salt plant and some warehouses they lease out to big stores. His whole family sounds a lot like mine, just that the Millers made wine and beer. He is quite the character, funny and he listens. Likes to laughs and smiles a lot. He blinks too much when he doesn't understand something or corks his head to the side as his eyes wonder around. He's cute like a baby, soft, gentle and makes you feel like you could just cuddle up in his big arms and live there forever.

The wine is strong and gets to me to such a point I'm rambling and telling him about the hospital and who is in a love triangle with whom. The conversation just flows or maybe I'm the one talking a lot, I mean, we cannot take out the fact that I'm a lonely doctor who doesn't have any other friends other than Lihlangene.

I tell him about my parents but I don't dive deep, I mention my fiancé died and then I moved to Gqeberha to get away from all the memories. I leave out Dali and I don't dive into the details about my grief. I didn't lie, I just left out parts that were not as vital for this conversation.

He tells me that he has kids, 2-young girls who live with his parents. They are 8 and 10, their mother was killed a year ago. He is still grieving; I can see it because I am too. We bond over that, the fact that we both lost a loved one and we don't want to talk about it.

"People like to say it gets better but I don't think they understand trying to find meaning in your life after someone who was your meaning to life,"

He says as we lean on the railing looking over the ocean.

My shoes have long left my feet and my jacket is draping over a chair somewhere in this rooftop, the sea breeze keeps blowing my braids.

"It's hard as fuck." I reply and stumble back and he catches me by my waist before I fall. Yes, I'm now drunk and I need to use the ladies.

"I'm light as a stick and this wind is pushing me back," I laugh as he does too.

"I guess it is our sign to go inside Miss Nobulali"

"I need the bathroom first..." I giggle.

"Right this way... masambe," He replies and holds me closer to him. He smells like everything is going to be okay.

We walk inside and he takes me to the bathroom, I release the pee and look around. It's actually an en-suite bathroom and this I guess is his bedroom judging by the humongous bed and mounted TV. A bit minimal and neutral colours. I stand there looking lost until he walks in and smiles at me.

"Uhm... I need to remove the make-up and get off these tight clothes. Mind lending me something comfortable...." I scratch the back of my neck as his eyes wonder around the room again before nodding and walking to what I make out to be his closet. He walks back out with boxer shorts and a plain black t-shirt and slides.

"Will this be okay?"

I nod.

"The... the drawers of the vanity have everything you might need; my sister visits a lot and always stocks up the toiletry section. Use anything,"

I nod and suddenly there's this awkwardness. Maybe I'm being forward.

"Zen..." I call out and exhale as he looks at me with baby eyes.

"I am not overstepping right?" My drunk self can hardly stand. I hold on to the door and watch him shake his head, something is definitely off.

"No, no... no you are not. It's just that.... this is my first time having a girl over since... you know, she passed on and I'm trying to make you as comfortable as possible and as I've mentioned, I'm not good with courting."

"Oh... I totally get it; I'll be a minute."

Now that's bull crap, I probably pissed him off because I got drunk and now I'm all up in his bathroom and asking him for his clothes. Argh... I can be too forward.

I walk out of the bathroom and he isn't in the room and the clothes are neatly folded on top of the bed. I walk barefoot and down the hallway, I make it to what looks like a lounge area and he is on the phone, my things are on top of the couch. He drops the call as he registers my presence and he is confused.

Advertisement

"serif";mso-fareast-font-family:"Times New Roman"; color:#050505;mso-fareast-language:EN-ZA">I hold on to the console table and he walks to me.

"Hey, I thought you were in the shower,"

"Uhm, yeah I was about to but then I remembered we just met and I can't already be taking over your space and the fact that I'm drunk doesn't make things easier so I think I'll just get my things and you can either take me home or I can call a cab, I don't know...." I scratch the back of my neck and he walks

closer to me, closing the space between me and the wall. My back doesn't hit the wall because his arm is holding my waist while the other is balanced on the wall. My breath hitches as I drown in his fresh cologne and big arms.

"Bombard me with your presence, I beg. Annoy me with your loudness and all your hospital stories I won't complain because I'm attracted to you Nobulali, I can't even explain it. I'm usually a man who knows what to do but with you, with you I'm just speechless. I'm overwhelmed by how someone so beautiful can be here with me because... let's face it, I have nothing else to offer. My money is all that but Nobulali, you are not here for that, and I don't know how else to behave when someone...." He stops and I feel him breathe in and out.

"When someone is attracted to you and isn't looking for your money. You don't know what else to offer because your entire life, people just loved you for your money. Now you don't know how to tell someone you actually enjoy their presence without gifting them the latest Rolex watch or Mercedes Benz." I finish for him.

He exhales loudly and nods

"Yes," he whispers "yes, I don't know how to communicate what's in me. Nobulali, your careless soul pulled me. You didn't even know who I am, hell you didn't even care but instantly

called me out on the bullshit without shaking," He smiles.

"That's bold sisi,"

I look at him and I feel so tiny in his hold.

"You start by being vocal and honest about your feelings..."

He nods

"Well, I'd like you to shower in my bathroom, wear those clothes of mine and we can maybe hangout and you tell me of all those hospital stories,"

He moves back and instantly; his absence is felt. My back goes against the wall as he removes his arm around me.

"You are so drunk you can't even stand upright," he laughs and I shake my head.

"I'm just tipsy please, not drunk," I giggle and he takes my hand and walks me back to the bedroom.

I finally shower and wear his clothes. The T-shirt is like a short dress to my body.

"You are cute," he says as I walk out of the bathroom and drop my folded clothes on the chair.

"Thank you,"

I join him on the couch that looks out the balcony and feeds the view of the ocean. I'm feeling a bit sleepy, so I lean my head toward the armrest as he draped the fleece over me.

"I would love to spend the day with you tomorrow. If you don't have anywhere else to be of course,"

It is clear that we are spending the night together and I'm drunk feeling sleepy which is really not ideal. It does not make the first impression.

"I promised a friend to visit her tomorrow..." It's a lie.

"Okay. Whenever you are free, you can just let me know,"

Silence sits and I can warmly feel myself drifting to sleep. I bump my head against the armrest and it completely wakes me up

"OUCH!" I wince and he just laughs at me and pulls me to his direction that I'm resting my head on his chest.

"You want to sleep?" He asks

"No, I'm fine." I glance at him and he cups my face.

He lowers his head and then our lips meet and tangle up in a kiss. He leads the kiss with his tender lips that have me wondering how he is if he'd go down on me. I'm enjoying it and it heats me up but I don't act on it just yet.... He then let go and perks me.

"Let's watch the stars,"

He kisses my forehead and I'm in his arms as we engage in a conversation and this time it is him telling me about his childhood and how he was raised. His siblings and endless number of cousins.

He is from a big family and his parents travelled a lot when he was growing up that they were raised most by their Nanny and grandmother. He sounds like he was a happy child.

Louds stomping of boots and shouting wakes me up from my sleep, I glance at the clock and it's 3am in the early mornings of Saturday. The wine, I guess, has long left my head as my bladder feels like it is about to explode. His side of the bed is empty and I slowly get up and make my way to the bathroom. I release and take a breather as my sane brain registers what went down. Omg.... I really went on to visit a man I only bumped into and we kissed, watched the stars and nothing else. Lihla will kill me when she hears about this. I laugh to myself, wash my hands and walk back to the bedroom and I find him pacing up and down.

He has a scary face now; it looks like someone pissed him off so bad I'm beginning to question my own existence. When he registers my presence, he is still stern.

"I just went to pee. You were not in bed..." I oddly explain and frown. "You okay?" I ask.

He huffs and roughly rubs his face.

"A boy got shot, he is one of the boys that help run my business and he got shot." He says and then paces up and down "They brought him here and he is in the basement wounded." He then stops and looks at me. I know exactly why he is looking at me the way he is. I know it very well.

"Please, I wouldn't be asking you if I had any choice,"

I exhale. "How bad?" I ask

"Two bullets in one leg... thigh to be specific,"

"What was he doing that got him shot?"

He looks at me and doesn't answer.

"You owe me at least that much if I'm going to risk my license for you Zenzele!" I shout and he looks scared.

"I swear on my grandmother's grave Nobulali, if I could reach Charlie. I wouldn't be asking this. Please."

"I feel like I'm being trapped." I answer and put on my shoes.

I should've gone home. I shouldn't have come to this place if I knew I'd be cleaning gunshot wounds at 3am in the morning of a boy who got shot in a "round" that went wrong.

I thought I had left this place. I thought it had ended with Eliza's husband when he died and we buried all our secrets with him but as the old saying goes; what goes around with eventually come back.

And it has returned and this time it has me dressing a gunshot wound and saving a life of a boy in a basement that looks like a medical centre. It is well packed with everything you'd find at a clinic or basic surgery of a doctor. Zenzele still hasn't given an answer about all this, he has me suspicious about it all. His face around these boys is cold, scary and stern. He doesn't let out his feelings or anything.

"Benicinga ntoni Sibulele! Niyaphambana makwedini!?"

Another slap lands on the face of the one who is unhurt. He was driving the Polo Vivo that picked me up and Zen has been shouting at him for the past hour. That's how long it took for me to finally bandage the wound and give him a shot of sleeping fluids.

"You shouting doesn't help with anything." I say and look at him. I see him break at my contact and but quickly dresses up the cold face and tells Sbu to go get cleaned up, change clothes and drive the car out of the neighbourhood. He quickly moves like he's been waiting for that his dear life.

"Thank you, Nobulali," he says and I look at him plainly.

I drop the gloves in the trashcan, take off the scrubs then walk out of the room and wash my hands before climbing the stairs out of the basement.

"Nobulali..." he calls lightly behind me and I feel tears burning my eyes. I am losing my breath with each step.

"Lali... please listen to me. I'll explain,"

Did he?? He just called me Lali. I come to a halt and look at him. His emotion filled face is back.

"You don't get to call me Lali, stick to Nobulali!"

I whisper as I feel something sit heavily in my throat.

"*Ndicela uxolo kaloku please ndimamele,*" he begs.

"What's there to explain Zenzele? You have your whole basement transformed into a hospital and has all the high-end equipment to perform a surgery. Do you know what image that paints to me? And now at 3am a young boy is coming with a gunshot wound. Are you running some kind of gang here? Mafia maybe, is that what it is?"

He looks plain. He is back to the cold face.

"If you aren't willing to listen to me then you won't know anything. And you'll make up these mad conclusions!"

He almost shouts but his voice is gentle.

"If we had a hospital or something close to it she would've been alive. With all the money in the world, all she needed was to get to a hospital as soon as possible and we were nowhere near..." He says and drops his head before looking at me.

"She was shot right Infront of me by someone who wanted a deal we had. I couldn't do anything Nobulali, all I did was hold her and feel her struggle to her death. If our house was near a hospital, she'd have made it but it was in the outskirts and nothing could've been done. Since then, in all these houses I occupy I have that. A private emergency home clinic.... a nurse comes in twice a week to recheck everything and make sure all is still good."

He exhales. "I'm not dealing with gangs or mafia or anything related to that. Please believe me." He sounds sincere.

"Then how do you explain the gunshot wound? Why they did not go to a hospital but come here?" He rubs his head for a second and then looks at me.

"Because I'm their big brother, I'm the uncle Nobulali. These boys are involved in some shit and for years we've been trying to take them off by giving them legit jobs but I guess all that isn't enough because they still have the balls to be out there on the streets and get their behind shot."

Silence sits and I look down and then face him.

"Please take me home," I say and he leans on the kitchen counter sighing in defeat. He blinks and then his eyes wonder around the room.

"Did I scare you?"

He asks in a low tone. "Yes..." I whisper and he nods.

"I'll get your stuff upstairs," he says looking down and his forehead veins are prominent and a faded shade of green like he is holding tears.

I sit and wait for him. After what feels like forever, he returns holding my stuff. His eyes are red and he doesn't want to look at me.

"I'll drive you home. You can direct me," I nod.

We walk to the garage and hop in the SUV. The drive to my place is deadly quiet, so quiet that for a second, I shake in my seat.

He parks directly outside my gate and leans on the steering wheel.

"I am not good at this Nobulali, please bear with me. All I am asking is for you to be patient with me and allow me to articulate myself well. because the thing I hate is miscommunication, I'm quite slow at responding, I need a

minute in-between each question you ask and my brain is not as fast to respond as yours.... I need you to also be clear about what you are feeling, tell me so I can know. Tell me even if it'll hurt in the worst possible way, I can take it I'm old. But what I cannot stand is rejection and you pulling away without saying anything, you said I scare you and..." He inhales sharply ".... I don't want you to be scared of me. I want you to be free around me. I don't want you to fear me or anything please... there are enough people doing that and I don't need you to be that."

He finally looks at me and I nod. I'm speechless, I have no answer or reply of anything because I am triggered if anything.

"You will let me know when I'll see you again right? I had a good time with you,"

I'm suddenly dumbfounded and cannot speak. He unlocks the car and I walk out with my stuff. His car only leaves once I lock the door and throw myself on the couch and weep.

I was 16 when I cleaned the first dead body and rolled it to a mat before father drove away with it in his bakkie. I learnt how to stitch and dress a wound at the age of 14 and by 18, I was already a pro. I've cleaned many murder scenes in that wine farm that for a moment I thought I'd grow up and own a crime scene cleaning company. I have had a gun pointed at me in the head multiple times and I have pissed myself a couple of those

times. It is not nice at all and today it felt like I was back there... being manipulated and used at such an early age. Being used and traumatised. I thought I had left that life yet again, his explanation makes sense. I'm probably overthinking this. I don't know but what I know now is that I'm tired and I need to sleep.

"Hey, hey, why are you hugging the pillow? You okay?" I look up to see Lihla in her scrubs and is pulling the curtains open to let in the sunshine. My head is heavy as I get up.

"Hey love... " I sit up and rub my eyes.

She throws herself next to me and glance at me.

"What happened now?"

"Nothing, I just had a bottle of wine and started crying for absolutely no reason," I laugh and she shakes her head.

"serif";mso-fareast-font-family: "Times New Roman";color:#050505;mso-fareast-language:EN-ZA">"It can only be you..." She sighs.

"Were you not at Steven's"

"Ahhh lowo, he ditched me last minute and I ended up working a double shift," She leans back and places her feet on the table.

"I met a guy," i finally say and she looks at me with shock written on her face.

"Wait what? And you don't seem enthusiastic about it and that is so unlike you,"

"Right, I mean. Yena he is a gentleman and all but I can't shake off this feeling that he is doing some shady things behind it all..." "Why would you say that?"

"He has a whole home clinic in his basement."

Lihla shakes her head and looks at me "Hold up, hold up.... wait a damn minute. You were at work this whole week and your days are spent at Dali's ward, when and where did you meet this guy and when the fuck did you go to his house?" She sits up and crosses her legs looking at me.

"Well, you know I'm kind of a whore that is quick to jump at man. We met at the hospital and had a little talk. Later, I went to his house and we had dinner, enjoyed wine and watched the stars,"

I laugh as she is shaking her head.

"You can risk hey, and when was all of this?"

"Yesterday boo, I only returned around 5am,"

Her palm run to her mouth and she muffles dramatic screams

"*Bitch!!!* You can risk with your life, what if that nigga was a whole serial killer?? A human trafficking agent and wena you were pulled that easily. And yes, Joy, I am judging you heavily! My *fucken* God, you can be so dumb but go on, tell me more..."

I kind of expected this outrage from her and well.... now that I think about it, I could've easily been killed or trafficked.

"Okay, shit. I understand all that risk chomi and I'm 100% with you but please, I went there and came back and I'm safe. Judge me, I don't mind and in actual fact I don't care but right now I need you to tell me if I'm hallucinating or not. Shit!" "Okay, out with it,"

I retell the entire story in detail and unexpectedly, she's laughing.

"You're a high-risk bitch but question if he is shady based on him having a home clinic? Joy, please."

"Lihla, he had a whole plan on what these boys should do. Take the car out of the neighbourhood, shower and change clothes... I mean, all that"

"That doesn't say anything, I'd do the same for my family too, hell, I'd do the same for you bitch. Even if you'd kill a person cold blood, I'm the one who'd help you dispose it and shut my damn mouth. People do whatever it takes for their family and imagine the backlash his family would receive if that would go

out. They'd lose their business... so you do whatever to protect it, not sell it out there to the enemies,"

Well, I didn't think of it that way.

"I guess so..." I say and she hugs me.

"If he is as good and gentle as you say he is, don't let him go baby. You deserve something to be joyful about so you don't spend your off-days doing that shit. Dali will recover at his own time but he won't want to be in a relationship with you, I'd like to believe he made that quite clear. So, give this Zen guy a chance. Go out with him, learn him and have fun in all that okay?"

I nod and she kisses my forehead and then lets me go.

"I'll make us some food and we can watch whatever series is on Netflix,"

"Sure.... and please shower first, you smell like a hospital!"

She laughs and throws a pillow in my face. "Shut up!"

She shouts as she walks to the kitchen. I reach for my cell phone and send a text.

I'd like us to go out on Sunday, pick me up at 5pm and don't be late!

Delivered And read.

"When will you be off work again? I'd like you to accompany me to a yacht party that will be hosted by one of our sponsors, it's Friday Night."

He smiles from across the table as we're having a dinner at this exclusive beach restaurant. It's a cool Sunday night with the sea breeze hitting my face so warmly and the soul music in the background setting the mood. I take a sip from my drink and nod.

"I'd love to join you,"

"That's awesome, I'll let them know I'm bringing someone. My family will be there, I hope you don't mind meeting them. They are a loud bunch,"

Meeting the boy's parents in a yacht, so unconventional but okay. I'm for it.

"I actually would love to meet them,"

He nods and smiles as we finish the rest of our dinner talking about everything in the world. Well, I'm the one doing the talking and he's just listening and nodding here and there to agree.

He's nothing like Dali but everything like him, in a sense that he chooses his words and has a way to charm you with just words.

But again, he is Zen and not Dali, even the first alphabets of their names are so far apart.

His cell phone rings as we are about to settle the bill, he excuses himself and I pay for everything. I sit and enjoy the beach view and the ear pleasing sound coming from the music in the restaurant, it's soul Sunday. And no music beats that playlist, it has a way of taking you to a cloud you've never been on.

He finally returns and his eyes are sparkling.

"Sorry about that," He signals for the waiter

"It's no trouble really, we are busy people,"

"You can say that again, the work just never ends,"

The waiter comes and he pulls out his card to pay and I quickly stop him.

"I've already settled the bill,"

He looks like I've just insulted him

"Oh, yes, it's already been paid. Thank you for dining with us,"

The waiter says and Zen's face is showered with confusion.

"The tip?"

"Everything Sir."

"Alright, thank you." He says to the waiter and looks at me with a pained face. He corks his head to the side and his eyes gaze all over the place.

"Why? Why would you do that?" He asks as he gets up and reaches out for my hand. "Let's take a walk to the beach,"

I grab my purse and lock my hand in his. We walk out of the restaurant and down to the beach. I take off my sandals and he offer to hold them as we walk in the sand.

"You didn't answer me," He looks at me and his face still has that confusion.

"Answer you in what?"

"You settled the bill, why would you do that? I'm the one who asked you out Nobulali *ngoku undenza* weak, like I can't afford to pay for things..."

His tone is full of annoyance.

"I'm sorry, you picked the up the call and the waiter was already there and I just handed him my card. No big deal,"

He remains quiet and a minute pass before he comes to a halt and stares at me. He's still annoyed.

"I don't appreciate that, when I take you out, I'm the one paying not the other way around. Please, don't make me look

like a weak man. *Ingathi ndiyi bhari ngoku, hayi Nobulali*, I won't take that. I'm a man and I pay for things, okay?"

All this because I didn't wait for him? Should I have just asked that waiter to join me at the table and wait for him until he is done with the phonecall? Absolutely not.

"You're overreacting," I argue.

"Haibo?" He exclaims.

"Yes, you are, it is just a bill. You don't have to perform your wealth to me Zen. And you better get used to me paying for things if this should go any further."

"It is not about that please. I want to spoil you; I want you to feel good and know that I've got you. I only want you to be comfortable, I know you have your own money Nobulali but sometimes take a step back and let me be the one paying. If you've dated broke guys before who made you feel bad for not paying for things, I'm not that guy. I want to take care of you sana and I can't do that if you're holding yourself Ma,"

I chuckle and he looks at me with a cheesy smile.

"Fine, I'll take a rest and have you take over. My car needs a full tank by the way and I'm going to need new clothes for the yacht party... how about that?" I dramatically blink my eyes and he laugh.

"That's cool with me. Ndiyi dyan sisi and it must show. Imagine all these losers talking about how I let my girl pay for things. Iyahlebisa bhabha," I blush and roll my eyes.

"Give me a kiss for that," he says and I immediately tiptoe to meet his lips while giggling like a teenager. He gently nibbles my lips and then grabs my bum before fully kissing me. A light groan escapes inside of him as I lead the kiss and deepened it. He lightly squeezes my bum and I moan in his mouth feeling my body closely meeting his. My arms wrap around his waist and I push myself even closer, he groans and my breath hitches, my nipples harden over the crop top and his thing pokes me that I lightly hump up and down causing him to groan and squeeze my bum harder.

The sound of crashing of waves is melodic as we, in that space, have filtered out the world and the only thing that matters is the two of us. The rushing warmth of passion and lust strikes from the soles of my feet and high up to the tip of the skull, rippling me in his hold and I hump harder. The need to tear his clothes worsens with each passing second.

He pulls out of the kiss to catch his breath but I'm still trapped in his hold and so is he. I attempt to move back but he shakes his head, his eyes are full of arousal.

"Don't move just yet... these are not my best shorts,"

"serif";mso-fareast-font-family:"Times New Roman"; color:#050505;mso-fareast-language:EN-ZA">He says in a low tone and I giggle. I know exactly what he means, if only he could feel how drenched my own panties are.

"We should head back to the house, this is a public space,"

I approve of that. He walks behind me, his hands resting lightly on my shoulders to hide his erection as we turn towards the bridge that leads to his house.

Immediately we walk in, fabrics fly all over and we can't keep our hands off each other. He takes me on top of the counter and opens my legs wide. He pulls my shorts and throws them to the floor and pushes my crop top over my shoulder and it joins the rest of our clothes.

His hands maneuverer all over my body and kisses me from up my lips to in-between my thighs. His lips come in contact with my *coochie*, I lose it all and orgasm and he continue to lick and play and do all sinful things that have me screaming on top of the kitchen counter. My whole body vibrates under his hold as moans bump from wall to wall I'm sure the guy in the basement getting all healed up is tortured by the screams of rippling orgasm and sexual pleasure.

The door clicks open and I shut my mouth, he comes up and hugs me to hide my naked body from whoever just walked in.

"Ouw fuck!" The third person shouts and Zen closes me in.

"*Kwedini!* Fuck off, what are you doing in my house!?"

"*Haybo bhuti*, you said I should pop by to talk about that deal!"

Oh lord please, I know exactly who that voice belongs to. I bury my face in his neck and he holds me tighter as if he knows my deep dark secrets.

"*Ngoku ujonga ntoni kwedini ungavali amehlo akho!?* You walked in the wrong time marn yeses, close your eyes and walk to the basement I'll meet you there in a minute. And don't you dare peak kwedini!"

I guess he does close his eyes and I feel my heart beating fast. Oh it truly cannot be this brat. Lord save me.

"*Ngoku Bhuti* how will I see with my eyes closed?"

"*Mandingaphikisani nawe kwedini*, I'm older than you. You should've known better than to not ring the doorbell first"

"*Haybo Bhuti!*" he complains.

"*Nyaybo bhuti ntoni kwedini!?*"

As he directs the man whose eyes are closed shut to the basement, I steal a peak and that big head cannot be missed. Mother fucking Zinene.

He finally makes it and I hear a door shut before he lets go and kisses my forehead.

"I'm sorry, I'll make it up to you okay. I totally forgot that he'll come by,"

"Who is he?" I ask needing confirmation.

"My brother, Zinene," Oh good lord. My hoe-ness is catching up with me fast.

He rubs his eyes and then exhales sharply. The sexual chance has died for the both of us.

"Okay. Can I take a shower and then head home?" I ask.

"Uhm... yah sure but, can't you sleep over? I don't know what the fuck I'm even saying Nobulali but...."

His eyes do that thing again of gazing everywhere. I cup his face feeling his beard, lightly pull it down to meet mine and then I kiss him briefly.

"I have work tomorrow. And we'll see each other again Friday for the yacht party. I enjoyed dinner today."

I force a smile and he nod and then carries me upstairs.

It can only be the universe to sabotage me like this. He brings my clothes after. I dress up and leave after kissing him goodbye.

I walk in the house to Lihla cosying up with Steven on the couch. I stand Infront of them and throw my purse to the floor.

"Hi Steven, Hi Lihla," I say and she burst into laughter and pushes Steven.

"To the room, mate.... this should be interesting!" She says laughing and Steven just rolls his eyes and greet me in a smile as he passes to the bedroom. I take Steven's place and she hugs me while still laughing.

"If you don't stop laughing, I won't tell you shit!" I say and that only pushes her to laugh harder.

"What flopped my friend? Tell me, your best friend in the whole wide world. Is his stroke game weak? Haha,"

"I wish, I didn't even get a taste. His brother walked in on us while he was eating me out..." She pushes me and laughs even harder, that loud laughter followed by wheezing and then tears.

"Wait, wait... so a douchebag of a brother walked in on y'all, while he was down there and you didn't think of continuing???"
Ma'am that's something you only see in those basic acting porn videos."

At least this is amusing to her other than my sexually frustrated self.

"And bestie you wouldn't guess who his brother is, my worst nightmare!"

She crosses her legs and looks at me

"Try me,"

"The one and only Zinene."

She looks puzzled for a minute and then her eyes grow big as the realisation hits.

"Suxoka!!"

"I am telling you; the universe hates me. I don't know anymore,"

I grab the packet of chips on the table and open them

"Hayi Nobulali! Uthini na apha kum? The same Zinene as in Zin the boring rich guy?"

"Yena himself friend. He is a whole brother imagine. At this point I might as well go to google and look up this guy, maybe his father might actually be the one I'm interested in. Andazi,"

She laughs loud and claps her hands

"But you won't stop seeing Zen because of that right?"

I look at her in my "are you serious lol" because she better be joking.

"Hell to the absolute No, haibo... stop for who? That douchebag. Sorry no, it'll be up to Zen to decide whether he stops what we're doing or not and by the way, you should've seen how annoyed he got when I settled the bill!"

"Hayi Nobulali, tell me more sisi!"

I take off my shoes and cross my legs as I get ready to narrate the story from the beginning. Steven must be annoyed at me for stealing their quality time, but he'll do just fine. I met Lihla way before him and he should understand by now.

We're inseparable.

Life is not Black and White, it has colours and, in those colours, you find me, Nobulali. The black girl with white adoptive parents raised in an insanely rich neighbourhood of white people in pre and post democracy. That's about enough to paint the picture of how I always was the other. Too whitewashed for the black and too black for the whites. I have always been told I don't belong in spaces where I most definitely qualified.... those spaces I only came to occupy right after they saw who was raising me.

My afro was too much for the parents to bare, they didn't know how to care for it until they hired Bettina who then taught me how to care for my hair. I've been ignorant about so many things, I at some point thought the world was black and white. That it was either this or that and anything in-between or outside doesn't belong. It was not until tertiary that I realised there's more to the world beyond the binaries. Beyond the constant boxing and grouping of people. Even with that education, I never had this overwhelming feeling that I have as I step on the yacht and all I see is my people. Black people performing their success and celebrating their wins.

My blackness is affirmed and for a moment, I feel like I belong. The rich black people. That is my category and I've been a fool

to believe that such a category did not exist. It truly does and this yacht party is proof of that.

"Watch your step sweetheart," Zen warned as hand in hand we slowly stepped to the main deck where the family is. He sneaks his arm around my waist and holds me close to him. The moon is blessing this night with its fullness as the city light of the bay are as colourful as ever. It is a cool night, the stars are glistening in the blue sky, the sea is calm as the waves lightly crash causing a melodic sound over the laughs and conversations of the people.

As we step closer, eyes turn to us and I notice a few faces. The minister of Sports and Recreation, a couple of CEOs, Wine Farm owners and yes, my eyes land on the media mogul; Sinaye Rhadebe. I never thought I'd see her face ever again in my life after that month at the wine farm.

I scan through and land on the face I've been dreading all along, he looks mortified, and at the same time confused, pissed off and questioning my presence. And also, why I'm by his brother's side.

"Look who decided to finally show up. Hello Baby," An older woman who by the way doesn't look anywhere close to 60 has Zen embracing her briefly and kissing her cheeks. He says, "Hello Mother, it's been a while," the little reunite is disturbed

by another man who is called "Father" and suddenly, I'm left standing alone feeling weird.

My eyes wander and they finally sit on Sinaye Rhadebe who approaches me with grace holding two glasses of champagne.

"We meet again," she whispers as she smiles and hands me the glass of champagne. I gladly accept.

"Miss Rhadebe. As the old saying goes, those who have met before will meet again. It is nice to see you," I smile. I see she's still charmed by me as she did back then.

"Nobulali," she exhales and we both interlock in each other's gaze. Clearly passing glances of reminiscing: the good, the bad, the ugly and the absolute beautiful of everything.

My hoeness is catching up with me... except... Miss Rhadebe was never hoeness. It was sweet love; it was figuring each other out and being comfortable in our spaces. It was pure romance and we went our separate ways after we ended what we shared. And I clearly did not expect to see her here.

"Wow, I'm just amazed. I never thought I'd see you again, let alone hearing from you. Nobulali."

She says my name in full. She's the first person who refused to call me Joy or anything, she stuck to my name. The one I was given at birth.

"The same can be said about you, Naye. It's been minute,"

"Years if we'd be technical. I'd love to hug you by the way but you know; we are ladies of the night holding champagne glasses,"

She has a point and I throw a light chuckle there.

"You can hold my hand," I lean over and whisper in her ear, "I mean no one here will suspect that two gorgeous women have seen each other naked before," I lightly blow cool air down her neck. She gasps and then I mask it off with a big smile as I step back. She also walks closer and whisper in my ear, "I think you forgot to mention that the two women are lusting over each other. And if this wasn't a party where they are known quite well and have hot men as their dates, they'd sneak to the nearest cabin and remind themselves of the good old days." Oh, she bet.

"I'd love to kiss you again, Nobulali," she says and steps back too and we are both beaming as the energy around the two of us radiates innocence, sweet love and happiness.

"I'd love the same too,"

Our hands meet halfway and immediately there's contact, electricity shoots from her hand to everywhere in my body, it feels like a shot of warm fluids, almost crippling as we squeeze the hold.

Her eyes glimmer the same way that they did under the dim light of her cabin at the top of the mountain in that wine farm. They remind me of the smooth taste of sweet wine and how soft her brown skin had felt against mine as we sent each other into pleasant climax.

The month our sweet love lasted left memories of a lifetime that no one can ever take away from me. Her breath hitches as she downs the champagne glass and place it to the console. I do the same the other hands meet. For a time in this universe everyone fades away and it is me and her under the bright light of the full moon. The ocean waves seem to cheer at the sight of two women who were once young and fell insanely and sweetly in love for each other.

I feel the cold stone of something on her hand and I glance down, I'm almost blinded by the shining diamond ring which sits comfortably on her ring finger. I brush it. I smile. of course, she is now married, what did I think it would be. We both moved on.

I let go softly, it would be mad of me to feel hurt by this. Before I could even ask, a tall man softly places his hand on her lower back and kisses her cheek. She got herself a good-looking brother, he smiles and introduces himself as her fiancé, I nod and glance over at her.

"Ouw yes, love. This is Nobulali, a good friend of mine. We haven't seen each other in a while and I was inviting her to the wedding,"

Her eyes are still locked on mine, I smile and nod.

"Yes, Naye's mom used to work with my parents but because of the busy world and moving, we lost contact," I explained and he seems to understand.

"Well, I am glad to meet you Nobulali. Naye doesn't have much acquaintances besides her colleagues and we were actually struggling to find a maid of honour for her. Imagine that,"

"Haybo love

you don't have to mention such..." She giggles and he kisses her on the cheek as he apologises.

"And anyway, Nobulali is a doctor. I don't think she has time for all the theatrics,"

She glances over at me and basically begs for me to reject. She's giving me that face.

"I actually don't think I'd be a good maid of honour... But I'd love to be just a regular guest sitting at the back."

"Oh no, if you are an old friend of Naye, then you deserve to stand with her at the front. Just... just sleep on this for a few days and consider," I nod.

"Let me go find my partner, it was nice seeing you again Naye. Maybe we could do tea one of these days when you're back in town,"

"You live in PE now?"

She asks. The hint of excitement in her tone shows.

"Yes, I actually moved here a couple of months back. I'm working at one of the hospitals,"

She turns her face to her fiancé for a second giggling.

"What a coincidence, we actually moved down here for work. So, we will surely do that tea soon,"

"And dinner too," the fiancé adds and I nod in enthusiasm.

"Looking forward to all of it. It was nice to see you again Naye," to the fiancé, "And you too sir, you've found yourself quite someone here. Naye is amazing,"

My eyes sit of hers and they are glistening, almost like she's feeling tears.

"It was nice to see you too Nobulali."

We finally embrace and she's smells heavenly. My arms wrap her and I squeeze her in and she moaned so light I almost missed it. I step back and her whole face is flushed. She hides it behind the biggest smile.

"Enjoy your night hey,"

I say and they both return it as I take a step back and walk around trying to find not my partner but the exit. I step back inside the yacht and my eyes are burning with tears needing a go ahead. I take a turn and down the corridor I stomp my heels walking towards the back deck.

"Nobulali wait,"

Her voice echoes across the corridor as her heels join in too. I can't hold them anymore; they fall freely in response to gravity. I try to stride faster but the damn heels are slippery against the floor.

She catches up with me and pushes me to the cabin on the left and locks the door.

"Why are you following me!?" I almost shout. She catches her breath first and I take this time to look around the cabin, it's actually vacant and only has a bed and closet, hardwood floor that extend to the glass door that gives way to whatever a patio in a yacht is called. The view of the endless blue ocean is accompanied by the air breeze and salty smell of it. I try to pat my face to hide the fears and I feel her warm hands holding mine. I step back and she follows me until my back is against the cabin door which feels cool against my dress.

She doesn't say anything but takes me in a heated kiss.

Her hands travel down to cup my butt, she sneaks her thigh in-between my legs. My short dress rolls up to my waist as I pull the front zip of her dress all the way down and caress her boobies over her lace bra. I lightly choke her and deepened the kiss causing her to moan and breathe heavily. She high bends her knee and her thigh come in contact with my lace thong, she rips it apart with one hand and frees my clit. I cry as it meets her thighs and grind against it.

"You're so wet," she whispers and I reply with a moan and pull her lips as her hand lifts my leg and have it cross her waist. She pulls back from the kiss and watches me grind against her thigh feeling an insane amount of pleasure coming strong.

"You're still as warm as I remember you..." She declares and attacks my neck.

"Naye...." I cry as her lips brush against the nape of my neck.

"No marks." She chuckles and pull back.

"So, there's someone in your side too huh?" She pulls my dress up from my waist and over my neck and the expensive designer fabric meets the floor along with hers. I'm braless and that excites her. My hands run up to unclasp her bra. My teeth bit my bottom lip.... I need to bury myself in them. Our bodies heavily press against each other and like I didn't warn her, she sucks my neck and plants a hickey causing me to go insane and grind harder against her thigh. The heat is unmissed and I don't

even care whether she marks my whole body, I need to feel her against my own, the world is filtered out and the only thing that matter is her and me in this cabin whose owner might knock anytime. The idea of someone knocking pushes me over as I cry heavily and announce,

"Naye, I'm gonna cum," she pulls back her thigh and my nails dig deep onto her back in frustration as my whole body shakes in need of release.

"Naye... don't do that... please,"

I cry and tears escape my eyes. I no longer recognise my voice or even my thoughts.

"You have someone too..."

It's not for anyone nor does it need an answer.

"Look at me Nobulali...." she begs and our eyes meet again. I struggle to keep mine open as I keep shaking against the door. She's delaying my orgasm on purpose. I try to pull her thigh back in but she chuckles in amusement.

"You have someone too. Answer me, confirm it for me."

"Yes, I do. I do Naye. Now, my orgasm please."

She goes for my neck again and before I could complain, her hand reaches for my *coochie* and her finger manoeuvre around my clit. She goes harder on my neck; I scream and shutter

against her as I heavily squirt. "Nayeee!" I gasp and try to catch my breath as I look at her. She's smiling, pleased by herself. She knows which buttons to punch and how hard and low to do it. "Good girl," she whispers and tears escape my eyes. My heart floats and I wrap my hands around her waist and pulls her in for a gentle kiss. I slowly lead her to the bed and as her back meet the mattress, I push us to the centre and go on top.

I start by caressing her boobies and down to her stomach and make love to her thighs and back to the bellybutton. My tongue goes down to meet her clit and finger glides into her wet entrance sending her into euphoria as her back arches and open her legs wide. She curses and calls out my name as I go in harder and faster.

She *cums* hard and her whole body shakes that she turns her upper body and muffles the cries of pleasure in the pillow.

I pull her back and look at her beautiful brown eyes sparkling. She takes me in her mouth again. My leg goes over hers, I lean back and push myself in as our *coochies* meet.

"Look at me Naye, be here with me. Let's go in together, slowly and then faster. Can you do that with me?"

She nods.

"Be vocal sweetie,"

"Yes, yes Lali, yes."

She moans loud as we grind and hump with the creaking bed joining the marvellous creation of ear pleasing sound caused by everything.

We shutter under each other and then kiss and hold each other as she pushes us under the covers. We hear the hoot of the yacht and it's no rocket science to know that we are now leaving the harbour. The party just began and the night is still young. We cuddle and fall into a sweet resting with my heart beating against her soft body.

My love, we meet again.

My arms wrapped around her body as if I'm holding her hostage. I've been in love before; I've loved before and I am walking proof that love doesn't come once in a lifetime. I have been loved before Jason, I've fallen in love before Dali and this person is now lying in my arms snoring lightly.

The ocean creates a form of vibration that is somehow inclined to undefined forms of motion. Swaying swiftly to the left and right as response to the waves.

My hand brushes her face and remove the strand of hair from her big forehead. I smile and kisses it lightly; she wakes up from her nap and takes a deep breath before brightening those brown eyes. She snuggles closer and pushes her leg to cross mine.

"Lali..." She calls. Her tone is low and almost begging.

"Mh-hh" I answer.

"I missed you. I missed you so much,"

"I know, I know you did Naye."

I plant another kiss in her forehead as she looks up at me.

"The hickeys are quite visible," she chuckles and I playfully roll my eyes.

"You did that on purpose..."

"I'm sorry,"

She drops her eyes and I pull her chin up with my finger, "hey hey.... I don't mind, you can mark me anywhere you like. Don't get sad on me now."

Before she could answer, my lips meet with hers and lightly bite her bottom lip. She pulls back swiftly and then sits up as her eyes move to the glass door feeding the ocean view and the city lights at the far distance. Tension settles as the elephant in the room begs to be attended to.

I also sit up and lay my head on her left shoulder as our hands meet and fingers interlock.

"You're thinking about him?" I ask.

"Yes," she sighs after.

"I am too. He seems like a nice guy,"

Her body shifts lightly and she clears her throat.

"He is...."

"I sense a but"

She exhales brings our interlocked hands to her lips and kisses our knuckles and she says; "He is just not you. And I don't want to complicate things Lali and pull you into whatever fantasy I have in my head but in this space, away from the people and the noise of the world; in this space with you in it.... I feel like I'm on top of the world." She chuckles

"I feel like everything wrong with the world is suddenly corrected. That all complicated and complex things are suddenly simple and easy. You do that to me; you always give me that. And today you reminded me of that and I don't know.... I'm not sure if I'll fully live again knowing something beyond exists wherever you and I are."

She brings her eyes back from the glass door and looks down catching my eyes and smiling softly.

"Do you want to know what you give me?" I ask and she nods.

"You give me comfort, peace, stability yet this rush of everything in life is exciting. You make me feel whole and I don't have to explain myself to you because you know me well. Shit, you are the only one who makes me lose it like that." I chuckle and she smirks too.

"My affection for you Naye is beyond what words can explain. There's not enough words that 26-alphabets can form to explain the kind of overwhelming feeling and rush of warmth along with an unsteady heartbeat you cause when my eyes glance in your direction."

I exhale. Naye adores me naked, I don't have to hide who I am around her. I'm in touch with my young self and there's nothing more fulfilling than having someone who loved and learned you while you were growing up and now that you're an adult, they still have that burning flame. Naye knows me better than

anybody could claim and that alone completes me.

"Lali, are we ever going to get our chance at each other?" Her tone is breaking.

"Naye..." I press my fingers around hers. A lump travels from the depth of my heart right to the tip of my throat causing me to blow cool her and hold the burning liquid threatening to escape my eyes.

"A lot has happened. A lot changed since the wine farm.... we promised each other a forever but life got in the way and now the two of us are with people we also love and adore and can never think to hurt them and because of that we choose to hurt ourselves."

I nod. It has always been like that, when Eliza found out about my affecting and bond at the cabin with Naye. She teamed up with Naye's mom and they moved. I still don't know where, however, the tightness of her hug that night she was leaving, I still feel it. We told each other that maybe... maybe in the future we will meet again and we will remember the bond and appreciate the month we spent in the mountain top cabin at the wine farm.

We however, were old enough to know that it would be quite impossible for us to rekindle the love and we said - in another lifetime. In another lifetime she and I would be lovers and we

would have each other and adore each other until the day of our last breath.

The vibration of a cell phone against the wooden floor pushes me out of the deep thoughts... she's still here, in this bed with me. I'm feeling her warmth and the softness of her brown skin. It's her phone but she doesn't seem to bother herself to get up and get it. I attempt to but she holds my arms and as I glance in her face, I notice the tears. She shakes her head. "I want to enjoy this space with you. Don't let them take us out of it... at least not yet," her voice breaks. I nod in understanding and kiss her on the lips.

"Lali, I need you closer,"

"Tell me what to do Naye," I say breathless.

"Closer. Lali"

I sit between her thighs and my legs go over her waist. I hug her closer as our bare skin meet and we smile at each other. Her arms go around my waist as mine wrap her shoulder area. I kiss her, tasting the salt of her tears that is infused with gentleness that stems from reminiscing our days in the mountain top cabin. My fingers travel to the back of her head as I loosen the pony tail letting her curly hair drop on her shoulder and I massage her head slowly as she moans in response.

I pull back and then smile as she giggles.

"It was already messed up," I say and she nods giggly. I also pull the band holding my braids in a bun and let them drop loose.

"You are still as gorgeous Nobulali,"

"I am. I've been keeping myself for you. You never know when I'll be captured holding a baguette and make it to the front page of your media outlets," she laughs and shakes her head.

"Our stolen captures cannot be that horrible," she continues laughing.

"Ehh, your people can make a celebrity look down and out. I fear your people," Her chest vibrates against mine as she throws her head back. I attend to her neck and kiss it. She giggles even more.

"Laliiii," I pull back and then I plant a soft one on her nose.

"You've done so well for your self Naye, I'm proud of you."

Her smile reaches her eyes and thanks me.

Naye has become a household name when it comes to anything media. She's made a name for herself and behind all the fame and media strategies that run in her brain when she meets with her team, behind all that wealth and power; lies a woman I hold dear in my heart and have a 30-days' worth of great memories and adventures.

"My plans for the night is to be here with you until they send a search party for us and then they find us all tangled up and regret ever searching for us." Naye blurts out and it is actually not a bad idea.

"I can already see the headline tomorrow, all big and bold," I add.

"They would have a field day and milk the story to its ends."
She says and we laugh. Her cell phone rings again and it's now a tune not a vibration. I look at her and see the frustration. My own is still quite dead.

"You might want to take that,"

She nods and I swiftly move off her. She gets off the bed and walk to grab her cell phone from the floor and return with it on the bed. She answers and as she tries to talk to the person, I wrap myself with the sheet and step out to the veranda and shut the glass door. Immediately, I'm immersed into a musical sound of crashing waves and the sea breeze that smells salt-like mixed with a different kind of flavours of the ocean. I hold on to the rail as the wind blows cool against my skin and braids. I close my eyes and feel the fresh-airy light air rushing through and creates an illusion of floating. Warm arms wrap around me from behind and she rests her head on my left shoulder. I join my own hands and we stand there for a while just letting the unsaid be said through our bodies.

"They were indeed looking for us. I told him that you felt sick and kept vomiting, so we stepped off the yacht through the back deck before it left the harbour. We have the whole night to ourselves..."

She finally says and I tap her twice as a Thank you. I'm not in a state to see people or even interact. My eyes would be locked to her the whole party people would be suspicious.

"The cabin... what if the owner walks in?" I ask.

"The owner is holding you, Lali. Lucy is mine and a friend asked to rent her for the party since she's big and spacious and I said it's fine if I'd only attend too and get some exclusive good shots for the gossip column."

Honestly, I am not shocked.

"You named your yacht Lucy?" I chuckle and she does too. Lucy was the name of our old dog in the wine farm. Naye loved that dog and I hated it with passion. I hate dogs.

"Yes, in memory of my beloved Lucy." "You are something else."

We remain out reminiscing of the old days before the breeze got too cold and we walked back inside with her blinding the glass door. She takes out some snacks out of the cupboard and a platter that was inside one of the drawers that look like a cooler and heater at the same time. Well, fuck me because I thought this cabin was vacant.

"And here I was thinking we walked into the captain's cabin because ma'am; that pull was strong," she laughs hard.

"I had them prepare it for me. We don't sleep in the same space with my fiancé and before you question everything.... we are 100% normal but I don't...." she hesitates "Never mind. But be comfortable, no one's going to come looking for us." She smiles briefly and I don't want to dive deep into inquisition mode.

She touches something and a flat screen appears from under the cabinet. I should get my own yacht. "Join me in bed please,"

She smiles and blushes as she drops the white sheet and then turn off the lights in the cabin leaving the TV only.

"You've seen the movie *Room in Rome*?" She asks as she joins me under the covers. She sits between my legs and rests her head on my torso. I kiss her head and chuckle.

"No.." I answer.

She turns her head in shock and laughs. "Well, prepare to be entertained," "I'm ready,"

I kiss her as we lay back simultaneously. The movie finally begins and in this moment in time, nothing matters but just me and Naye. We are in the middle of the ocean and should anything happen, I'd rest comfortably knowing I died in the arms of my most loved. I kiss her head again and hold her tight. My love.

They say time is nothing but an illusion. I don't know my stance there but I know the clock ticks and ticks and ticks until the hours go by and you find that it is time to be with the world again. It is time to be a member of society and make decisions - good or bad.

"I say we move to an island in the Pacific and spend the rest of our days there. Just you and I..." Naye blurts out as we enjoy breakfast in the veranda of the cabin with the sun rising over the horizon with the beach houses lining up over the coast line.

"We'd wear thin fabrics and enjoy the island life. I mean, no one would know us there," I add and laugh. We're wrapped in white robes, the party ended early in the morning and everyone was escorted out the yacht before Naye informed the crew to head to the bay coast. That's where we are right now, the bay coast. It is absolutely magnificent.

"I can already see us holding each other through the stormy winter night," Naye says as her eyes glimmer in response to the rising sun.

"We'd cook and plant and lead a simple life,"

"We'd finally have some time to only us. Focus on just us and enjoy life without everyone else..." she sighs and looks at me with a smile that quickly vanishes.

"We can only dream," I say it before she does and she

nods reaching out her hand for mine. They interlock across the table and we sit there eating and watching the sun rise.

"I have a house around here. It looks out the coast and no one has been there but myself. I built it 3 years ago as an escape, a place of refuge but never been there since they finished it a month ago. Only my staff and interior decorator. I've received pictures of the inside but never really stepped in." She chortles as her eyes glance around the line of houses.

"Would you like to go with me?" I ask and her face brightens.

"Yes, I'd love to please."

I get up and walk towards her. I sit on her lap and my arms wrap around her as I give her a kiss.

"We could go to Italy, Rome. Have a night like Anna and Alba," I mention referencing the movie we watched last night. "Go to the bar and spend the night talking about literary references and all the grandfather of classical studies." She catches on and I smile.

"Don't forget the passionate love making and the laughs," I cup her face and plant a kiss on her lips and move to her neck. She moans.

"The....Lali you're making me wet," I pull back and then look at her.

"The movie love, the movie angel.... we're talking about it," I answer and pull open her robe and cup her boobies

causing her to slither and pull my robe open to separate my legs. I gasp and she laughs.

"The movie. yes. I'll be Natasha and you, you will be Alba," she says as I take her in again. Her thumb sits directly on my clit and I moan in her mouth as she rubs it lightly. Our morning session take on in that veranda as the sea waves crash and the sun rising beautifully. We take separate showers and she lends me one of her dresses on board. Mine is too short and glittery to be worn at this time. She also gives me her beach sandals and hat. We look like two women who just had glasses of Mojito on a yacht without having sex or making out. Totally unsuspecting. We walk out of the cabin hand in hand, back to the world as if nothing happened. I check my cell phone and it is actually off. I don't remember turning it off.

As we get off and step onto the bridge that leads to her house, I hold her waist and she looks up at me smiling. We hear a click sound of a camera and she tenses up. I quickly make up a joke and she catches on and laughs hysterically hitting my shoulders. The camera man shows himself and is rather pleased with himself. My heart sinks... we're in the real world now. No longer in our escape of the yacht.

"Johnathan, hi..." Nays squirms and then I slowly remove my hand and extend it to greet Johnathan who just took our stolen shot. We will definitely be in the front page. He is the trusted cameraman and investigative journalist in one of the

media houses owned by Naye.

"I was in the neighbourhood boss following up on a story. I was actually sitting nearby enjoying the sun until I saw the yacht coming up."

"No need to explain yourself just get back to work Okay," He nods and then takes another shot before saying; "Your friend here should consider modelling, the camera loves her..." He declares and I smile lightly as my phone finally turns on and the beeping goes off like crazy. Naye looks a bit annoyed and then smiles at Johnathan; "Back to Work Johnathan, I don't pay you to lounge around and I'd like those photos emailed, okay?" He nods and gets out of the way as we continue with our journey.

"You turned my cell phone off," I say as we are out of Jonathan's ear and eye shot.

"I'm sorry," she says.

"Naye...." I exhale and she glances at me briefly.

"Let's reach the house first. You can yell at me there,"

"I'm not going to yell at you Naye," I mention and she chortles

"Whatever Lali,"

I don't understand that. The sudden change of attitude.

"No! What the actual fuck, you are not about to pull that shit with me Sinaye. I only asked about my switched off phone and all of a sudden you are annoyed at me! What is up with

that?"

"Reach the house first, Nobulali. Plz."

I exhale and shut my mouth. We finally reach the beach house... more like a beach mansion because it is overwhelmingly beautiful. I don't say anything but take in the mesmerising architecture and state of the art furnishings. I hear keys drop on the console table before her back hits the door. She sighs deeply.

"I'm sorry I switched off your phone, Lali. I needed time with you. I don't know much about your love life but I didn't want anything coming in between us. I'm jealous.... I'm a mess... I don't know. I'm in love with you all over again but I'm scared to push you away. I'm scared of everything Nobulali. However, after last night my greatest fear is losing you all over again." She sighs deeply and then wipes her tears. "I'm a mess... I've pulled you in my mess and I'm sorry but I can't let go." I walk to her and cup her face with both my hands and silence her with a passion filled kiss that has us taking each other on the nearest couch.

"Welcome home," I say as she catches her breath with me curled up on her as we recover from yet another orgasm. She giggles.

"I don't think we'll be able to keep our hands off each other. Nobulali at every chance we get, I'm afraid we will fall into this."

Our hands are intertwined.

"That's not a bad thing...." I say and she chuckles.

"Johnathan was the first clap back-to-reality moment. He reminded me that I'm Sinaye Rhadebe. the CEO who is well known. Not Naye who Lali squirts to whenever she touches her..." she laughs hard and I join her.

"I mean no lies there. You do make me squirt; it makes me mad that you are the only person who has ever done that. And trust me, I've been around to know," I laugh but she doesn't, I look up and a face of amazement is written on her face. She doesn't say anything but pulls me up and she sits up. My back meeting her chest and then she cups my tits, rubbing them and caressing them.

"I do? Nobulali, I'm the only person?" Her tone is low and whispering.

I nod.

"I can't hear you sweetie," She says as her hands travel down to separate my legs. The left bends and she rubs my clit again.

"I think I've had enough orgasm to last me a year...Naye." She doesn't listen. She gives me wet kisses and moans near my ear.

"Nay-e-e-"

"Lali... you don't say that and expect me to move like nothing happened. Now, be here with me love, squirt for me

babey,"

I scream and shatter under her hold as she continuously rubs and flicker with my clit. She slides in her centre fingers and whispers sweet nothings in my ear.

"Honey, be present with me. Feel me in you, cum for me, okay?"

I nod, my whole body is in heat and responding to her touch and sweet talks. I moan louder, her center fingers slide slowly and deeper inside of me. I twitch and try to grab onto the air. It amuses her. Muffled sounds escape my mouth.

"Honey be as loud as you need to. It's just the two of us," she whispers and I let out a scream full of pleasure

"Good girl," she whispers. My hands travel to my nipples pinching as her fingers inside of me began moving in up and down motion and me grinding with my back arching in her hold. She increases her pace and goes faster with her thumb teasing my clit. I cry and my whole-body trembles.

"Baby be here with me,"

She calls out loud and she turns her hand as her fingers get twisted and her palm hits my sensitive clit.

A rushing fire gushes through my whole body as I moan louder, I tremble under her and a bursting orgasm rushes through me as my coochie pushes out a strong liquid that excites Naye. I shudder and hold both her arms to stop her, I twist and get on my knees as another liquid splashes and leaves me paralysed

for a moment. My body jerks and then falls on top of her my face meeting her chest first. She wraps me with her warm arms and an emotional sensation overcomes me. Tears burn my eyes and I let them out.

"Are you okay?" She asks with a low tone. I shake my head feeling the loss of her fingers inside of me. They are now in joint, brushing my back and comforting me.

"I think I'm in love with you," it comes out as a whisper but loud enough for the both of us. She simply holds me tight and shift until my face is buried in her neck and her hands travel to rub my butt.

"Joy!!!" Lihla's loud voice pulls me back to reality again. I can't seem to leave Naye's beach mansion. We ended up staying the whole day making love, having her make me squirt in every corner of the house until I passed out in her hands begging her to stop. My legs still quiver at the thought of the day. The conversations we had, I told her about Jason, Dali

the brothers - Zin and Zen. We had a warm bath where I held her in my arms and had her confess her marriage to Andile - her fiancé. It's all a media façade to help him with his image, a publicity stunt that had her and I arguing for hours. I was mad

at the fact that she would waste her life like that... didn't she learn anything with Eliza and her husband. A marriage of convenience never works.

"It is not like you would dare give us a chance Nobulali. You wouldn't do that even on your best day...you went on and got Jason, you got uDali and Zenzele who loves you but what about me? Nobulali I built this house with you in mind. I left all the love I had for someone in that mountain top cabin, I can't be in relationships for a long time because all I am searching for in people is you. You've chained me into your love that sometimes I can't breathe because you are all I'm thinking about. You may have moved on and found love and loved again but I'm still there. I'm still there waiting. Waiting for you.... for your love to return and make me whole again. I am deeply in love with you it hurts my soul that you think I'm throwing my whole life away when all I've done is to continuously wait for you but you never show up... you never. And... and I waited. I did."

She broke down and cried. She bawled her eyes out I felt an immense guilt at thinking she had moved on.

"I'm in love with you." I said as I made sweet love to her until her whole body resigned. We spent the night in each other's arms doing nothing but listening to our heart beat and heavy breathing.

"Nobulali!!!" Lihla claps her hands close to my face and I shake back to reality.

"I'm here, I'm here..." I answer and take my cup of coffee to the couch with her following me. I'm in my pyjamas and she's wearing her scrubs. I think the day today is Friday.

"What's up with you?" She asks and sit next to me.

"Joy, what happened in that yacht party? Since you've returned, all you do is cry and then get cooped up in this couch. You didn't even show up for work this week I'm getting worried."

I sniff and then sip on the coffee. It's bitter and I spit it and place it on top of the table before I feel tears falling down my face.

"Nobulali!!!" She calls and then hugs me.

"Sweetie, I want to help you but I can't when you won't tell me anything," Her tone is full of concern.

"I left her Lihla. I didn't search for her and all she was doing was trying to find me." I sniff in my pyjama top and cry.

"Who? Babey, who are you talking about? Take a deep breath and then tell me, okay?
I nod.

"I fell in love with her Lihla while I was young. I swear to God she never left my head. I thought about her, I did

but what was the use of that when she herself was nowhere I can find her. Maybe if I had looked deeper and....Lihla I don't know." I sniff and she nods. She knows who I'm talking about.

"Did you see her?" She asks.

"I was with her the whole weekend." I answer. Struggling to form each word. My mouth feels heavy and my voice is coming out as a whisper.

"Ouw, Lali." She hugs me tighter and rocks me. "Can I call her for you? I can't bear to see you like this." I nod and she kisses my forehead before taking my cell phone along with hers. I remain in that position of a mess until I nap. I get awakened by light kisses and warm hands with a swift of a familiar scent. I throw my wobbly arms around her without even thinking twice and quiver.

"How long has she been like this?" Her melodic voice echoes and I try to close my arms tightly around her.

"The whole week, she didn't even go to work or eat. She just sits there and cries until she falls asleep. She makes coffee but doesn't drink it because it's bitter... I think she doesn't know where the sugar is." Lihla answers.

"Oh! sthandwa sam, I'm here now. I'm here with you. You'll be okay," Naye whispers to me and brushes my back.

"You should've called me earlier..." Naye says to Lihla, her tone stern.

"I know but she didn't talk until today and told me she met you.... she always talked about you in varsity, wondering where you were and I'm the one who talked her into moving on and being out there. I'm sorry, I should've known better."

"No... no... don't beat yourself up for it. You wouldn't have known... will you please pack a bag for her, I'm going to take her with me."

"Alright, give me 10 minutes." Lihla answers as she strides to the bedroom.

I open my eyes and it's me and her. Her hair is pulled into a pony tail and she smiles as she looks at me.

"Hey baby, I'm here now, okay?"

"I... I waited too. I searched for you, prayed that I'd find you. Maybe bump into you at Uni but..." It's hard to make out words but I try and force myself. I shake my head and she shush me. She cups my face and I look at her beautiful brown eyes. "We both did but what matters is that we found each other again. I'm here and you are here too. Sthandwa, you don't have to search anymore because I'm here, it's me, your Naye. I'm taking you home with me, would you like that?"

I nod vigorously.

"Ye-yes," she kisses me lightly.

"You don't have to say much. You are okay now, I'm with you," she hugs me again until Lihla walks out with the

bag.

"Help me take her to the car." Naye says and both with Lihla they help me until I'm in the back of Naye's car. Lihla hugs me and give me a kiss as Naye affirms that I'll be fine. She gets in too and pulls me to her embrace. I don't say anything. I just cry in her hold as the car moves.

"Andile, help me put her in the bedroom upstairs," My puffy eyes open to meet with Naye's Fiancé. I look at her and her own eyes are bloodshot red. I'm taken to the bedroom. She thanks him and takes off her high heels, lets down her hair and changed into a t-shirt and short. I smile, she looks good but I can't seem to work my mouth to tell her she looks cute. She disappears for a while and then come back and sits next to me. Her forehead veins are prominent.

"Lali... I've run the bath. Can I help you out of your clothes so we can bath?"

I nod and she smiles.

She takes off the pyjamas and then helps me out of the bed. She carries be to the bath tub and reads a children's book as the water soaks my body. It's the classic winnie the pooh.

After the bath, I lay on my tummy as she uses a tissue oil to lotion and also rub me. She dresses me in an oversized t-shirt and panties. She puts on socks and the tucks me in, with me being the little spoon.

The door swings open and Andile walks in holding a tray of

food, I just bury my face in her chest. There's silence in the room until he walks out and shuts the door.

"Your food and meds are here love. Let's get you up, I'll feed you,"

I sit up and enjoy the warm food and drink the pills after. She kisses every part of my face and I let her.

"You should've called me before it got worse. We've been through this before and you'll be okay. I love you,"

I nod again but she doesn't know that this time it's worse. It's not like last time. But I trust her when she says I'll be okay, she means it and I trust her.

"Him..." I mutter painfully and she nods in understanding what I am trying to say but can't properly voice out.

"He knows that you're special to me." I nod.

He comes in again to take the tray with empty plates, Naye nods at him and he does too. He mutters a low goodnight and then switches off the lights as he walks out.

"Naye..." I mumble as I shake uncontrollably and a glass breaking scream shoots out of my mouth. It is evident that it is coming from the unopened bag of pain that was left to sink in the river. I guess it never sunk deep enough.

Naye straddles me and then rocks with me.

"You are okay. Naye is here, sweetheart I'm here and I won't leave. I love you so, so, so much that I can't hold it in. Come back to me sthandwa, I'm here with you, I'm here for

you. Please don't let our numbered days end like this, come back to me Lali... I'm sorry I wasn't there earlier, I'm sorry my love that I let you go. I'm here now, come back to me. I need you," She sniffs and holds me tight. I'm in too deep. I've sunken in the deep dark place it'll take some time for me to come back. But I know that my love is with me, she's here.

She's here and I should be fine. Soon.

"Buya sthandwa sam. I'm here, I'm waiting."

She whispers as she lays back on the bed with me. She covers us both and kisses me on the forehead.

"Remember your Naye? She's here baby. We're together again,"

I was diagnosed with high-functioning depression and I've been told I fear rejection so bad that it has turned itself into anxiety. I was 15 when I was told that. I was 18 when I attempted suicide for the last time and ended up at the mountain top cabin with Naye. She has always been there, the shield.... The protector and also the guide. I had fallen deeply in love that when her mother took her away from the wine farm, a part of me left with her. It remained with her and it remained with the cabin. My relationship with her is something so many do not understand and at every time they try to, they fail because they can't fathom how deep our love runs. It's simply like that.

"Andile is gay, I'm bisexual. In our line of work that is regarded as taboo and I would lose everything I worked for should I come out and so would he. Unfortunately, they are not as accepting and the worst case is that I would be raped and killed because of that. You know that too Nobulali, you know what Eliza tried to do to us when they found out about us. So, Andile and I decided that we would hang out until we convinced everyone that we were madly in love. Andile's dad is a Shona man from Zim, very educated and highly intelligent man but somehow when it comes to sexuality, all that intelligent flies out of the window. He is a product of his own background and unfortunately cannot help it. And so, we did it

and it worked. We are best friends like you and Lihlangene. We met at university and from there bonded. He's taken me home to meet his family and he has met mine. We are best friend and this, us. Fooling the world. We are doing it to be safe."

Truly, the reality of being gay isn't the same as they make it out to be in the constitution of this country. It may all be accepting but really; there's still more work to be done on the ground. I can't add that to the argument because my voice is still shy. I've been told this kind of trauma response stems from being a child that was abandoned at birth and being with people I didn't recognise, being silent was a coping mechanism. I don't remember much from my birth. Hell, I don't remember myself until at least 5 years. That too is foggy. Maybe I'm broken beyond repairs and the only thing that's been helping is work and studying and sleeping with men.

"I knew it when you told me there's someone as I pinned you against the Cabin door, I knew that for you it was real. That you found love, it was a selfish act turning your cell phone off but please understand love that it was me protecting my heart from breaking again. I got jealous and.... I guess I overreacted...."

She stops and I want to tell her that she didn't overreact. I want to tell her that it was okay, I also did not want to be disturbed by anyone. I also wanted to fully fixate myself in that moment

with her. I want to let her know that everything I thought I knew about love didn't match anything until I was crying in her arms and she assured me multiple times that she's with me. I've been rejected so many times that her arms are the only place I feel like I've come home. The only place I feel like everything I am and not, is affirmed. She spoons me as the night falls and dawn begins to take over. I kept falling asleep and waking up. Shaking and trembling uncontrollably because I thought she has left my side. My body jerks up and I search for her with my mind, the message seemingly untranslated to other parts of my body. I whimper not sure whether I'm heard or not. I try to shift and then whimper again and that seems to work as she envelops me in her arms.

"I'm here, I'm not gone. I'm holding you; can you feel me?" She asks with her sleepy tone. My legs tremble as an overwhelming feeling of weakness overcomes me and I surrender to it. Letting it rip my soul apart and I silently cry. The door to the room opens and I guess it's Andile walking in.

"I think we should take her to the hospital," He suggests with a tone full of concern. "Look at you Sisi, you haven't slept a wink,"

I hear Naye chuckle.

"We've done this before Ace, it's not mental but it is her soul. Remember Heathcliff and Catherine?" She says and brushes my side.

"Whatever our souls are made of, his and mine are the same." Andile quotes out loud and chuckles lightly. "Wrote Emily Brontë" He finishes.

"Lali's soul and mine are the same. We are chained together and when that chain is broken, it is hard to reach down and form another. Only I can fix her and nurse her back to life.... she's mine Ace and I'm hers. Even in death, I'll have her next to me."

I feel the mattress sink and Andile sits at my feet and hold them. This love is too deep to only have been formed in this lifetime. It was translated from another and it just rips me apart whenever I don't attend to it. The bag of trauma I thought had sunk in the river, opened and presented itself to me. I was forced to look at it, search through and be at mercy of it as I drifted to the dark place.

"Will she be okay?" Andile's voice comes out as a whisper.

"Yes, she will be. I'm here with her." Naye answers.

"I'll go prepare food. Would you like to eat downstairs?"

"I'll appreciate if you'd ask the staff to bring it to the balcony. And check on Pat please, he called me yesterday asking for you."

He chuckles and then says okay as he leaves.

My eyes are swollen and puffy, they feel heavy but I open them as Naye kneels next to me and kisses my face.

"Do you wanna watch the sunrise with me?"

I try to smile but my muscles fail me and so, I nod.

"Let's get you up and we'll sit outside, it's so beautiful you'll see." She kisses my face again and helps me up. I can now take steps without heaving or falling down on my butt.

"Progress

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I'm proud of you baby. Now, walk with me. I'm here, I'm not leaving." She says and we walk to the balcony and she fixes the pillows in the chair as I lean on it and feel the sun rise. She takes my hand and sits next to me as she tells me more stories about Andile. The next couple of days we fall into a routine. She wakes up and watches the sunrise with me as we wait for breakfast, we then bath together and dress up in an oversized t-shirt. She walks with me to the garden and we return in the house as she works and I listen to an audio book or take mid-day nap. Andile will come up with lunch and sits with me and tell me all stories about Naye that I missed. Some are too funny and some are sad. We have dinner together and then Naye tucks me in at night and sleeps next to me. It's been a week and I feel a bit better. I can walk on my own and I can feed myself but I can't voice out my thoughts, my speech seems to be still impaired.

"You're in the front page! Both of you..." Andile shouts as he throws the paper in Naye's desk. I switch off the audio book

and watch Naye's face as it turns and transition to multiple phases of annoyance.

"Johnathan ran the photos."

"You knew? Sisi I always make sure I'm discrete. Johnathan took the photos and you didn't even think to mention it? Is this what you actually wanted? Being on the front page with the headline, "Yacht Romance"? And this picture is too damn good to even be missed. Every behaviourist knows that an arm around the lower waist is mother fucking romance, up to the shoulder blade point, that's work. This picture has nothing of work here!" Andile is fuming but he's looking at this in a way he as a behaviourist would but not all people are behaviourist.

"You are looking at this with eyes of dissecting every little thing. Call my assistant, I'll write a statement on this and send it to her. I'm already dealing with endless messages from my own mother." She glances my way and I flunk.

"And what will you say?" He paces up and down and Naye walks up to calm him down.

"Ace, this is not going to jeopardise what we worked on okay? I'll use reverse psychology on them and explain that Lali is my childhood best friend and we were catching up. It so happened that Johnathan snapped only in that angle but if they were there for themselves, they'd have seen everything was merely friendly. I'll even release the other pictures of us

laughing because Johnathan held on to those. It will work, trust me Andile and stop panicking please. Go check on Pat."

I've learnt over the days that Pat is actually the love of Andile's life. I've caught a glance of Pat and him leaving the house and they are always giggling when chatting. I see how he brightens up Andile's day without even trying, I've seen the kind of spark that I know exists between Naye and I.

Should we come out, I don't even think my patients would trust me either because immediately you tell them that you are actually not straight, they get these weird conclusions in their brains that you don't know anything.

I gather with every strength in me to push out a sound.

"Naye," I call and she immediately waltz towards me and kneel.

I can see she is holding tears and wants to break down.

"Hey baby. I'm here...."

"Hug..." I exhale as it comes out clear.... even though it is one word.

She falls in my arms and holds me tight as her head rest on my lap.

"You can let it out," I try to form a sentence and even though terribly slow, it is something.

"It is unfair Lali. Unfair that we have to hide and make up stories just so we could be with the people we love. They all say, just come out but don't understand the dangers that follow that. Had it been easier then, I'd have totally stood on a balcony

and shouted it for the world to hear. It's unfair. Unfair...." She sniffs and I comfort her. I want to tell her that Heathcliff and Catherine never found their time until after death but she and I, even with hiding and ducking. We have each other and we are with each other. In a big circle of closeted gay people, we are privileged enough to have resources that take us away from civilization so that we are our best selves together.... that we have refuge and places we go to and filter out the world. We have each other one way or another and whatever people think of that picture, it's their problem not ours.

"Dinner is ready," Andile's voice pulls Naye out and she smiles as she mouths a thank you. The door shuts close and she gets up and reaches her hands out for mine. I get up and then pull her to my embrace. I give her a kiss on the forehead and she smiles.

"I'm getting better," I whisper and she smiles at me.

"Good, now it's my turn to be sick," She chortles and I roll my eyes playfully as I lean on her and we walk out of her office to the dining room.

The frenzy dies down a couple of days later. Naye is a fixer and strategist and that's how she's managed to be the best in

the business. She knows her work well and only she does it the best.

"You know, she's absolutely a titan at this job, she's transformed my whole image from gay-priest-child to a respected professor with a wife who is also successful. But at what expense Lali? We hide who we love for all of that. It's all a façade."

Pat blows the smoke out as Andile confesses his tiredness with everything. We're all sitting by the garden watching the midnight stars. Naye's head is resting on my lap.

"It's not worth losing your life over, the things you've worked hard to accomplish. The people you love, the hiding feels a bit better when you think of all that's at risk." Pat gives his own view on it and then silence falls. My hand brush over Naye's head and play with her hair.

"We fell in love with sin, maybe that's the price to pay. But I'm no Christian, so I wouldn't even know what the actual fuck am I paying for," Andile chips in and that evokes laughter among us.

"The fact that you are not a believer is the actual pit." Naye says and laughs as the rest of us.

"Seek him and his kingdom they say," I chip in. Andile rolls his eyes.

"That didn't make me any less gay." - Andile

"True" says Pat as he blows the smoke from his cigarette.

We're dancing under the stars. I don't know myself in love, I know how it is supposed to feel like based on stories. But the truth is; to experience love is different from reading about it in a novel. I thought I had fallen in love before, I have never, because this feeling of floating in space and laughing all the way from the inside of your stomach up to the tenderness of your lips is new to me. I have felt love but never in love - Naye has given us that, it is a dangerous feeling that can have you kill and murder someone who dares to blackmail you in any way to do their bad deeds. This is why I'm standing next to cold corpse of Zenzele at a morgue with his teary brother whose toxic masculinity isn't allowing him to break down and cry. An unending love for someone pushed me to do this without thinking twice... stab at the nape, rush them to the hospital with a donor card... do not resuscitate and use their organs to save someone worthy of life and not a serial killer and rapist and a blackmailer on top - A deal gone wrong for Zenzele and not me. His soul will rest in shit, hell doesn't take that kind of a monster- The devil would be too kind.

"I'm sorry my brother did that to you. I heard the family dropped the charges against the cleaner and that's the least we could do. You didn't deserve to go through all that." Zinene says in a low tone.

"Your brother didn't deserve death, it was too easy for him. I hate myself for even thinking he was a gentleman. He was nothing but a wolf in a sheep's clothing. And from now on, your whole family better do me a favour and stay the hell away from me and my people. You don't want another corpse." I click my heels as I walk out of the room and vomit in the nearest bin. I should've known better than to stuff myself up with a greasy breakfast then come to a morgue after. It was silly. I search for a sink and rinse my whole mouth. I walk out of the building and immediately I reach Naye, I throw myself up in her arms and feel my stomach grumble up another vomit.

"I think I'm sick. I shouldn't have gone in there Naye," I shake my head as I search and notice an open drain near.

"You had to do it for you and the girls you saved." I nod and rush to the open drain to throw up some more. Naye holds my braids back as I kneel on the tar road and let out every single meal I had. Morgues make me sick. They trigger me, the foul smell, the coldness, the empty bodies and pale skin. It brings back unpleasant childhood memories, smelling death isn't a nice scent to keep in the back of your brain. Naye hands me bottled water as I recover and then we walk back to the car. We lean and I gobble down the water.

"I'm proud of you. You saved so many girls from that man," She hugs me and kisses my forehead. We get inside the car and she drives us to her house.

It was a Friday afternoon when I got a phone call from Zen asking about everything after weeks of not getting a hold of me. I didn't bother detailing everything but kept it at the explanation that I felt sick during the yacht party. Met an old friend and ended up leaving through the back deck because I couldn't stomach anything. I was feeling extremely hot and I'd have been an irritated guest. He seemed to get the story and invited me over for dinner in his house. I told him it would be friendly and making up for disappearing in the yacht party. We indeed met and had dinner until another case of a home clinic happened. This time it was a girl who clearly was drugged and raped.... I was manipulated into helping her and giving her the right pills, I knew something was not right but a girl's life was on the line. I helped and she survived.

Another case followed in the same night, a girl - in the same basement home clinic gave birth to a child. My brains returned as I held a new-born baby in my arms that there was more to what was being let on. Working with Eliza and cleaning corpse at the wine farm has taught me to always be naive and act like you don't know anything and you're unsuspecting but you keep telling the person who is ordering you to do these crimes that it is the last time you do such. After that Friday night, I drove to Naye's place and found her, Pat and Andile playing 30 seconds. I decided that I'd tell them all, besides - we've grown to trust each other.

This is when Pat began to tell me that Zen is being investigated for some heinous crimes in his department. His wealth is not his but his parents' and has been involved in shady dealings with politicians. Dali so happened to have been caught in the crossfire during the taxi war. The taxi war itself was cooked by some powerful people in the game to drive the investigation away from their shores. Pat told me he works for the National Intelligence Team and the case of Zenzele is one that has been taken from the SAPS, it is serious and includes so many connections that it is an on-going case.

I so happened to be the person that helped Pat crack the case. I told Zen that I no longer want to be in his space or anywhere close to his house that is when the threats began. Threatening to release the tape of me helping his gangster friends and they would paint me as the mob doctor and I'd definitely lose my medical license. Threats went as far as having me followed and pictures of Naye and I were placed in the desk of negotiations that were merely blackmail. I knew all that was coming because he didn't know who I am. He had no idea of what I am about and thought I could easily be intimidated; he didn't know shit about me. I did what I knew best and today, he is the one lying cold in a mortuary and I am holding Naye as the car drives us back to the house.

“Good Job, I thank you, my boss thanks you, and the state thanks you.” Pat says as we walk inside and I smile briefly.

Andile is also by the door.

“I’d like to take Lali upstairs, we have some things to discuss.”

“Don’t take too long, Mam Rhadebe is coming.” My body freezes and I stare at Naye.

“You didn’t tell me,” I exhale and stare at her.

“Oh!, you definitely need to take her ass upstairs,” Pat says to Naye and briefly taps her shoulder before he opens the door and pull Andile’s hand.

“We will take a walk around the garden and maybe get a few things from the shop. The house is all yours,” Andile says and Naye tightens her grip around my hand. I don’t understand why she would not tell me that her mother is coming over. The same woman who – I don’t even want to recall the things she did with Eliza when she found out about Naye and what we got up to in that cabin.

“She may be your mother but she means absolutely nothing to me and Naye...” I exhale holding myself from getting teary.

“Let’s go upstairs and talk, please love,” Her tone is weirdly low and almost whispery. I follow her as she leads me to our bedroom upstairs – I say our bedroom because it is what we use whenever I come over.

“I went to visit uDali this afternoon, he’s still unconscious

but out of the woods. His family is planning to pull the plugs tonight because it's been months. I talked to him, I did feel a reaction but they say he does that and nothing changes. He squeezes hands lightly now Lali. Have you been to him?" She asks as she lets me in the room and closes the door behind. She places her purse on the table and take off her high heels and blazer, leaving only the white shirt and pants.

"I was there a month ago. And why did you go to see Dali?" I throw my purse on the bed and take off my high heels and jacket leaving only the dress.

"He is someone special to you and since you were wrapped up on the case I decided to go and visit him. I see why you were attracted to him," She smiles, it is genuine.

"Oh, so you are a regular?" I ask. This is all confusing me.

"Yes

I never missed a Saturday and I think he recognize me now." She says and then steps behind me to unzip my dress. It freely falls and I'm left with a bra and panties. She kisses me lightly and sneaks her arms around my body and caressing my titties over the bra. Her face rests on my shoulders.

"Naye..." I call lightly but she holds me not letting go.

"I love you so much Lali. I don't think I have experienced this kind of love, it is a once in lifetime thing that just sits with you and doesn't let go." She whispers and inhales sharply.

"You are scaring me and you are also running away from

telling me why didn't you say anything about your mother coming over?"

"Because I knew you'd get mad and not let me make love to you,"

"Well, what makes you think we're gonna make love now? Because I am truly mad." I say and try to move out of her hold but she tightens her hold and kisses my neck sloppily leaving some marks. My body betrays me as a rushing warmth comes over me.

"I want her to walk in on us making love. Screaming out loud and you squirting in my hold. I want her to be shocked and be left speechless. Tell me you want that too Lali,"

"No. Naye, I don't want your mom finding out about us in that way. We've been through that scene before and it didn't end well," I say and she releases herself and I turn to look at her. Her forehead veins are popping and her eyes are full of tears. This is not easy for her too; she smiles trying to hold the tears. I break the first button of her shirt while looking at her straight in the eyes.

"I don't want children Lali. I don't want to marry a man. I am not interested in being a respectful wife + mother. Many women are already doing that, isn't it okay for me to want something a little different? Something that is not... something that does not fit the binary please,"

I don't answer her, I nod and then break the next one.

“I want you Lali, I want us to grow old together and live in some cabin or island growing our plants and make love to each other until the day of our last breath. I want a forever with you and not anyone else. If I can’t get that then let me, let me make love to you now. Let her walk in on us and say whatever she wants to say but allow me this last time with you. Okay babey?” The tears drop as I break the last button of her t-shirt. She pulls down her pants followed by her panties as I do too. We make love under the dim lights of our bedroom. She screams my name as she *cums* strongly. We cry together as we hold each other tightly feeling our hearts beat in synch as if holding a conversation with one another.

“I love you Lali. I’ll always love you, okay?” She sniffs as she comes on top of me and lays her head on my torso. I play with her hair until the room is too dark. After what feels like forever, we hear footsteps stomping towards our door and immediately, we are taken aback to the cabin. Naye tenses but she doesn’t move. As the loud knock and voice of Naye’s mom calls out our names – more like insulting. Naye relaxes and kisses me.

“We’re not young anymore babey. We’re grown woman and she can’t do anything to us.” She whispers and I feel her warm tears on my skin.

“Naye, she’s mad.” I say and she huffs.

“Just focus on us, focus on me and the warmth that’s

here, okay?"

She travels her hand down to my coochie and rubs my clit. I cry out and she shuts me with a kiss. She moans under the kiss and the knock intensifies... she locked the door. Her mom is screaming and shouting right outside the door. The staff was let go and there's no one to possibly help her kick the door. All she can do is call out and shout until her voice is gone.

"Focus on me baby. I am here with you, filter her out," She whispers and my back arch as an intense orgasm threatens to shower over me. Her centre fingers enter me and I feel their warmth inside. My legs shake and she kisses me again causing me to pull the sheets as the intense feeling comes over me. I try to catch my breath as she moves to the side and holds me. The knocking and the shouting are no longer there.

"Let's sleep. I love you, okay?" I nod and she kisses my forehead.

"Be vocal my love" she asks and then I chuckle holding her closer.

"I love you, Naye," I whisper as she tightens her hold.

"Thank you. Sleep now," She instructs and she kisses my forehead again.

'I love you more than life itself. I am sorry I am not there for our forever... in another lifetime, we'd have less problems and more love. In another lifetime, they'd be accepting of people like us. I

loved you only Lali, love someone else after me, okay? Live for me, you saved me. - Naye'

The note next to Lali read as she woke up in the middle of the night feeling her thighs aching after a love-making session with Naye. Her heart drops to her stomach as she feels her knees weaken at the prospects of what the note might mean. She pinches herself to make sure it is not a nightmare, it's real. She gets up and looks around the room, the door is still locked from the inside.

"Naye," She calls out but there's no answer. Sweat drops from her face as she fears something tragic happened. It is not the first time she had felt like this. She walks to the balcony and checks - there is nothing, no sign of Naye. She unlocks the door and is only faced with an empty corridor.

"Naye..." She calls out again as she tightens the hold of the note.

She throws in the oversized t-shirt and shorts. As she looks up, the door to the bathroom is slightly open. She shakes her head as fear kicks in causing her to almost drop on her knees as tears make their presence.

"Naye!!" she calls out loud running toward the open bathroom door. She screams as her eyes sit on the lifeless body of Naye in the bathtub full of water and empty containers of sleeping pills. She pulls the lifeless body out of the cold water and screams until her throat feels painful.

“NAYE!!!” she calls out crying, feeling defeated from every inch of her body. She holds the lifeless body to her and kisses her pale face, tightening the hold onto her.

“I am sorry. I am so sorry. I am sorry I didn’t notice.” She sniffs and cries rocking the lifeless body with her.

“I’m sorry, I’m sorry,” She keeps uttering in tears holding the dead body.

She doesn’t let go as the rest of the house catches on and they call the emergency line.

She is pronounced dead by the paramedics. “In another lifetime my love. In another lifetime.”

That’s all she says as she finally let them take her. She lies on the bathroom floor weeping.

Andile walks in and picks her up. She doesn’t try to fight him; she is too weak to fight anything. He takes off her wet clothes and then places her under the covers. She smells Naye’s strong scent and hugs the pillow as tears fall into it.

“The hospital just called. Dali woke up immediately after his family pulled the plug. The hospital says it is a miracle... he’s now breathing on his own and talking. They thought you’d be pleased to know.” He says and then walks out switching off the lights, leaving Lali crying silently

“In another lifetime. My evergreen.” She keeps muttering in-between the tears and the hiccups.

Rest in peace Naye

Naye left. She left me, Dali," I sniff and wipe my tears with the sleeve of the Jersey. I'm standing in the middle of the hospital room looking straight at Dali with puffy eyes from crying the whole week. It is nice to see him again but being on life support for so long has had its own effect on him. He knows so much time has passed, he is aware. He sits up on the bed and looks at me as I dropped the purse on the floor feeling defeated.

"Lali..." He says out loud and for a minute I close my eyes feeling his voice hit the walls of ear so smoothly that him saying my name like that feels like the only right thing in the world.

"She called me like that too." I smile and I walk closer to him as he reaches out his hand for mine. I hold on to him.

"It hurts so bad right?"

I nod. I can't voice out how bad it is.

"I want to say I am sorry but truly, what is it that will I be sorry about. But Lali, I am sorry." He says.

"People don't belong to us, you said that when we first met. You said they don't belong to us and you were right. We don't own people you said, we truly do not. But I think you forgot to mention that the people we love are a part of us. They may not belong to us but they make up the entirety of who we are and when we lose them, something rips. And it is painful, so painful that words cannot describe it. I will live after Naye, I will be alive but she won't be here to next me. She won't give me

random kisses and hold my hand when I'm under the weather. She won't be here to whisper to me; 'Baby I'm here, your Naye is here'. She won't do that Dali because she's not a part of me anymore. She's gone and there's nothing I can do about it," My voice breaks and he pulls me to his chest as I let out the tears.

"She told me how you loved her and how she loved you too. She told me all about it all from the inception of your love. She'd visit every other week and never misses her time. She'd sit and tell me all the stories. I'm not Naye, I'm Dali and I'll be here with you every day. I'm not promising a forever but for as long as I live. Naye is your forever. I know how painful it is, I know Lali. I know."

Silence falls and only my breaking voice is making a sound as he brushes my back lightly.

I know death like I know my name. But grief seems to be as unknown as the people who gave birth to me. Naye left a letter, videos and a whole documentary filmed during our months together. They were in a box with my name on it that was delivered a day after her death as I ate ice-cream out of its tub in Lihla's arms.

She knew that she was going to end it all. She had thoroughly planned it. Naye out of the two of us is the one who didn't show much feelings, all she wanted was to live in the moment and anything that has passed is only a dream. She's

been the shield, the protector, the bullet-proof vest but a hero can only take so much and needs to be saved too.

I haven't had the strength to read the letter or go through the whole box, I have it kept in my closet and all I want to do is cry without having an explanation of why she decided that taking her life would be easier.

I do regret falling asleep. Maybe had I heard the bathtub water running I'd have saved her. Maybe if we had unlocked the door when her mother was knocking, she'd be here with me. All kinds of scenarios ran through my mind but it all came to the fact of the matter that she is gone and gone for good. She is not returning to earth, at least not in this life-time.

"There's a farm outside P.E. It's more of a resort in the middle of a mountainous village, my sister is sending me there as part of the recovery plan, please come with me after the funeral. I want us to spend some time away...."

Dali says as I wipe my tears with the tissue and prepare to leave.

"When are you leaving?"

"Whenever you're ready," He says.

"I'll pack this evening, Somi can pick me up at 8am in the morning,"

He nods.

"I'll let her know... and Lali," He smiles and I look at him.

"She loved you. I don't think I've met someone who was loved like Naye loved you."

"Thank you. She's one of a kind."

I say and thereafter bid him goodbye. I leave the hospital for my place.

As I walk inside, a familiar face sits on the couch. Naye's mom with Lihlangene. I stare at Lihla who gives me a shrug and disappears to the bedroom.

"What do you want?" I ask her without even greeting. I don't have time.

"I didn't know deep your love for each other was. I thought it was a stage Nobulali."

"Ma'am, please spare me the details, you don't know shit about the love I have for Naye. What do you want?" I almost shout and she drop her head down.

"Sinaye left her estate to you and Andile. I want it signed over to me immediately." She says with a straight face. I chuckle. An annoyed chuckle.

"Get out of my house please

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" I instruct and she leans back on the couch.

"You seem to have forgotten who I am," she says. "Sign the estate over to me and we will have no problems Nobulali," She can't be serious.

"You know, Naye may have died by suicide on her own personal reasons but you played a big role in her death. You say I don't know who you are but I know exactly who the shell of a woman I'm looking at is. It's the woman who claimed to be a mother but was ready to let Eliza's husband and Thomas rape her own daughter because she was different from the rest, she was a lesbian. A bitch with no back-bone and depends on the sweat of her own child to live. I know exactly who you are and you don't scare me because I'm not the Eliza you'd suck up to just to fit in with your peers. A woman with no dignity. Get the fuck out of my house!"

"My daughter wasn't in any of that nonsense claim! She was ready to marry Andile and move on until you came along and she lost her way again, kaloku you have that orphan charm of a lonely girl Eliza felt for you. No wonder your mother left you, you are nothing but a reject and no one wants you!" She spits her insult and I laugh briefly. The reject insult is old and does nothing to me.

"An old fool of a woman you clearly are. You will not get a piece of Naye's sweat and I'll make sure of it... you don't deserve shit wena but to be left in cold and die! Even death will be an escape for you. Get the hell out of my house!" She gets up and straightens her skirt with her hands.

"This will not be the last time you hear from me. And you are not welcome in that funeral,"

"I don't even want to attend a funeral full of pretentious people. I've had my goodbyes with Naye and you can go ahead and celebrate the fake life you pushed your daughter to live and you know it too. And I hope you choke and die while spewing lies in her name. Take your dusty behind out of my place,"

"You haven't heard the last of me Nobulali," she says and then exit the house. I take my cell phone and dial Dali's number.

"I have changed my mind. I want to leave immediately," I say.

"Somi will be there to fetch you in an hour," He doesn't question anything.

"Okay,"
Lihla walks out as I drop the call.

"That was intense," she says.

"I know. I will be leaving for a couple of weeks if not months to a retreat. To mourn, cry and celebrate Naye's life. I'll also get counselling and come back okay,"

Lihla nods in understanding and pulls in for a tight hug.

"I'm proud of you,"
She smiles and holds me in her arms. She let go when her pager beeps.

"Go to work Lihla," I chuckle and she smiles.

"I can help you pack..." She says.

"No, I can do this." I assure her and she nods and takes her bag and keys.

"I will miss you Lali and I'll be here when you come back okay?"

I nod and smile at her.

She kisses me goodbye and then leaves for work. I walk into my bedroom and pack some clothes along with the box full of Naye's things. As I finish packing my phone rings and it is Somi, she's outside. I walk out and she helps with my bags. I get in the back seat and greet Dali. "Hey,"

"Hello, you're ready to do this?" I nod and he holds my hand after I fastened the seat belt.

"I'm ready," I say and Somi starts the car and we drive at least 3 hours out of Port Elizabeth listening to a podcast and stopping for Petrol and water until we get to the resort.

As we enter the gates, we are welcomed by a worker who explains what they do and how treatment goes. We sign some papers and hand over our gadgets and basically anything that might connect us to the outside world. We are here to connect with ourselves and find our place. They give us our schedule and some books explaining the code of conduct.

"The road ends here for me. I wish you both the best and come back whenever you are ready again," Somi says while teary and hugs Dali and I. We promise her to attend every therapy session and abide by the rules of the village. After Somi leaves, we are led to another car and driven to the actual

village. I could explain it as an estate in the middle of mountainous forest with a beautiful waterfall and fields of corn. A magnificent botanical garden and there's a beach on the father south side.

It is not a mental asylum. It is a retreat that prides itself in letting people be in touch with who they are without administered treatment of drugs and all. It is liberating and let you feel every emotion that there is and find yourself with the help of a therapist that will come to your cabin once a week to check up on you and hold sessions. There is also a nurse on standby should there be any medical emergencies. Our cabin which is really not a cabin but a wooden house in the mountain, it is situated near the physiotherapy house to help Dali with his exercises. It is wheelchair friendly.

"There is staff that will cook, clean and do laundry for you as our mission is to help you solely focus on healing. You'd hardly notice them but if you'd like to remove some service as we've had people come in and ask to do the dishes themselves as they help them... we are totally okay with that. Please enjoy your stay with us and make the most of your time here." The manager smiles as she hands us the keys to our cabin which is not really a cabin but a wooden house in the mountain.

"If we're going to heal, let it be glorious." Dali quotes Beyoncé as we marvel at the beauty of everything inside. I agree
If we're gonna heal, let it be glorious.

"You called her your person," I say killing the silence as we sit on the porch watching the sunset.

"Who?" He asks turning his head briefly to glance at me and then back at nature.

"Lisa. That day we were over at Somi's, you said, 'Lali, meet my person', I was hurt by that statement. But I think I didn't know enough. I would've introduced Naye the same way." He exhales and balances his legs back on the wheelchair. It'll take some time for his body to be back in full function, I think that's why they made sure the physio house is near. He sighs as I rock back and forth on the rocking chair.

"I regarded her as such. I thought, what we shared was too special to simply end as abruptly as it did. I was still in disbelief because here's the thing Lali: when you love someone, you give them your all. You give up everything just so you can be with them and love them until the end, you become so blind to the things they do on the side. You end up believing that your love alone is enough, your perfection alone is enough but the Jiggs is; most times they run away exactly from that perfection, from that stability you're giving them. They are running away from the all you are giving them and it is not your fault but theirs, they are the cowards.

But we don't get that because we constantly ask why. Why am I not enough for you? Why am I not worth your love? But in all

honesty, we are. We are the dream they've been waiting for but unfortunately, they didn't prepare for it.

That's what happened between Lisa and I. The stability and good man she prayed for, she ran away from, because she; in her own regard felt overwhelmed and not ready." He glances my way and I nod. Maybe Naye felt the same. Not ready for I was giving her a forever and she wasn't ready for it.

"You think Naye left so she could be free from me. Like, my love suffocated her?" I chuckle.

"I don't think so. Yours was too deep of a love. You saved her and made her realise she actually had a purpose."

"It doesn't feel like that at all. She just decided that... that she'll leave me. Just like that Dali, the same night we made sweet love and promised me a forever. The last thing she said to me was, 'sleep baby' and she was so selfish a part of me is mad at her..." my voice breaks and I hold the tears by blowing out cool air.

"Another part of you? How is it?"

"A big part of me wishes that I should've seen she was not okay. I mean, she took care of me and knew exactly what I needed without me voicing it out and.... and Dali I failed to see that things were not going well for her. I want to go back and assure her that she's okay, that she'll make it through. I want to tell her she can cry in my arms Dali; I want her to know that I'd give up everything just to be with her, hold her.... feel her warm

hands as they join mine. I want her back... Just another moment with her.... it hurts so bad." My tone breaks and I let the tears freely fall. He only reaches his hand for mine and holds it. My head lay on the rocking chair as tears stream down the sides in response to gravity. I only need a moment with her again, a forever moment to hug her, feel her lips against mine. I want to feel my stomach get filled with fluttering butterflies at her presence. I miss her so much it hurts. I want to scream so loud but something is holding me back. I feel like chocking but there's not enough build up.

"She loved you...she still does. I know that." He says as I sniff.

"I know she did. I know she does but all that doesn't make it any less painful. Dali, I'm missing someone I'll never meet again."

"I'm not expecting it to feel less painful Lali, I'm reminding you that in all of it, she loved you. And there's nothing you could've done because you loved her too...."

"It still doesn't make any sense Dali," I move my hand from his and get up from the chair wiping my tears. "Naye was selfish. She was selfish, she chose herself in all this and didn't even think of the pain that I am going through!" I shout. "She didn't think of the pain she's gonna cause to me, she knows that I can't breathe without her next to me, she knows how much we loved each other but she broke that by taking

sleeping pills and drowning herself in the bathtub. Did she even stop for a minute to think of what that image will do to me?? Didn't she know that it'll damage me forever... having to pull her out and realise to myself that I was too late?? There's no love like that. Naye chose herself. She didn't think of anyone else but herself. My love yet again, didn't save her, she had no faith in my love and you keep telling me that she loved me...." I shake my head. "Naye never loved me Dali because if she truly loved for me, it would've been enough to save her. It would have been enough but it wasn't and now I get to live with that..." My voice comes out as a whisper. My butt meets the ground and I bury my head in both palms of my hands and let out a loud cry. Still, it doesn't help ease the heavy feeling of life that has made my throat its home. It doesn't remove the burning sensation down my stomach caused by the realisation that I'd never feel her touch again. Hear her voice again.... I'm only left with memories and they are not enough to last me a lifetime.

I thought we had time. How much of a fool had I been, I thought we had a lifetime together and we would travel the pacific islands together and make love at any time. I didn't think as she held me tight, it would be for the last time. I didn't think as she told me she loves me; it would be for the last time. Naye broke me, she took every fibre of my being and burnt it with her the minute she drank all those pills.

Life seems to be stripping me away of every love that I get. Jason died, Dali got into an accident but survived, Naye died too. It seems like everything I love, dies or leave me. Even at birth, my biological parents left me. I wipe my tears and exhale and get up from the floor. Dali looks at me with red eyes, like he was crying.

"You know, I fell for you too." I mention and he smirks. "The taxi driver who was so kind and attentive. The person who took me on a township tour and made sure I was comfortable. I had sex with you in your car and it was good.... I hadn't enjoyed sex with a man like that before," I sniff and wipe my tears again.

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"serif"; background-image: initial; background-position: initial; background-size: initial; background-repeat: initial; background-attachment: initial; background-origin: initial; background-clip: initial;"> "I pushed myself to just go with it. And then when I broke down and cried, you attended to me in the gentlest way. I fall in love easily Dali. It's in my nature, I can't help it. I fall in love easily and then deeply and I fell for you hard, in a way that I felt like I could take over the world. But you broke me when you rejected me and went for Lisa. I felt weak and insecure and felt like you took my vulnerability and threw it back at my face. I felt like the only thing that I was

doing was grasping at straws.... you said to me you don't do love anymore, it hurt."

"Lali..." he says but I stop him.

"I'm not done. You are an amazing human being and at the same time, you can be a disgusting human being who treated me like some flossy you had sex with." I chortle

"Nobulali...." He calls again but I stop him

"I said I'm not done.... then the chief calls me to the airstrip and there you were, unconscious. Shot and barely breathing on your own, I wore my doctor cap and helped. I administered the treatment and went out of my way to try and get you to be okay as soon as possible. As I should've because I'm a doctor. However, still, I visited and made sure you were taken care off. Got groomed and cared for.... I read you stories to keep your brain taking in information, I told you about my day and everything that was happening. Even though you rejected me and treated me like shit, I went beyond my pay rate to help you and I did that because I cared." I exhale and look at him. "I did all that driven by love and then I stopped because why? It is not like I wasn't told that I'm not loved... it's not like this guy didn't introduce me to his girlfriend after weeks of me showing him that I care and I love. The same man took me to a party to show me his girlfriend. I stopped because you made it clear. I stopped because, what is it even worth? Nothing."

He shakes his head and tears escape his eyes as he snorts.

"She never even came to visit you, the Lisa you highly claimed to me, she never came to even check how you're doing."

"Lali... I was inlove with you too. I still am,"
He confesses but it doesn't matter anymore. I laugh mockingly.

"You don't love me Dali. You were never in love with me, you just liked the idea of having me in your life. You loved having sex with me, sure, I did too but love? Man, you don't know shit about love!" I sniff again as he shakes his head.

"Nobulali, I did love you!" He shouts and then heaves. "I love you so bad. So bad that my love for you was going to reach a toxic level.... I knew I had to protect you, to shield you from this love of mine because when you've loved before and got hurt, you build a wall and whoever comes next and shakes the wall, it will fall and the bricks will hurt someone. You didn't take off the bricks one by one, you were shaking the entire wall with a force that was new to me, I had to protect you. I had to stop you from shaking the wall because the bricks will fall and they will hit you so bad that by the time it is down, you don't even know your own name." He looks at me and I just roll my eyes,

"There you go again creating hypothetical scenes that do not exist in real life to suit your own narrative. You say you were in love with me because it is what you think I need to hear... you make up this nonsensical story of a wall but when

you said, in that party I should go and make friends so you don't have to be the one to warm my bed, it was never love. It was never protection, if was you being a disgusting human being who didn't even consider that I was in love with you. Who never considered my feelings? I needed to hear it then Dali not now because right now, I don't think there ever will be another person after Naye. You are a stranger to me at this moment, I don't know you."

I look at him and his face looks like he is holding the world's problem on it.

"I am sorry Lali. I am sorry for everything. I am sorry for taking you for granted, disrespecting you. Please forgive me, I was wrong, I should've done better... the months at the hospital I learnt a valuable lesson about time. You say you don't know me; you say I'm a stranger to you but I'm also a stranger to myself Lali. Take this time and get to know me, let's keep love and falling for each other on the side and get to know each other, two strangers in the middle of a mountainous forest and all getting to know each other without any expectations. We're housemates who are healing physically, psychologically and are grieving in all of this. Let's get to know each other dear stranger. I'm Dali and I was in a comma for over 7 months, my muscles aren't fully functioning yet but I take physio every day to try and get better. I'm also attending therapy to talk about my mental problems because I am trying to be a better

person..."

He says and looks at me. I inhale sharply and then sit back on the rocking chair.

"I'm Nobulali, I recently lost my lover to suicide. I'm still trying to come into terms with everything but it's all foggy. I take walks and watch the sun rise and the sunset because she liked doing that and I feel her presence every time I do this. It hasn't been long since her passing, the wound is still new, I cry every time I think of her."

I rock the chair back as silence falls and only the trees make a moaning sound. We didn't mention what we do for a living, I guess that part isn't important when you are in the middle of nowhere.

"Nice to meet you, Lali,"

He says and I nod. One step at a time - said someone.

The trees moaned in response to the cold blowing wind in the village. The cold breeze from the water caused me to turn back and end my morning walk abruptly. There's no watching the sunrise today, nor is there sun it is drizzling and the clouds are lingering. It is our 5th day in the resort, we haven't talked to each other since that evening, I've been keeping away from him and I guess he read the room and decided not to question, we are strangers anyway. I've had a session with my therapist who thinks it isn't a good idea that I chose to not attend the funeral, she thinks it's even worse that I haven't gone through the rest of the box yet. She thinks I need closure from Naye's death, which had me arguing against that. I don't need closure from her death, I don't need it explained to me or to make sense, I need Naye next to me, I need Naye to be with me. I don't care to know why she did what she did, all I need to know is how to have her back.

She didn't answer me on that. She told me, I haven't come to terms with Naye's death and I need to sit with it, cry and understand that she is not coming back - that is one hell of a hard thing she's asking me to do.

I hug my own arms as I climb up the porch stairs to the cabin, the weather is insanely cold this morning. As I walk in, the record player is on and some classic music is playing. Oh, the

vinyl player... it was given to us by the people in the physio house because we needed some form of entertainment, apart from the dozens of books making up the entire wall of the dining room. Out of all entertaining things, they chose to give us a vinyl player and a dozen of vinyl records that are only classic music. What a pick.

I take off my shoes and leave them at the shoe rack, I step inside with only my socks. We have a tradition of no shoes around the house, to keep it clean and I guess pure. But pure from what really? I also have no clue. A bowl breaks and I instantly turn to the kitchen to find a frustrated Dali hitting his lap and then a forceful loud groan comes out. He continues to hit his legs and for a moment I stand there at the door watching him in frustration, tears freely fall and he attempts to get up again but fails earning another loud scream bouncing off the walls and landing painfully in my ears.

I wouldn't have heard him had I walked to the bedroom because the player is loud. He pushes the rest of the ingredients off the table and again, a sound of shattering bowls and cracking eggs make me jump and exhale.

"Hey, hey!!" I shout and he does not stop but continues to release his cry and the sound is coming from deep his throat.

I walk closer but stand at a safe distance. He buries his head in his palm and sniffs. The veins in his head are prominent.

"There's broken glass all over you, if you dare push in any inch, they're are going to shatter your wheels and you won't have anything to take you around the house. I'll get a broom and sweep."

He doesn't answer but continues to silently cry in his palms. I clean the mess and the rest of the kitchen silently. He was trying to make breakfast, I don't know why would he do that when the breakfast got delivered early today, he could've asked a staff or even me. I don't question him or anything, I just leave the kitchen and go shower and change into warm clothes. I grab a novel from the bookshelf and sit on the couch by the burning fireplace.

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The house is silent like there's no one. I open the novel and try to read.... I can't. My brain won't keep quiet, the voices are all talking in my head and making it hard for me to concentrate. I try again and the same thing happens before I throw the damned book to the floor and get up to pick another one. I read the first line and then throw it to the floor; I pick another one and same thing but still - they all don't seem to capture my focus.

I scream and throw the whole row of books to the floor in frustration. My butt meets the floor and I hug my knees rocking back and forth, this is not how I should live. I hate feeling like

crap, if only I could numb the pain and stop the voices inside my head.

I angrily get up and walk to the kitchen, the only drinks there are non-alcoholic. There's not a single pint of alcohol. I slam the cupboard doors and pull my braids.

"Fuck!!!!" I cry out loud hurting my vocal cords. "What kind of place that doesn't have alcohol???"

I shout to no one in particular and then head to the bathroom. I search the medicine cabinet and my heart stops as I notice a bottle of flu mixture. I gasp before a laugh escapes, I shake the bottle and it is empty. It meets the wall immediately and a scream comes out.

The voices are loud, I need them to stop. They are talking over each other making me feel like a mad person. I scratch my head in frustration and pull the braids harder feeling my scalp burn... at each signal of pain sent to my brain, the shouting voices seem to fade. I pull further and they fade away. I pull, my scalp burns and they fade....

"Nobulali," I hear a voice calling in a distance. It's painfully familiar, it's not loud but so soft and feathery like.

I pull, my scalp burns and the voices leave my head.

"Lali..." the voice again, soft and feathery like. Painfully familiar.

My back hits the cold bathroom wall and slides until my butt

meets the floor. I bang my head against the wall. It caused a sound - it's not a concrete wall but still, the pain feels achingly sweet.

"Lali..."

I turn and she is wearing a white dress, it sits just above her knees and she is walking barefoot and her hair is in a ponytail.

"Naye..." My heart skips a beat as I let the go of the braids and suddenly; I don't feel any pain. I get up from the bathroom floor and jump into her arms, holding her tighter than I had ever done in my life. I cry and she brushes my back.

"Oh baby! I'm here now, hush,"

"Why did you leave me?" I ask in in-between tears. She sighs and pushes me back as her soft lips meet my forehead.

"I had to baby. It was my time and I had to give in so he can be saved. It wasn't okay for him to haven't lived his lifetime with you. I was already dying Lali... my body was giving up and so, I traded souls and asked the universe to give him his back and take mine. I made a deal Lali..."

I shake my head. I don't understand

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why would she do that? What does that even mean, I don't get it.

"Naye, that is absurd."

She smiles and looks at me with shimmering eyes.

"Lali, with every birth there's death. With every rebirth, there's also death. I was never going to survive the car accident and I chose to make the trade before it was too late so he can live, he hadn't had his set time with you and it would have been unfair of me to wait until nothing can be done. You need someone to love, I've spent my time with him and can vouch for him but you of course don't need to hear that because you know it. He has your colours baby and you have his, find them," I am stupid because I don't understand anything she is telling me. All of it does not make sense.

"I don't understand. And I can never understand Naye because you left me!" I shout at her and she smiles. She is smiling a lot that her eyes shimmer. Her energy is more peaceful, her soul is the colour white.

"I didn't leave you. I'm always with me, but you don't feel me." She sulks "I'm always with you Lali. I'm in all the elements of the earth and you know that, you need to find your centre to feel me. But I'm always with you... okay?"

I nod and look down for a second.

"Why did you leave me half of your estate?" I ask but as I raise my head there's no one.

"Naye..." I call out as I look around. She left.

~

I jump up from the couch and gasp. I look around the house and Dali is sitting by the window as the sun penetrates

through.... it was a dream.

I take the novel and place it on top of the table before I exhale and stretch my arms.

The room is still in its state... I walk to the window and feel the sun hitting my face warmly, my lips curl up in a smile. She's always here with me. That part I understood.

I glance at Dali and he isn't looking well.

I push his wheelchair to the kitchen without saying anything. Its clean now.... spotless actually.

"How are you?"

I ask him and then walk to the cupboard and pull out baking ingredients and place them on the counter.

"I'm okay, physio is going well and therapy. I might be able to walk again in a few days... I'm good." He says and I chuckle. I walk to the fridge and pull out milk and other ingredients needed for muffins.

"You are lying to me. I can see it," I say placing all the ingredients on the counter and grab the baking bowl. "Be honest with me Dali. We may be strangers but lying isn't nice." I actually laugh to myself at the thought of people who know each other naked are suddenly strangers. He exhales as I hand him the dry ingredients to mix while I do the wet ones.

"I'm not coping Lali. I want my limbs to work fully again, I feel like I'm stuck in this place with no improvement. We're

approaching a week since we've been here but I still can't get up from my bed without the nurse's assistant. I can't sleep at night without a pee bag because how will I get up? I can't reach for anything. You don't come out of your room to greet in the morning or open your room when I'm knocking. I'm feeling helpless Lali and death would've been easier at this point. I don't feel like living anymore because what reason am I still alive? To be a person with no legs and just..... at this point, the comma was better because atleast I didn't go through the torture of life every single day."

He raises his frustration and then pushes the bowl of dry ingredients to my side to mix with the wet ones.

"Did you raise this up in your therapy session?" I ask and he shakes his head no.

I mix all the ingredients and then pull out the muffin pan and pre-heat the oven.

"Why did you choose to come to this place Dali? Was it your idea?"

He looks at me confused by the question.

"It was my idea and I chose it because it felt better to be away from the people. To fully recover,"

He says as I pour the mixture into the muffin pan.

"I'd like to believe you chose it so to be away from amajita

ekasi. You did it because them knowing you've woken up and you can't walk is basically social suicide, they'll tell you all the rank stories and feel sorry for you and no one likes pity. You'd have hated your life more than you do now.

Here, no one knows you or even cares to know how your life was before and it felt okay. It felt okay to escape the same way you escaped my frustrations about how you treated me and opted that we reintroduce each other as strangers, we start over as strangers. Until you've realised that you can't run from your past and who you are, the better not only for you but for me, Lali. The girl you treated like trash."

I place the muffins pan into the oven and set the timer. I attempt to walk but he pulls me by my hand and I turn to look at him. His eyes are bloodshot red.

"Please sit with me..." He says and then immediately let go of my hand and I feel his absence. I pull the chair and sit facing him.

"I've been here before Lali. After returning from the military, I came here to prepare for the world because I was traumatised. I was having nightmares and would jump awake at night scared that a bomb would go off. I couldn't sleep with the door closed or anything tying me down. I lived in the North wing, they have a mental facility there. I was a high risk patient once upon a time but I came to be okay and then was checked out to be

able to function in the civil world again.

I met Lisa who I loved very much. She could do nothing wrong in my eyes Lali, even though when I look back now and think of the things she's done to me: I didn't deserve all of it. But I was persistent, I mean, I had come to be okay as someone who was fully traumatised coming from the military. Ofcourse I chose to see people as worthy of a second chance. I believe in rehabilitation of anybody and I thought I could get Lisa to act right.

I gave her chance after chance because I failed to understand how can someone not want a guy like me. I finally let go when her gangster boyfriend killed my parents and made it seem like a taxi accident. I let go for my safety, hers, and Somi's. When she came running back to me saying she was in danger and she needed me... ofcourse I welcomed her back because I was like; yes finally, she is back to me and we will be okay again. We will fall inlove again the thing is Lali, I had fallen in her sick cunning trap of wanting to make her gangster boyfriend jealous in my expense. I was mean to you and treated you like trash because.... I have nothing to justify that but it was to hurt you and drive you away from me as having you close; Lisa didn't stand a chance. See, I'm attracted to you Lali." He stops and then chuckles before glancing my way. He smirks and then locks his eyes briefly with me. I notice a memory flashing in his eyes and it is one that gets his pupil to dilate.

"I saw you at terminus and knew immediately that I wanted to know you. I told the taxi marshall to take you to the taxi I was driving, he brought you to the wrong taxi on purpose because my eyes couldn't look anywhere else but to this young lady with her afro and smooth skin. How when she told me her stop trying to confirm the right taxi, I had to act like I didn't hear you because I would never have lied to your face, dammit, I was smiling the whole ride even whistling.... you did that to me. You felt like home, comfort.... like I'm right where I need to be Lali." I smile with him as his words transport us to that first day. The day, I arrived in Port Elizabeth.

"You were giddy and kept singing along to a song only in your head." I recall and he smirks.

"You radiated an energy unknown to me sisi. You humbled me with your beauty and then when you spoke... good lord I felt like I had won the lottery. Yho! Lali. I could've jumped up and down the way my heart was bouncing that day. You told me you were lost and you were new to the city... I knew it because no one ebhayi is as beautiful as you are. It got worse when I was on the phone with Mam Brenda. And from there, you know what transpired I won't repeat it. But I was attracted to you but still in conflict with my love for Lisa. I talked to you the way I did because I knew how I felt about you. I knew the only way to push you was to hurt you... biggest mistake. Nobulali, I can never push you away no matter how hard I'd try because.... I

am so into you it makes me feel helpless. I am sorry I was the jerk that I am. I am sorry. I was blinded by something I thought was there but.... it wasn't there. I don't expect anything of you right now, we don't have to do anything.... let us just co-exist and be okay so we walk out of here ready for the world." he smiles and deeply sighs as the oven beeps.

We lock eyes and I feel like I've had a door to his soul open for me to walk in. He was ready for me to capture it and let it fill me up until I can't move anymore. So vulnerable, so pure and so open for me.

He's here.

"I would like mine with a cup of coffee," He says as we both snap out of the other universe and back to earth.

"Yes, yes... in a min," I say and walk to take the chocolate muffins out of the oven

"What is something you wish for Lali?"

Dali asks Lali. They are still in the kitchen enjoying a cup of tea with chocolate muffins that came out pretty well and with the right amount of everything. Balance, something they are both uncertain whether they have it. Lali glances over at Dali, taken by this sudden question.

"What do you mean?" She asks.

"I feel like we all have something we wish for. It's not something we say when we blow a birthday candle or when a child asks. It is something that visits us when we alone and we feel its absence... what is it for you?"

He places his cup of coffee and lean back on his wheelchair waiting for Lali to answer. She exhales first and then crosses her legs on the counter bench before her back meets the wall. They share eye contact as if sharing codes to the combination of the suitcase that holds their dear wishes.

Lali drops her head and faces down and Dali immediately regrets asking the question. He knows that this time he is asking for her, the real her. Not the Lali that is filtered, He is calling upon the child in her to express her feelings. She raises her head back and as her eyes meet with Dali's, he receives an overwhelming need to comfort her.

She half smiles.

"My wish is to have a place where I belong. I yearn for that feeling of home but everywhere I go I seem to be rejected. I painted Eliza as a mother of the century because at least she never pushed me out of her house... If we could disregard everything I went through in that farm, Eliza loved me. She never even attempted to throw me out of her house, she was someone I knew could go to the ends and back for me. Now that she is gone, I wish to get that feeling again Dali, to know who exactly I am. I want to define Nobulali without having second thoughts." She says and Dali's heart sinks. He knows that he is on the list of people that rejected Lali so bad he still feels shame from that.

He wishes to tell her that she is home right now. That she belongs here with him, he wishes he could reach over and pull her close to him, tell her that she's right where she belongs.

"I wish for a place to call home. That's what I wish for when I am alone at night. Dali,"

She says and smiles revealing a small dimple on the left side of her face. Dali feels a burning sensation overcoming him as she studies her face, her sparkling eyes protected by bushy eyebrows, braids draping down her shoulders and a perfect jawline. As she stares at her longer, it feels like she's looking at Morden day Nefertiti. "You're so beautiful..." He whispers for

only him and Lali smiles uncertain as the silence makes her question if she's said too much.

"I understand. We're humans and we always yearn for connection with those we regard as family. Do you mean children when you say home?" Lali rolls her radiant eyes and huffs causing Dali to shift uncomfortably trying to hide the effect she has on him.

"No... absolutely not. I don't want children.... I thought I did but not anymore. I'm also not looking for a family structure Dali, I want something that goes deeper than that and I want to share it with someone I can trust fully to be my home. I can never explain it without sounding like I'm searching for a sense of belonging in people but..... You remember falling asleep on the couch and waking up in your bed because your mother carried you to bed?" Dali nods "I want that kind of belonging. The kind that made your body relax enough to fall asleep on a couch because deep in you, you knew that someone would be kind to carry you to bed or place a blanket over you. Something like that... that's the best way I can explain it." She says and looks out the window.

"I understand."

He gets it. Because in his bones that's what he wishes for. To be with someone who understands his love and does not feel overwhelmed by it, someone who will gracefully accept it and

reciprocate the same back to him. He wishes to fall asleep on the couch and then feel sweet kisses as a blanket is placed over him. He needs to hear whispers of I love You and dance under the stars and he wants all that with this woman who stole his heart when she arrived in PE. But now, she seems to be unreachable. Naye did mention in one of her visits at the hospital that Lali is guarded... but when she lets go and thereafter that chain of trust is broken, it'll be hard to build from root up because she's not helping with the foundation - you're on your own. She can only join when she sees you've built enough for her to lean over and you carry her fully.

"Dali, what is your wish?" She asks and glances over at him and he smiles, mesmerised by the beauty. She doesn't know the kind of stuff happening in the insides of Dali. Every time her melodic voice echoes and sound bounces around the room and vibrates in his ear to be translated in his brain; happy hormones are released. She could talk all night and he wouldn't be bored. But now, he has to think of a way to answer her.

serif; mso-fareast-font-family:"Times New Roman"> "I don't..." he chokes and inside his brain contemplates telling Lali the truth or... or maybe just not. If truth is told, she is not ready to hear it or maybe she is... he doesn't know. His heart and brain are at war. He rubs his head and then looks at her again feeling swallowed by her alluring spell of affection. "I

honestly do not know of any other way to put this without throwing you off but I'm just going to say it and if we don't talk another five days it's fine by me..." He cautions, which is an awful lie because Nobulali's absence and isolation had him crying alone at every night hugging a pillow wishing it was her. "I wish for you. My wish is that I get to show you how... I should probably stop because you are awfully amazed right now," He chuckles and then his eyes wander around the kitchen with his brain reading lousy labels. He is fighting the tears threatening to come out, he is holding them like his whole pride is hanging on it as the insecurities kick. Nobulali may have found it in her heart to forgive him of his shitty treatment but that does not mean she'll jump on the bed with him. He thinks to himself that there is no way she could like him back, especially now with the treatment, it seems like he has taken 10 steps back. His eyes take him back to her and she's just sitting there in her own feelings. Her face, as he'd come to appreciate is easy to read and right now, he can see that his bold wish is something that caused confusion. He clears his throat. "Well. I mean, it's just a wish. Not something you are obliged to fulfil. Uhm- I'll just wheel myself back to my bedroom," He says awkwardly and thanks her for the good muffins.

"Dali where are you going?" Her melodic voice sits on his ears so beautiful that if he'd stop blinking so much the tears would fall. His eyes are teary and even blurring his vision. He

barely can make out the labels now. "Uhm... Back to my room Lali. I figured, I crossed the line and I shouldn't have," He mentions and he chuckles.

"No line was crossed. I asked what you wish for and you told me. That's all it was." She said sliding out of the bench and walks to push the wheelchair to the tv room.

He closes his eyes and inhales her powerful scent that causes his heart clutch painful missing her. She's right next to him but feels further away, like at a land he can't reach and that kills him every day. He hates it that she's hurting but not allowing him to share that with her. He quickly wipes the left eye tear and his eyes are burning in pain holding in the liquid.

Lali sits on the ottoman feeling herself very much in flame with Dali's wish.

"We put a timeline to everything. That's our flaw as humans, we say; in three years I'm going to have healed. In 6 months, I'm going to be in this space. We put a timeline to everything, even love. We constantly preach; don't move on too quickly', wait until at least this has happened but when that said time passes and we don't get that feeling we were supposed to get at that supposed space in time, we get frustrated." Lali tells Dali and he looks at her and nod. "I've put a timeline to my legs working again. I thought by this time I'd be able to walk and run but it's impossible... instead I'm

battling these feelings of inferiority and sadness every day." He says finally opening up to her about his pain. He is not expecting her to understand but at least someone to listen is better.

"How often do you get them? The feelings of inferiority?" She asks "Every morning when I wake up from my dreams. It is crippling me and everyday feels like I'm pushing without exerting any force."

The burden of not being himself is killing him softly and every day is a fight.

Lali's breath hitches and she reaches her hand to him and hold it tight warming the heart of Dali. A warm fuzzy feeling ripples through him as he feels like the heavens are smiling.

"Let it go," She whispers and he needs not being told twice and there go the flood of tears. Lali doesn't say anything but holds his hand as he breakdown and ugly cries in front of her. He sniffs and groans in pain feeling the release that sat between his ribcage. She allows him to cry and he does until he feels a little bit better.

"You are not alone Dali." She says and he nods.

"I need to take a nap but... I'll call the nurse first." He says, his voice is a bit deeper now and flat. His eyes are red and Lali is fighting the strong urge to jump onto him and give him a hug

and assure him that he'll be okay. But instead, he wheels her into his room and as she walks in, she's amazed by the amount of technology and how there is everything about home-based care. She helps him in bed right after massaging and stretching his leg muscles. She sits by the rocking chair and looks out the pouring rain outside. She begins to shiver because it is cold in the cabin, Dali notices and then invites her to bed. He still has not napped.

“I should probably go to sleep in my own bed,” she rejects the invite. It pains him a little but he nods. He understands...

“Okay, keep warm,” he tells her as she gets up and walks out of the door closing it shut. He exhales and his head hit the pillow as his eyes look at the ceiling.

Would you like some coffee?"

I ask and he nods sitting comfortably on the ottoman. He's been very reserved since he returned from his physio today, I guess he wasn't told good news or he didn't do well. Dali is rushing himself and I don't think it fully sits in him that it is the actual problem. I make us coffee and join him on the sofa leaning on the further left, the past couple of days the weather has been brutal, it's almost like we're Antarctica the way the temperatures are.

"How did it go with your physiotherapy today?" I question with my tone a little lowered. I'm skating on thin ice with this man and it is making me uncomfortable. He glances my way and I notice his red eyes. "No improvement, they say we just have to keep up with the exercises," His tone is flat with no emotions; however, the emotionless tone expresses way more. I just huff and go back to reading the book as silence falls and the crackling sound of burning wood is the only thing bridging the awkwardness.

"Lali what's wrong now?" He asks. I place the book on the side table. "You tell me, you are the one who came back from the physio house sulking and being all salty,"

I cross my arms and watch him as he leans back and huffs.

"I am not getting better Lali. No improvement means that there's a chance I could never walk again."

"The damn legs huh?" I roll my eyes and get off the couch and shove the book back into the bookcase.

"Nobulali what do you mean by that?" His tone is stern.

"You keep complaining about your legs but you don't even try to tell your therapist about your feelings towards you using the wheelchair. You Hide it from her and then come back to this house making me feel guilty for having two working legs. Dali do you know how It makes me feel when you attach my attraction to you on mere legs? I understand that they are everything but to doubt me being here with you based on legs?" My tone is almost shouting.

He shakes his head looking confused.

"I don't understand Lali,"

The past few days Dali and I have been spending time together. Playing boardgames, having long conversations but it all ends with him feeling insecure about his legs not working. It ends with him sulking whenever I reject his advances towards me. I don't know how to approach him without being questioned if my intentions are clear. He consistently says he is attracted to me but when I return the same, I am questioned about pure intentions. What kind of a fucked-up person does that? I Try

and not bring up Naye in all our heart-to-heart conversations because I've accepted that Naye is not returning, I've accepted the fact that he is here now and I want to know him better, I want us to be better. I want him to be my home and I get to be his but it seems like the man who said he wished for me isn't ready for all that and it is hurting me.

I glance at him and confusion is washed over his face.

"I am tired of this fucking run around game we keep playing. If I'm interested suddenly your interest is lost. When mine is lost, you are interested. I hate this bullshit of a marry-go-round we keep doing. Why can't you see our stars are in line Dali?? Every time I'm on-board you make things hard for me, you make me question every decision and I'm so damn tired!" I shout in frustration and still, it doesn't click on him. I huff and stomp out of the room with him calling my name. I don't turn but head to my room and close the door shut, I climb on the bed and hug myself. I try to cry but nothing comes.

The door clicks open and Dali wheels himself to the side of my bed.

"Lali," He calls

"Leave me the fuck alone please,"

"No, I won't do that until we talk about the shit you just yelled at me for!" He shouts and I sit up and look at him.

"I can't take any more of your insecurities Dali. I'm tired of hearing you making yourself a victim. Having my intentions questioned? Really Dali? You think I'm still here with you because I feel pity for you? You think when I reject lying in your bed with you it's me being disgusted because your legs aren't working? That is some high-level manipulation shit. Using your fucking paralysis as an excuse for me not accepting your advances? Don't fucking play with me please. And get out of my room." I turn back but he doesn't wheel himself out.

"I am insecure yes, I am Nobulali because I constantly question myself if I am worthy of your love. I hold back because I know that out of this cabin there are far more better men besides me and why the fuck would you settle for me? I constantly ask myself if this is any real, if me and you stand a chance out of these walls. Both of us know how we are sexual beings, what if being here is only a response to the environment and not genuine love? Nobulali I am not questioning your intentions, deep in the depth of my bones I know you are a good person, I know you are great and I question if I am worth all of it, I question myself Nobulali.... would we exist beyond these walls? If I never recover, I am not going to be the Dali that can drive you to work and back, do you think I can offer you everything? It's me I put in the interrogation room Nobulali." He chokes and his voice sinks. My heart drop to my stomach and I feel tears escaping my eyes. I

turn to face him again and his head is down. I sit up and cross my legs tears falling freely down my face.

"Hearing you say that... hurts me. It-- hurts me so bad Dali because how dare you think so low of yourself. It hurts me because you undermine yourself and hurt me in the process. You think that someday I will wake up from this dream and realise I've settled but the truth is; You are all that I want from this day on. It is an insult to other people who are in your position to think so low of yourself because your legs are not functioning, people who have zero proven chances that they can never walk again... what you are saying is an insult to them. Don't ever see yourself less than... I'm not going to stand for that." He raised his heads and we look at each other. Travelling inside each other like wanderers looking for direction, we gaze at each other as if affirming and sealing the deal that we are in it together, I reach my hand for his and it meet mine halfway as we hold tight.

serif; mso-fareast-font-family:"Times New Roman"> "You can never be less for me Dali. Stop trying to push us away when you and I know a soul was traded for you and I to exist, let us stop fighting now and let me trust in you fully. Don't push me away. Stop doing it because I'm not going anywhere... when we leave this place, we will exist because our love can never be tied to one thing. It's deep to only be a moment." I say and he

looks at me with teary eyes as he nods. I get off the bed and sit on his lap. He welcomes me in his arms and we share a hug... it is the first time in a long time I've been in his arms and something inside shifts causing butterflies.

I remember him now; I know this hold. It has comforted me so many times... I know this warmth, it's a familiar kind that soothes my sore places. I hold him tight and sniff in his shoulders as an overwhelming sense of insurmountable tranquillity collapses over me... He slowly let go and tries to push me back but I hold on to him. I shake my head lightly. Not yet...

"Don't let me go. Dali hold me please. Don't let go."

I whisper choking in the lump down my throat as tears burn my eyes. His arms hold on again, this time tight and I feel his own tears wetting my shoulders. "We are finally together again...." his tone is deep and breaking. I nod and we sit there crying silently in each other arms, it had been long since I've been held like that, my legs jolt as warmth washes over me. Dali shifts uncomfortably. He clears his throat.

"Lali... Lali, you've...uhm, I don't know how to say this gently but my dick is hard and it is your fault." He groans and I move my legs so that I'm straddling him and my boobs meet his

chest. He warns me first but I can't stop giggling at the blatant announcement of his horniness.

"Of course, your dick is hard Dali," I chuckle and we gaze at each other. It is more of a feeling of being grateful to be together again, it's us begging each other to choose each other. Our souls are in conversation, a deal is signed, a promise unbroken is made... yet again. It's a vow, it is a dedication. "Don't kill yourself please. Don't live me alone," I confess my fear out loud and he nods.

"Don't do it too. I wouldn't stand being without you," he says and we smile at each other.

I slowly move my waist humping against the bulky muscle that has no manners. He throws his head back and closes his eyes shut. I glide slowly as he leads the rhythm with his hands on my hips, my breath hitches.

"Lali, *uyandonzakalisa*... you've injured me," he exhales as he looks at me with eyes full of lust. He pulls my pyjama top over my head and caress my firm tits, gliding his fingers over my sensitive nipples causing me to moan and cry softly. I then go in with a kiss, he responds to me and it is soft, gentle... like a pledge and promise of a lifetime. My hand travels to slowly free it out of the sweatpants, it hits my stomach and I feel its burning warmth and hard self, he groans as I brush it up. He elevates my hips as I rip my pyjama bottoms and guide it inside

of me, I sit on it and gasp as my vaginal walls clenched around it. I open my eyes and we look at each other just enjoying the feeling of warmth without moving. Tears escape my eyes as my vision seems blurred and legs shake in desperate need for a movement.

"Dali please... let me move," I beg my eyes barely able to make out his face. He holds me tight without moving as his fingers meet with clit causing me to jerk up and shake uncontrollably. I cry out in pleasure as I feel the wave of earth-shattering orgasm coming down hard on me he removes his finger and guides the movement of my hips, I ride him hard but we both down last long, my body vibrates as he shoots warmly inside of me. We cry out in pleasure and hold on to each other. I feel him go soft inside of me as we both pant and then share a kiss.

"I've missed you," He calls and I agree with a feeling of satisfaction.

"I've missed you too." I whisper and hold on to him. I don't want to let go... just not yet.

The door flies open and Dali quickly pulls the duvet to cover us, I turn to glance at the door and my eyes land on the physio nurse who is shocked.

She freezes for a moment before closing the door shut and I laugh in silence. "Oh my goodness I'm sorry to disturb your.... your exercise but we heard noises and I was sent down to check...." she shouts from outside the door and I can't hold my laughter even for a second.

"Thank you Nurse Jane... We are okay, it was nothing alerting." Dali answers

"I've seen it wasn't. I'll make my way back to the clinic, have a wonderful day further," she says and we hear her footsteps strutting down the passage as if she can't wait to get out of here. I look at him and we fall into another round of laughter.

"We should probably clean up... before someone else walk in," I giggle and he nods. "We should," he smiles and before we know it, we're kissing again and I feel him growing inside of me. It's been a while.

I've been in love before, I know I've felt it, and I've given it to someone without hesitation. That would be the months Naye shared with me. My love tank once reached its full capacity and right at this moment, it feels like it is overflowing. To experience love is one thing but to experience the purity and the gentleness of it from a different person is something out of this world. The best thing about life is loving and not giving up on it, the best thing in life is constantly being with people who complete you and make you feel whole, I've felt this with Naye and now again with Dali. The love I've experienced in this lifetime isn't comparable, I can't choose him or her because they loved me and completed me differently. No one is better than the other and in all that, I feel like I'm floating in the ocean with a smile on face as the waters shut off everything noisy out of the water. It's been a month since our arrival in this place and each day is brighter than the last. Since our moment, we've grown incredibly closer.

I place my warm hands around his waist as he balances on the rail and shakes terribly. "You've got this, don't overthink it. Focus on the first step... slowly," I speak softly and hold him tight as he shakingly take a few steps and stop. He carries on 2-steps, take a pause and then continue.... 2-steps pause and then continue, we do that until we reach the end of the rail and

he drops back to his wheelchair. I kiss his forehead and clap for him. "You did good! That's very good Dali," He smiles at me and it goes up to his eyes. "Really?" He asks and I nod. "Very well," I compliment and then sit on his lap.

"I am convinced these legs are getting better because of you," He says and I throw my head back in laughter.

"You mean my butt is healing you?" I giggle and he nods smiling before pulling me in on a kiss....

"This is the physio house, not a valentines day hotel! Keep your tongues off of each other," The Nurse again... she walks towards us and I can only laugh at how unfortunate her luck is. I move from Dali's lap and We apologise for our behaviour.

The scans came back and Nurse Jane gives us the good news. Dali should be feeling some pain and cramps because he is getting better, and his body is actually working in a healthy manner. His blood pressure is balanced and so is his stress levels. I meant to add that good sex does that to a person but I think that would be too much information for Nurse Jane, anyway, she's still recovering from the shock and never let us forget it.

Dali is ecstatic at hearing these news, he's jolly all the way back to our cabin. The weather has been terribly cold the past few days, the storms, rain and wind has been working like a team.

As soon as we are inside, I make us coffee and we sit by the fire place drinking the hot beverage along with chocolate muffins.

"Lali, I'm going to say something to you and I don't want you to be shocked? Just prepare yourself," His warning tone bounces off the walls and I chuckle to try and ease up the building tension.

"Uhm, I can't promise but go for it,"

He nervously huffs first before glancing my way and exhaling hard.

"I am insanely inlove with you. I can't hold it in anymore, it is suffocating me and that can only mean; it is dangerous. I am at your mercy because you hold the make up of my life in your hands, you could break me to pieces and I wouldn't recover. That is how much I'm in love with you."

He confesses and then silence falls. For a moment, the world is still as his words register slowly in my head. He loves me, he's inlove with me. He's saying it out loud for the walls of the cabin to hear, for myself to hear too. My eyes fall on his and I read his soul like a book that has captured me. I smile, I smile and I feel tears prickle.

"Why would you think I would need to prepare myself for that?"

"Because of this..." My eyes bulge out and I gasp so loud my heart almost stops. He's standing on his own two feet, he take a few steps and he's standing right in front of me. I feel tears burning my eyes threatening to fall, he struts to and back - first shakingly and then close to perfection. He's still wiggly but his balance is good.

I lean back to the chair watching him walk back to me and stand right in front of me. "So, you are not going to give me a hug? We did this Lali," I get up and I wrap my arms around his waist pulling myself closer to him.

"When did you find out?"

"About 2-weeks ago, I wasn't sure at first but Nurse Jane said it was good. I asked her to not tell you because I wanted it to be a surprise. I thought I would do it under a sunset somewhere with a picnic dinner but something in me said today is the day," He chuckles and I don't do anything but weep in his hold.

"It is a nice surprise, A good one. I am proud of you," I tell him and he press on me tight and kisses my forehead. I'm holding in tears, we are close to finishing our days in here and I don't know what holds beyond these walls. I don't know this brand new self I am, out of these walls.

"I'm scared," I tell him "Because I love you just as much Dali. And I'm scared,"

"I know sweetheart, I know. I am too," I pull myself back just in time for him to cup my face and smile as our eyes meet. His gentle fingers wipe my tears, I smile and he presses his lips against mine in a tenderly manner.

"I love you, and I'm sure of it," He whispers and whisk me away with his soft kisses. He then pulls me to his embrace and comforts me. I silently cry

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in my heart of hearts, I think I have an idea of how all this will go. Now that he has reached his goal, we're going to leave and head back to PE and I'm probably going to spend nights crying in Lihla's arms. He's got the power to end me with this love. I am extremely taken, it actually feels like drug.

I'm scared of rejection, I fear how things would go and I dread the real world. Why can't we be closed up in this place forever? I am jealous, I want him to myself. I don't want other people to even look at him, his sister may visit every once in a while in this place but to the rest of the world; He is dead anyway and why should we leave? I want him to all myself it's quite dangerous.

I pull myself off of him and wipe my tears.

"It's good that you are walking again...uhm, it is great actually Dali and I love this for you," I say before dropping my eyes and

feeling an overwhelming amount of pain sitting on my throat. I turn and walk to my bedroom.

"Lali? Sweetheart," He calls but I need to go cry in my little corner first. I don't answer him and I walk into my bedroom and he walks in as I sit on the edge of the bed. Snorting and sobbing out loud.

The mattress sinks as he sit beside me. He rubs my back and then pull me to lie on his chest, I sob out loud and he lets me. He doesn't say anything but sits there and hold me in his arms as I cry my sorrows away.

"What's wrong babey? Talk to me so that I'll know. Share your thoughts with me, what's breaking you?" His baritone echoes in.

"I'm scared Dali. I'm scared that after this, you'll not see me the same way again, I'm scared of facing the real world but I guess it's not really fear but I'm jealousy. It's just the two of us here, the rest of the world isn't here and I don't get to worry about who's looking at you and who is not."

"You are jealous and you want me all to yourself." He voices it out and I chuckle.

"It's a silly thing Dali but I can't help it,"

"No, not silly. You are allowed to be jealous Lali because I am too. I think of all these people that will look at you and see

what I see in you, just the thought of it makes me sick. So, I am jealous about you too, I fight my feelings every time that guy in physio glances your way and I want to punch him in the face!"

"Joe??" I laugh out loud and he snickers.

"See, you even know his name!" I laugh more and his chest vibrates too as he releases laughter.

"We are unsure baby, we are scared because there's so many scenarios that could unravel out of this cabin. I'm dreading home too, hell, I don't even know what home is anymore.... they burnt my house down Lali and....." He chokes and holds himself. He never mentioned this to me? And how come he never told me?

"Dali, you never said anything to me," I whisper and he exhales.

"It probably slipped my mind. But they did, nothing was saved Lali.... everything burnt down to ashes and I feel defeated actually. I'm numb because what is Home anyway?"

Home is where the heart is, I think to myself. Whoever came with this philosophy had a point, we attach home to building and when they are burnt down we feel a sense of loss - as we should. However, the loss of home to a house is different. We lose the house to whatever but truly, home is where the heart is. And our hearts are with the people that make it a home. Our hearts are with our families and partners and friendships. That is

when we really feel a sense of loss.... I guess Dali lost a house full of memories of what was once a home. But again, he'll forever carry those memories in his heart, they were not burnt to ashes.

"I'm your home now." I utter softly and he holds me tight.

"You are sweetheart. You are,"

We are unsure, we've never done this before and what is worse is that it is wrapped in a little ball of fear.

"I'm going to need us to trust each other Lali. I'm never letting go of you so please, trust me with your fears, trust me with your confusion. I won't take it away but when you share it with me, you allow us a chance to talk and fix things. I don't like how you stomp out at each and every inconvenience Lali, please let's talk things out no matter how hard, we need to trust us for this to work. Do you think we can do that?"

I nod.

"I'm going to need you to use your words,"

"I do understand Dali and I'll do better. I also need you to not hide anything from me. My heart won't handle the pain,"

"Hey...hey..." He nudges me and I look at him "Why should we focus on the bad side when we can imagine the good in all of this. Lali, this time I'm not going anywhere. We are tied

together and I need you to understand that okay? I won't ever do anything to hurt you. Let this be a promise,"

"I love you," I blurt it out and watch his face come alive. He exhales hard and I straddle him. He holds my butt and brushes it as his eyes are overwhelmed by tears. Come to think of it, this is the first time I've said it out loud.

"And how do I call you, love?" My heart smiles as I whisper that. his eyes close briefly before setting on mine. He kisses my cheeks and I giggle.

"You call me anything you like. I'm yours,"

"You're mine,"

"I love you way more Lali." He hugs me tightly, I feel safe here with him. I feel okay, I'm at home.

We sit in that position until we kiss and things get heated. And before I know it, I'm screaming his name with my legs on his shoulder as an earth shattering orgasm comes over me. He kisses my forehead as he falls to my left and then pull me in and lock me in with his legs.

"My love," I softly tell him and he looks at me with eyes full of love

The thing about grief is that it visits you at odd times. You would think that you are doing well and then all of a sudden, you are back to square one and feeling the worst. Yesterday, Dali and I went through the box of Naye, it was full of most of her personal things and a bunch of pictures we took together. It had important files of her companies, keys to things that I'd probably be murdered for had they knew they are in my possession. Reality hits all over again, Naye is gone and I'm left here. I'm a crying mess. I've been sitting on the floor bawling my eyes out since last night, I loved her so much and all that she worked hard to build fell on my shoulders. What made me cry all over again is finding a video full of her footage and confessing her love to me. That night, she had woken up to make that video, the water running was loud in her background and she had the same clothes. I couldn't have finished it if Dali had not held me through watching it.

The box had more of her personal things and a notepad full of her passwords. She left her whole life in a box; she had prepared for the day. She knew she was going either way.... this time I'm not sad. I'm not sad because of my own selfish reasons, I guess I've made peace with the fact that she chose to go her own way. It will take a while before I come to full term with her death, I'll still cry and miss her on her birthday but

above all -I am grateful to have had a chance with Naye. I'm grateful we spent all those months together, that we found each other again, and I held her in my arms. Naye left so she could be a great angel in a white dress, she gave me a chance to be loved wholeheartedly and it is up to me to make the best out of it. She's in all the elements of earth. She's with me through it all and I do believe, I have gained a powerful angel. I lay on the floor in the cabin bedroom until I felt warm arms around me. He picked me up and placed me on the bed before giving me a kiss.

"Join me. Hold me please," I ask him in a low tone and he doesn't ask twice but joins me in bed and wrap his arms around me.

"Are you okay Lali?"

His tone is full of concern, I chuckle as a smile makes its way to my lips. "I am perfectly well, I needed to open this box and be in touch with my emotions. It's quite personal stuff she packed in there and I feel like I fully understand her position. She chose herself and there's nothing shameful about that. I'm proud of her... which raises hairs because how dare you be proud of someone who died by suicide? But I am because it means she was at peace. It was never about anyone else but about her and liberating herself. I probably would've been

miserable in death because I'd wonder about what I've missed....

it was never about me or anyone else but about Naye and choosing to take charge of her own life. I understand her Dali.... she's okay now." "I'm proud of you too." Dali says and for a moment I've slipped into another universe and it feels like Naye saying exactly that. My heart softens and I take a deep breath feeling Dali's touch on me. I'm ready to build something with him, I'm ready to be fully his.

"Let's go home. I miss the beach," I tell him and he chuckles.

"I miss it too," he says and then kisses my forehead again.

We spend the rest of the day walking around the retreat and enjoying the nature for the last time. We have dinner on the patio watching the sunset and the waterfall. We have our last session with our respective doctors, we receive training on how to exist with the outside world and after 2-days we make our way to Port Elizabeth. And this time it isn't just us being just friends but as partners who love each other and can't seem to stay away from each other. The drive takes hours and when we make it to PE, a sudden emotion of uncertainty overcomes us. What are we going to do now? What is the way forward but it's that uncertainty that sets a challenge for us to be?

The driver drops us at my place and as we walk in, a familiar scent of home fills my nostrils. I lead Dali to my bedroom as I knock in the other to find Lihla, but she's not here. I pick the cell phone and dial her number.

"Lihlangene," I call her full name and a scream comes from her side.

"Babey!!" She squills.

"Where are you, I'm home and the house is empty," I ask as Dali walks out of the room and then sneaks his arms from the back, I lay my head on his chest as he plants soft kisses down my neck. I inhale sharply

"I'm at work sweetie, I have a double shift today. Oh my goodness, Are you really back?"

I'm sure she's jumping up and down that hospital screaming at anyone who cares to listen.

"Yes, uhm, Dali and I just arrived."

"Ouw God! I'm going to need details. See you in the morning, okay? My pager is beeping,"

"Alright baby... don't tell the whole hospital of my return and if you do, I'm not on standby," I warn and she laughs.

"No problem. Let's chat in the morning baby,"

"Okay, bye,"

She ends the call on her side and I throw my cell phone to the sofa gasping for air as he touches all my core places with his tongue. This man is dangerous and one of these days, I'm going to die of orgasm.

"Love.... mhhh," I'm breathless and horny... He let go and I turn to look at him.

"We're back here again," I smile and he nods.

"Where it all began." He adds.

I give him a kiss.

"Somi will fetch me later on, will you be good?" He asks and I look at him with a face full of confusion. I don't understand.

"Dali, why would she fetch you?" I don't understand, I'm failing too. I thought we'd stay here together; I don't want to be away from him. My heart drops to my stomach and I exhale. I attempt to walk out but I sit on the couch and he joins me as his arm drape over me.

"I'll be staying with her for a little while as I get myself back on track." he explains but still, I'm confused.

"Why do you want to be away from me?" I ask and he just grins. "Sweetheart, I'm not trying to be away from you... I

just need to recollect the pieces of my life and build one that has you in it, we're back here again and we need to adjust, okay?" He answers.

"You are trying to be away from me. I get it..." "Lali..." he drags my name and he exhales out loud.

"That's not it. I can never survive being away from you but in order for this to thrive, we need to reconnect with our friends again. I'm not getting away from you, I'll never," I exhale and hold him. It'll be our first time away from each other.

"You promise?" I sound like a little child it's annoying.

"With my life," I nod and he holds me and we share a kiss.

Somi arrives later in the day and takes him away, leaving me to be alone for the first time in a while. I exhale and take my laptop to the dining table. I set it up as a work space and begin reading more on Naye's estate and everything that I now own. I contact the wealth management firm and we spend hours on the phone going through everything, they've been handling it well. I call the lawyers and after the formalities and official admin things, I dial Andile's number and it sends me straight to voicemail. The time is around midnight anyway and I can't sleep.

I recheck my messages and there's nothing from Dali. My heart sinks, this is exactly why he's a risk. I can't seem to function without him now, my nerves

kick in but I quickly recover. "Stop overthinking Nobulali," I dial Dali's number and it rings for a while before it goes through.

"Hello," a voice of a young lady comes through and sweat jumps through all pores as I feel my high blood pressure rising.

"Hello, Hi, can I speak to the owner of the phone

" The young lady giggles first and there are voices talking in the background having a full-blown conversation full of laughter and they are noisy. He wouldn't? Would he? My palms sweat as I pace up and down.

"Okay. Who should I say is on the phone?" the voice is chippy and it is taking everything in me to not shout at her. What is she doing with his phone anyway?

"Lali... uhm, his colleague," She laughs even more and I'm on the verge of dropping the call before she says, "Okay, I've found him. I'll give him the phone now," it's quiet for a second.

"Sthandwa sam," His full deep voice comes through the speaker and my back hits the wall and I slide down until my butt hits the floor. Tears escape and I sob not saying anything.

"Love, Hi." I manage to whisper and I hear him sigh on the other side then a door shut killing off the background noise. I wipe the tears off my face and just listen to the silence between us, I close my eyes and inhale.

"She's just..."

"Dali don't explain!"

I shake my head as if he can see me.

"I want to be there with you. I miss you, I've been losing my mind here," He says and I exhale in relief.

"I want you... here with me. You didn't text good-night," I sob and my voice cracks as I bite on the pyjama top with tears freely streaming down my face.

"I'm sorry sweetheart, the kids had my phone." His tongue is rolling, alcohol had been involved in some form or way.

"Okay. I wanted to say goodnight," I tell him and he chuckles.

"Goodnight, Dali," I say and break down as I end the call without hearing him answer back. I lay on the floor and cry... he's with his people. I have no people, mine are all gone.

After what's close to an hour of laying on the floor there's a knock on the back door. My heart jumps and beat so hard my ribcage is hanging by the thread. My cell phone pops a text and

it's Dali saying I should open the door. I get up fast and go open the door, I come face to face with him and his eyes are bloodshot red. I open and he walks in, he's limping like he hurt himself. He leans on the kitchen cabinet as I lock the door and turn to look at him.

"I am.... Lali since when your colleague now?" He looks defeated but my concern is over why he is limping.

"You are limping," I point out and he shakes his head.

"Don't run away from the question Lali," he begs, almost teary. He sniffs and rubs his face before taking steps towards me and locks me between the counter and him.

"And then you end the call abruptly..." He shakes his head with hurt written all over his face. "You know how that hurt me? Lali I wasn't out with girlfriends. The young lady who answered the cell phone is my niece, Sine. They were playing games on it and doing all the shit. I couldn't text you Goodnight because the phone wasn't on me and Somi was hosting a dinner of which we ended up drinking alcohol and talking about everything,"

He part my legs and lift me to sit on the counter, he brushes my thighs up and down.

"You didn't think I was bending another woman over now, didn't you?" I shake my head and he exhale.

"You're limping," I whisper and he doesn't answer that.

"I want you here with me, you said and do you know what that does to me?" He asks and I again shake my head.

"Oh! Lali you are the end of me," he cries and then takes my hand to feel his hard-on. He groans at the collision of my hand with his manhood down there. "Nobulali!" He groans hard and loud as his forehead meets mine. I trap him in with my legs and hands on to him while pulling it out of the pants and stroking in softly watching him ask for mercy as his groans grow into deep growls. He pulls my pyjama bottom with my lace undies and rip them apart causing the fabric to fly all over. I remove my hand from him and his red eyes pierce through mine and before I know it, he slams into me so hard I hold him tight and balance with both my hand over him. He rips the pyjama top and attacks my neck as he fucks me until I lose my breath and swear to death. He pulls out before I cum and I scream in frustration as he carries me to the bedroom.

"Dali, don't do this shit... I need to...." I try to voice out my frustration and he lay me down at the centre of the bed. I watch him close the door and remove all his clothes and climbs on the bed. My legs are no longer mine anymore as he sends them to his shoulders and pin my arms above my head.

With his other hand he teases my clit and I cry out loud.

"What would it take for you to trust me?" He asks and I see his forehead veins are prominent, his eyes are glistening in tears held with his whole self.

"Dali, I trust you!"

"No, no you don't because if you did then I wouldn't have jumped your neighbour's fence and then yours. Tell me please, I'll do anything."

He begs and I writhed under his restraint needing just one more touch to reach my orgasm.

"I trust you. I do Dali."

"Then Lali why do we keep going back and forth?"

"I just needed to hear from you. I'm sorry I'm in love and I'm jealous and I can't help it." I confess and He removes his hand from holding my arms. "Oh!" He says and then ever so smoothly, he fills me up and my back arches up.

"You glow when I make love to you. Your eyes brighten up as you reach the climax and I'm addicted to that look. The way you glance over at me and smile, how you shut your eyes listening to the pleasure we give each other. Sweetheart, I'm going to ask you to not close your eyes, I want to see it all as your eyes glow, your pupil dilating. I need to you to feel me inside of you, no one but you will I ever fill fully inside. Lali, it's only you. Can you be here with me on this?"

He says and I look at him baring his soul open for mine. He begins sweet, with each stroke deep and slow, our eyes hold into one another.

I gasp and my breath hitches as he hits the spot so lightly.

"Harder baby," I tell him and meet his stroke causing him to hit harder and then faster. I attempt to close my eyes and he rams in harder shooting my eyes open.

"Dali!!" I squirm and feel my legs going numb, his fingers move to rub my clit and he rams in harder and harder that we hear the bed squeaking. The orgasm comes faster than the speed of waves and I scream his name loud as I squirt hard leaving my whole body to shake for a good minute.

"Right there," I hear him say and my eyes shut open as my elevated numb legs hit the bed and he groans hard as he cums. I am transported into a different dimension.

"You don't know what you just did to me," I tell him as I try to catch my breath.

"You were so beautiful as you shot out that squirt," he says and then spoons from the back. His fingers find their way to my clit again, he rubs it softly, he cups it with his palm and with his other hand, he caresses my titties and kisses my neck leaving marks. For a moment I feel the spirit of Naye had possessed him, he went exactly in the same rhythm she had

whenever she'd have her fingers inside of me. He strokes and pushes and strokes hard causing me to scream again and writhed under his hold as his palm rubs against my clit. I cry out and a shot of squirt comes again, he is pleased with himself that he groans out loud.

He doesn't know what he just did to me. He has no idea that he's messed me up. He gets up first to shower and then lead me to the bathtub, my legs are wobbly for the shower. I soak in the bathtub and he in the meantime, changes the linen and brings back a t-shirt and a pantie.

I get out of the tub, lotion and get dressed. He brings me bottled water and fruits with a bowl. I lay next to him and he cuddles me.

"I love you and I'm here with you," He whispers and then rubs my thighs.

I chuckle as I fall into a sweet slumber. I love him too. More than he thinks.

"I made breakfast, Lihla isn't back yet," I say to Dali. He's so hungover, he can't even get out of bed.

"And I can't believe you jumped a neighbour's fence," I chortle and he pulls the covers off his face and smiles at me.

"I had to get to my woman," I roll my eyes at and reach out my arms for him to get up. He groans and then takes my hands getting up, he sits at the edge of the bed and pulls me to him, he rests his face on my torso with his arms wrapped around me.

"Dali..." I drag his name but he just groans and then laughs. He pulls back and looks at me, he has gorgeous eyes.

"You are so damn beautiful, good morning baby," he says and I blush. I give him a kiss.

"Good morning love and you need a haircut, this little afro you have going on here isn't cute and shave!" He looks at me with beautiful brown eyes. "But this is my African Hair, why are we living up to European standards?" He frowns and here we go again with politics.

"It being African hair doesn't mean keep it unclean," I reply and he huffs. "So, what you are saying is that my hair is unclean?"

I shake my head and chortle. He seems pleased with getting me all worked up in hair politics early in the morning.

"Baby, I have an afro too. All I am saying is take care of it and if you can't, you can cut it. That's all."

"But baby..."

"Hayi Dali!" I cut him off and he laughs, pleased with himself.

"I wish you could see yourself from my point of view. Okay sweetheart, I'll take care of it."

"That's all I wanted to hear." I kiss him again and he buries his head on my t-shirt. Groaning.

"The food is going to get cold. Let's go eat,"

"I need a minute baby," he says and then we I stand there with him holding me and his head buried in my t-shirt. I first notice sniffs and then feel the wetness of my t-shirt, is he crying? Why is he crying?

"Dali, baby. Are you okay?" My tone is low and almost a whisper. He nods and then looks up at me all teary. He takes and deep breath and lets it out slowly. "I am so in love you. Man, this isn't how a *Dyan* acts but I am taken Lali. I love you, okay?"

I smile and it comes up to my eyes burning my cheeks. "Why didn't I notice earlier," He says to himself and I reckon he means the love he has for me.

"And I love you too Dali. Now, breakfast baby!"

He nods and get up. We step out of the room with him holding my shoulders as if we're playing train. We sit down and enjoy breakfast over a light conversation about his fence jumping stunt last night. I also noticed he's not limping today but he doesn't mention why he was, in the first place.

"You didn't make the bacon, it's unlike you," He mentions as he helps me pack the dishes and clean up the kitchen.

"It's spoilt, I threw it out,"

"Are you sure? Was is not in the freezer?" He asks

"I wouldn't throw something out without knowing, now, would I?" I can feel the anger rising, why the hell would he say that? My eyes burn with tears threatening to fall. I blink multiple times blocking it.

"No, no, no sweetheart." He chuckles and walks towards me and hugs me. He cups my face and plants a light kiss. "No baby, I'm not saying that okay? But I think, I think we should refrain from throwing out food, okay? We don't want Lihla mad, remember; she's the one who's been getting food, okay?" He smiles and I nod.

We continue with cleaning the rest of the kitchen and then the room.

"I'll call you later," He says and I nod feeling a sense of loss.

"Lali, I'm not leaving you. I'll call you later and we'll chat on the phone.

Don't be sad because I'll be sad and I won't have a good day,"

I nod again and something settles on my shoulders. I exhale and he kisses me. "Okay, don't forget to call." I remind him and he kisses me again before leaving.

As he walks out, Lihla walks in and they greet each other and then goodbye again. The door shuts and Lihla opens her arms for me, I hug her warmly. "I missed you," She says.

"I missed you too and you smell of the hospital." I mention and she pushes me lightly off her but I don't move.

"Ungrateful ass! Get off me with that attitude!" I let her go and she smiles and hugs me again.

"Argh, I missed you so much. You have no idea!"

"I know friend because I missed you too."

As per tradition, she takes a shower while I make her some food and we get cuddled up in the couch.

"Where do I even begin with the story?" I ask no one in particular and Lihla smiles at me.

"Bitch you even gained some weight! Look at you with thick thighs, start from the beginning. " Yes, maybe I did gain but thick thighs? Lihla can never be serious.

....

"I'm going to need a glass of water. You guys were made for each other anyway, I mean the way you cared for him and he cared for you? We all knew you guys were in love." She says walking to the kitchen.

"Well it took too damn long for him to figure it out..." I grab the bowl of fruit and snack.

"Babe, why is the bacon in the bin?" Lihla asks and I hear the water running in the sink.

"It had a funny smell. I threw it away

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" I shout for her to hear over the running water.

"Are you pregnant!?" She screams and then laughs. She turns the tap water off, walks back to stand Infront of me. She pulls me to get up and I do as she says. It's Lihla... she forces everyone to do what she likes.

"No!" I say and she shakes her head. She pulls up the t-shirt and begins feeling me up, she presses my lower abdomen and I almost push her at the sharp pain it caused. She takes a step back and then looks at me.

"Let me see you side-view," I roll my eyes, hold my t-shirt up and she claps in disbelief mixed with excitement.

"Your ass is definitely pregnant. I mean, the tears, clinginess and the bacon? You are and you know I'm never wrong. "

"Lihla I can't be pregnant!" Oh, my world, I can't be. I'm not ready, not now. Not yet.

"Pee in the cup please!" She says as she pulls her medic-kit and takes along with two hospital pregnancy tests. She follows me to the bathroom as I do it all.

The waiting minutes seem like years in prison. For a moment the time stops and it is me and my thoughts. I can't believe this, I don't want a child, at least not yet. Both of us are not ready to have a baby let alone raise one. We were

supposed to spend the first years of our relationship with each other first and not... not like this.

"Two lines. You are pregnant baby,"

Lihla smiles, she is chippy and almost teary. She hugs me tight and kisses my cheeks. I just smile.

"I'm in shock Lihla," my hands immediately travels to my tummy. "You two had sex. Lots of it, and not once did you mention protection or him pulling out. That's what happened sthandwa sakhe." "Friend you are not helping!" I say and she just smiles.

"Sorry, go call him and let him know. You two are going to be parents." I nod and walk out to the bedroom.

My approach to this is different. I don't want that; I don't want to share him. At least not yet.... I dial his number and he picked up almost immediately but I don't mention anything about the pregnancy. I make up some other reasons and we spend 30min in the call, he actually cheers me up without even knowing. We say our goodbyes and then I step out of the room back to the couch in all smiles.

Lihla snuggles me and kisses my forehead.

"I know you didn't tell him baby. But don't ever think for a second you won't be a good mom. What happened, happened.

And if you are not happy, there's always an option for an abortion, okay?"

I nod but that's another thing. I don't want an abortion; I'm not even considering it. "I want to carry full term Lihla but the uncertainty of everything scares me. What if I'm a bad mother, what if Dali just rejects the whole idea and move on with his life. I do want to have a child but motherhood is what scares me the most! Being responsible for another human being,"

"I understand but you won't be alone, okay? Even if he leaves which I doubt he will. I'll be here with you; I'll stay up at night and help you figure out motherhood, Okay? And you won't be a bad mother, you'll make a terrific mom to that child. If you are worried about the pregnancy separating you too; I think it'll only cause your obsession with each other to worsen, the love you are going to give this baby is out of this world. I know that because you give it to me every day," She kisses my cheek and I think of Naye. My hand moves to my tummy again and I smile. I'm sure she knows too.

We are pregnant

I already know sweetheart *Of*
course you do.

I will stop by later, we'll talk. I love you. Xxx

"What's funny?" Lihla asks.

"I sent Dali a text and he knows already, how come I'm the last person to know about all this?"

"Because pregnancy isn't something you diagnose Dr Miller." I laugh and shake my head.

"Congratulation's sweetheart," she says and kisses my cheeks snuggles me. I'm content.

"Lihla, I think I'm ready to find my parents. My biological ones and I have no idea where to start?" I say.

"From your mouth to the universe, it is received. You start from the beginning sweetie and follow the pattern of it all. But now that you've said it out loud, best believe the whispers of life will come and you'll find them both." I nod and she hugs me again. We stay like that until she begins snoring. I forgot she had a double shift, oh dear. I balance her head and then cover her with a throw, I clean up and head to my bedroom. I stand Infront of the mirror naked inspecting myself. I notice the bump from the side, I barely remember the last time I had my periods...

I am awakened by cold arms wrapping tight around me, spooning me as the mattress sinks lightly accepting their weight. Tingles rush through my whole body as the legs lock mine in. His scent hits my nostrils first and a calm comes over me. He's back, I push my butt up to be closer to him.

"Hey, baby," He whispers lightly and plants a kiss on my cheek "You're cold..." I say and he just fixes the blanket then holds me tight with his hand settling on my belly. I slept with my underwear and t-shirt, I had a headache after dinner and told Lihla that I'm having an early night, we blame the pregnancy.

"How was your day?" He asks and pulls me even closer, there's unfortunately no way we could live in each other's skin.

"My day was okay. I finally got a hold of Andile and we had an hourly chat about everything. Since I don't know much about the media business and I actually have no passion about it, I chose to be the silent partner. I'll still be notified of things and attend board meetings but on the day-to-day of running things, I'm not there. I also spent a good amount of my day searching through my birth records and trying to contact the adoption agency but nothing fruitful came out of that. How was yours?" He exhales first and then plants another kiss. "I got my new house. Actually, Somi got it for me because I'm a man and I have no taste... I just went to sign the papers for it

today. But it needs furnishing which I told her to worry about because I know someone who will do it better than her," he chuckles and I smile. His hands lock in with mine and he pulls my t-shirt, his cold hands settle on my belly I feel flutters and a smile form.

"Someone says hello Daddy," I giggle and he gasp trying to press hard. I laugh at him.

"There's kicks already? I can't feel anything," He says with a confused tone.

"Well, it's flutters sweetheart. Not kicks, just not yet. This one is only for mommy to feel." I answer him feeling very much lucky and happy. This is a stamp to the beginning of a journey. My sweet love.

"I don't think it is fair," He sulks. I giggle at his sad statement. He starts narrating all the things his did for the rest of his day and the silly stories of what happened in-between until I start drifting away to a sweet slumber.

"Sweetheart, Lali..." I hear him call, I release a murmur and he chuckle at that.

"You're sleeping already." He points out and kisses me on my side, I turn to face him with eyes closed shut. He laughs again and kisses my forehead. "You're so beautiful," he whispers "And I love you. I love you more than anything Lali,

okay?" I try to nod and release a sound but I'm too sleepy for anything audible to come out.

He just spoons me and press his lips against my forehead.

"Goodnight sweetheart." He whispers as I snuggle closer.

The sun set beautifully over the horizons of the city as we dined on the rooftop of the restaurant in town. Dali has been a love bug the entire month after we found out that we were indeed pregnant and saw the beautiful blip on that tiny scan screen. I've been having weird cravings and sleeping a lot; he unfortunately has the rest of my sicknesses. I don't vomit, he does. I'm full of energy and he's always tired, it's funny but also a good thing that he's suffering first trimester with me. We do sleep a lot; he sometimes misses work because he overslept. I haven't moved in with him and we fight about that a lot, he doesn't like it and he does not appreciate that. He wants me all to himself and I do too but Lihla is there with me when he's busy and there's no one else I trust about my food besides Lihla. He thinks it is unfair and I am choosing her over everyone else. There really isn't any choice to make.

Today, he told me to dress up, he's taking me out on a Friday dinner which has turned to be our tradition but today, he specifically asked me to dress up in the beautiful gown and be all glammed up. Lihla styled my afro before she left for work. He picked me up and we drove to this beautiful restaurant with a rooftop setting.

There's been progress with finding my biological family, I called in a few favours and ended up with the number of the

lady who gave birth to me, and she's alive. She leads a fairly comfortable life. Works at a marketing agency and goes to therapy twice a week. She lives in a beautiful house in the suburbs with her boyfriend. The PI confirms her husband died in a car accident year back and she's never married again... Eliza lied to me, she told me both my parents died in a car accident and I was left with nothing but a name tag. A green lie

As it turns, she doesn't have any other children nor family. She seems like a lonely person... The private investigator had told me all that. I went over boundaries and asked for him to get a sample of her DNA, the results came back positive last weekend and I've been nothing but shocked. What we couldn't find is what actually happened that night of the accident? What went down? And how did Eliza legally adopt me if my mother was indeed alive and well? All I have is questions with no answers.

"I still can't believe you don't want to move in with me," Dali says pulling me back to the moment we're having under the sunset. He stares at me and knows that my mind is not here. He puts down the cutlery and walks to my side. "Dance with me," I smile and he shake my head. "Please..." He begs with puffy eyes and it would be rude to deny him like that. He looks sexy today, I wish I could strip him right here, right now.

He holds me closer as we dance to the Luther Vandross Ballard playing in the background.

“What’s bothering you love?” He asks and I exhales hard before I narrate everything I’ve done with the PI. He kisses me on the forehead and dances slowly with me.

“You should call her. We will need an elder to be there when we get married,”

Dali is always directing the conversation to the other side but somehow it gives motivation to actually do the thing.

“Do you think she still knows me?”

“A mother never forgets their child my love. I am sure she is waiting on you as much as you are. Connect again with her, don’t miss this chance, okay?”

I nod and he kisses me softly. “I want to marry you. I want to call you my Wife, how do I do that?” I giggle... Oh this man.

“You buy an engagement ring and propose but don’t go down on one knee, that is tacky and old,”

I smile at him and he grins as his eyes sparkle up.

“Oh, that’s easy.” He says and reaches inside his pants pocket and pulls out a black velvet ring case.

“Check if this one fit sweetheart,”

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serif; mso-fareast-font-family:"Times New Roman">We stop dancing and just stand staring at each other. This man is from the township indeed.

He pops it open and my eyes feast on the silver diamond engagement ring. For a second my heart stops. I hold it through the case and look at it feeling teary, I look at him and he is smiling.

“You have to put it on me kaloku Dali,” I laugh all teary and he nods.

“Okay, Okay,”

He slips it in and it fits perfectly.

“You are the puzzle piece that’s been missing. I found it and there’s nothing I wouldn’t do for you. I love you Lali and please say yes to me,” I agree. He also been my missing puzzle piece.

“The ring fits perfectly. I love you and yes make me your wife,” I respond.

He cups my face and we stare at each other feeling very much in love. Everything we’ve been through has led to this moment right here, our moment. And now we are promising each other a lifetime. “And make me your husband,” He winks and I

giggle at how corny he can get. “I take that as you will be moving in?”

“Dali...” I drag his name but he shuts my mouth with a kiss.

We then dance to Tamia’s into You on the rooftop and it just the two of us with the band and the photographer. I am in love. It is a high, our defining moment

“Sweetheart, I need to use the bathroom,” I mention to Dali feeling my bladder about to pop. We’re about to leave the restaurant and we’re inside an elevator heading to ground floor.

“We will get to one soon baby, hold it a little bit more for me, okay?” I nod and he holds me in his arms rubbing my back lightly. The elevator pings open and we’re actually in the second floor. “Is there a bathroom near in this floor?” He asks and the waitress nods.

“Get the car closer love, I’ll be there in a minute.” I say while handing him my purse and then kiss his cheek.

“Alright,”

“I can take you, ma’am,” The waitress offers and I nod.

We take a turn and find the nearest bathroom. I thank her as I walk in and she goes back to her duties.

I release the pee feeling a sense of ease. I take a deep breath and exhale loudly.

“You are going to be the death of me,” I whisper brushing my belly and flushing the toilet. I look at the glimmering engagement ring with a smile and walk out of the toilet to wash my hands in the sink.

A woman in a staff uniform walk in and greet. Something unsettles me about her and as I'm about to step out, cold hand pulls me back and within a minute I am fighting for my life. I scream out loud but a cloth covers me. I'm tased and everything goes blank. Lights out.

“She’s up!” The deep voice calls out as my eyelids separate heavily opening me to a sight that is unfamiliar. The room is a bright coloured blue, there is a table at the far end full of takeout and bottles of water. A toilet to the other far end with a bed and a window so high. The events that took place are recollected in my brain; someone tased me as I was walking out of the bathroom and this is where I’m waking up, chained to a chair still in the dress. My hands move closer to my belly as the chains rattle. I need you baby to flutter for mommy, let me know you’re okay... I chant in my head as tears freely fall.

A hot slap land in my face, it is the same girl who tased me in that bathroom. Hate could be read in her face.

“Wake up! This is not a fancy hotel.”

The door opens and someone I did not expect at all walks in – Zin! I look at him with a confused face.

“Hi, Nobulali.” He smirks and walks in.

“I couldn’t get you then but I got you now...Finally,” I take a deep breath and close my eyes. Another hot slap lands on my face. “Look at him when he talks,” she shouts and I look at her up and down. I feel anger rushing up and down me.

“Don’t fuckin’ pull that shit on me.” I address her and she laughs.

“Oh, little slut is bold,” She snickers.

“You had to chain me the fuck up because you know as hell how quickly I could rough you up! They warned you against me, didn’t they? Little bitch being told what she must do by bunch of men. What a puppy!” I yell out to her and spit on her face. She’s about to throw a fist but Zin pulls her and pushes her out of the room while throwing tantrums.

“You need to shut your big mouth, they’ll shoot you!” Zin shouts.

“And you think I care because what? I’m not scared of death; I’ve come face to face with it so many times. And if this time it is here to take me, then damn well I’m ready!”

“Zen once mentioned you were a hot head but I never knew it was this much,” He chuckles and then pulls a chair to sit across me.

“I have what you want. What is it?” I ask him and it seems to amuse him. Don’t beat around the bush, straight to the point.

“The wine farm. All of it. And some papers you were given by that dead girl you shared pussies with.”

I laugh.

“I might as well be dead. Kill me, right here and now, you won’t get shit.”

He gets furious and chokes me. It is painful but I've suffered worse. I've bathed with the devil and I don't care. I've given up because there's a possibility the life, I'm carrying might be dead in my stomach. I feel nothing, no response. "Wipe this attitude of yours or I swear to God. I'll call people who won't be kind to you,"

He lets go and pushes my head back as he takes the seat.

"Call them. To kill me because you yourself doesn't have the balls! I won't beg a bitch baby like you for my life. If you are so desperate for my life, go ahead and take it but thinking I'm going to surrender the shit I worked hard for? Forget it. You are so used to being a mama's boy! I'm not your mother,"

"You think this is a joke Nobulali?"

"Nah, I think you think I'm making this up and I'm not." He chuckles and sits back on the chair.

"*Uthembele ngantoni?* You think that taxi driver of yours is going to budge in here to save you? He would never. And I still wonder how he got you when he is the same person who was ordered to kill your fiancé and that white bitch. Didn't he tell you that he knew that old man who raised you well? Did he never mentioned that he in the army that was in, they worked for the mafia government and killed civilians? Children died,

women were raped and got knows if he didn't take part in that,"

I frown at this new information. He sees my shock and sits back enjoying himself. Dali doesn't know I also cleaned bodies of powerful people who suddenly went missing. The secrets of our pasts are now in the open. He is doing all this to get a reaction out of me but I don't give in to that pressure.

"And what do you think that's going to do to me? You think I'm going to cry and be all damsel in distress and surrender all that I have to who, you? Try again,"

"Nah, I don't want that but I thought you should know that the reason you have no protection or anything is because Eliza died and the kind of person you're marrying." He snickers and I inhale sharply. And glance at my engagement ring. My heart sinks, we were supposed to be celebrating with steamy love making...

"Okay. I don't care whether he killed them or not, I don't give a shit anyway because they are dead."

serif; mso-fareast-font-family:"Times New

Roman""> "You're a cold bitch!" he spits and looks at me with hate. "But how about we take in that bitch friend of yours in? You think if Eve plays with her for a little while she won't sing out your secrets,"

My whole-body froze. Lihla did nothing wrong and should never be subjected to anything. But I know he is trying to find a weakness, something to come in with.

“You would be writing your death wish if you in anyway mess with that girl. This whole city would be in flames and you know better than to mess with her. She is unlike me; she has people who care too much about her. You get your eve to mess her up? All of you will be dead in a minute. Your bosses know it too,”

He sits back and then the door flies open and two people walk in. Andile walks in chained and looking roughed up along with Naye’s mom. I should’ve known she is the one who organized all this with the obvious help of her goons. Zin gets up and gives her the chair. She kisses him, quite sloppily it is actually disgusting. Andile is thrown on the floor and he cries, I guess he suffered

“We meet again Nobulali,” She says with a smirk as she takes a sit. I don’t answer her. She probably thinks she can get through to me, I’m not Naye.

“I was disgusted when I saw her with you. The way she loved you but you knew that as soon as you killed her, you would move on with that dodgy taxi driver you call a boyfriend. And chow the money, my child worked so hard on. Please.”

“Let us not waste each other’s time ma’am, what do you want form me?”

“My daughter’s businesses. Sign then all over to me,”

“You would have to kill me first,” I chortle and she shakes her head.

“Wrong answer,” She pulls her gun and corks it. She aims it to my head “You don’t have the balls,” I laugh at her and she looks disgusted by me. “Girl, give me what’s mine before I torture you until you lose that shit you’re carrying”

She threatens and that actually gets to me. I press my palms against my belly as I feel flutters. Tears escape my eyes; my little blip is well... they go on for about a minute.

“How far along are you?” Zin asks and I would be damned to mention anything. I don’t answer, I just stare at this lady with a gun on my head.

“Do it! Kill me. You are so used to it you can’t even help it. Go for it because I will not be signing those papers, I might as well die.”

“It’s my daughter’s money!!” she shouts

“I don’t care but I won’t give you the satisfaction. I would rather die and when I’m dead you know damn well you stand zero chances of ever getting them. You need me alive,”

“No, I don’t need you alive but he does. You call him Dali, right? He touches your soft spots and whisk you away, he needs you and this child you are carrying to be alive. He needs you in order to be sane and you need him baby girl. Is the money worth all that?”

My heart sinks and the big girl who was strong flew out of the window as she vividly mentioned her. He is probably losing his mind right at this moment. I may be selfish but after all is said and done, the money can be replaced, the businesses can be bought again but that love... that love and gentleness of that guy can never amount to anything in this world. The way he gets excited and cries every time he senses a moment of reject, the way he looks at me and wraps his arms around me at night... the passion, the undying attention. All that can never be replaced, she got to me. She knows my weakness is love. She reminded me of the actions of the person I love dearly. To die and miss all that would be an insult to Naye who placed herself at the end for myself to share a lifetime with that man.

“Leave Dali out of this!” She laughs.

“Sign over the farm, give us Naye’s papers and sign your share over to us,”

She smiles feeling pleased with herself.

In a world where I can't have both I would still choose Dali but in this world I can. I can have both just not yet.

“Forget those papers, get the wine farm and my share of Naye’s businesses.” She chortles and looks over at Zin who nods.

“Good girl,” she says and pulls out an envelope.

I read and sign on all of the pages. I hand them back to her.

“Now, let me go,” I say.

“No!” she gets up and steps out of the room along with others leaving me looking at the damned blue walls in frustration. That was too easy... way too easy.

I haven't had anything to eat, I've been chained for what feels like days. If not weeks. My mouth feels dry, my feet are numb and my face is dry with chapped lips. I can't even move around the room; I lay on the bed as feelings of hurt and regret come over me. I should've held that pee until we reached home, I shouldn't have said to Dali to head downstairs without me. He must be going insane, or maybe he thinks I ran away. Maybe he doesn't bother to look for me because he believes I left him after he proposed. I cry out loud as the pain of my heart breaking feels too much to bear. Everything in me hurts and I am still in that same dress, it's all dirty and ripped. My hair doesn't feel like mine anymore and I can't even think properly. I don't even know where I am.

The door opens and Eve walks in with a bucket. She throws it in my way, it is ice cold and causes my nipples to harden as I shiver like nothing.

“Don't die just yet. Your boyfriend got your letter and he ate it up, he believes you left him because you felt overwhelmed by everything and you were reminded of Naye. All that you wrote there, you are a good girl now. We can finally send you off for auction, you know what they say about pregnant ladies, the give the best!” She laughs and I don't have the energy to answer her on anything.

I signed the papers. They got the business and I saw on the newspaper they threw at me, Andile was there with them looking rather torn as they announced Naye's mom as chairperson of the board. I thought they would let me go but nothing, they kept me locked up in this room and forced me to write a breakup letter to Dali. They beat me up and kept throwing buckets of ice-water at any time I give up and surrender to being unconscious. Right now, her reporting that Dali backed out from searching for me hurts. It hurts because I think about him whenever it gets too much, I could've tapped out so many times but his words kept me up, the hope of seeing him again kept me going but I don't think I can go anymore. It is clear; while I chose him over the money, he didn't think to look past the lousy letter and continue with searching for me, now I'm going to be fed to the vultures. I don't blame him, maybe he doesn't think I am worth fighting for. My heart goes out to Lihla, she must be going through hell without knowing me and she must be blaming Dali for it all. If we had an indoor Friday night, all of this could've been avoided.

I shift and the chains rattle, I am shivering and feeling cold. My teeth tatter. The door opens again and one of the guards walk in with a shopping bag.

And what looks like a hose pipe.

“We must move her. She needs to change first,” He announce She has a smirk on her face.

I get hosed down but the water is a bid warmer she cuts my dress and I’m all naked as in her description; she is washing me. She does all that laughing and snickering.

She dries me with a towel, lotions me and get me changed into an oversized hoodie with leggings and winter boots.

They give me something to eat and drink. I force down everything for the life inside of me, I drink the water and another guard rushes in “We must move, now!” he shouts and they carry me in chains. I feel drowsy and try to scream as I hear sirens at a distance. In a minute the daylight is blinding me, I’m forced to the back of the SUV along with Eve and we’re on the move as my eyelids shut.

I wake up and it is dark outside. We’re still on the move and my heart sinks in disappointment.

“I am hungry and I need to pee. I am pregnant for fuck’s sake, not your regular person. And I need my pills!” I announce. I’ve figured whatever I am needed for, they can’t have me dying.

“There’s a garage, miles down, we will stop there and you’ll get what you need.

I am alone with the driver. It is not the same SUV I was thrown into. This one is a polo and only my hands are restrained.

“Where are you taking me?” I ask and he looks at me with eyes that scream I should not be asking questions for a person in my position.

“Turn the radio on at least if you won’t talk to me,”

He huffs and turns the radio on. I thank him and he rolls his eyes.

The 10pm news cover what went down. It is said that the SUV was shot down killing a woman but they did not find me. Which means I was switched under a certain bridge. The building I was held in got raided but the police found no one. What they can confirm it is that

this is indeed a kidnapping case not a ‘girlfriend runaway’ and they are on high alert. There’s also a reward up for anyone who can offer information, R2 million. The driver almost choked on his saliva.

“Bitch! Are you that important?” He asks and glances at me through the rear-view mirror. It is valid that he has never done any kidnapping cases. He is new at this but wait.... I know those eyes. I know this boy.

“I saved your life once.” He hits the break so unexpectedly I almost hit my head but the safety belt helps. He takes out a cigarette and opens his window as he lights it.

“You don’t know shit about me,” he calls calmly.

“I know you are one of the boys that worked for Zenzele. Your boss and I almost had a thing and I had visited him that night. The doctor couldn’t be found and I did the honours. Had I left you for one more minute, you would’ve been dead. But I chose not to and saved your life,” He puffs out the smoke.

“Yeah you did.” He chuckles.

“Let me go then... Please,”

“Sista you don’t understand man. If I let you go, this job is a flop and I’ll be joining my ancestors in a matter of minutes. These people are dangerous. Please let me deliver you to this place without any hassles. I am grateful ne about what you did, *enkosi* but yho! sis wam, I am trying for myself here. Please let me do this.”

I sit back and feel my tears fall as he roughly starts the car again. We drive in silence until we are at the garage.

“Please don’t try any flop nhe, I’m going to uncuff you. Let me deliver you to this place in peace please.” I nod.

I step outside the car and I walk wobbly at first until I am firm, the garage only has workers and people who stopped by. I start by the toilet first and he follows me in... he stands right next to the door,

“I am not running way,” I say as I walk out and wash my hands.

“I know because I’m guarding you,” He huffs and I roll my eyes. We head inside the store; I get what I need and he pays.

As we’re about to step out I pull a chocolate off the shelves and it causes the security pass at the door to ping.

“What the fuck did you do?” He mutters under her teeth but immediately sees the chocolate in my hand.

He shoots the security in the leg and I scream as loud as I can. He carries me up to his shoulders and keeps firing bullets carelessly in the air. He pushes me in the car, locks the doors and I scream banging the window. He drives off fuming.

Another failed attempt at trying to escape. I’m losing this battle.

“Are you trying to get us killed?” He shouts at me!

“I am trying to go home. Please let me go. I will pay you more than they can, I can guarantee you your safety just do this

one thing for me. I am pregnant, I have people who care for me that are searching for me tirelessly.

Please,” I beg in tears feeling pain in my lower abdomen. Panic rises. “Please shut up sista! You can’t guarantee shit for me because we are here together!”

I filter him out as I listen to the pain again and I feel something wet between my legs. “No!!” I scream and cry, I hold my belly. “You can’t do this to me baby, you can’t do this to me. Hold on for mommy a little bit more, please don’t do this to me.” I cry, tasting defeat.

“Jo, you are really pregnant?” He asks in disbelief but I don’t dignify that with an answer I lay back and tears freely fall to my side and I wince in pain. I think of Naye, Lihlangene and Dali. I think of the mother I haven’t met. I think of everything in my life.

“I may no longer be pregnant. I’m losing it...” I cry in pain. Everything I have survived doesn’t amount to the pain I am feeling. The defeat of everything, being unable to do anything about it. It hits me hard, it cripples me.

I brush my belly and the pain comes deep from my lung and rushes through to my brain. It hurts... too much.

Heaven couldn’t wait for you. I chant in my head as tears make my eyes hurt.

I must have dosed off because the minute my eyes open there are blue & red lights all over us. I can't believe it, is this the part where I jump off the car and rush to safety? I don't know. I look around and this is the main road, this is the highway where there are cameras all over, why would he take this turn? "You did this on purpose. You knew there's a road block, you were warned about the main roads, why would you?" I ask, the concern over a kidnapper surprising me. But he is a boy caught up with the wrong crowd.

"I am letting you go. Please my sista don't make this harder than it already is. I owe you one," he says as he sniffs. He's crying with the gun on his hand. I unlock the door and all guns are on cocked up toward the suspect, I hold my hands up and I can't seem to walk. I fall on my knees and hear a loud bang! It almost deafens my ears and as I look back in the car – he shot himself. He killed himself to avoid being tortured later for losing the package, I can't save his life but he saved mine. Paramedics rush to my side and a stretcher is brought. They all work on me but I shut down. I shut down and let them do what they have to without fussing.

It is said that with every death there's rebirth. With every life taken, a life is given.

I wake in the hospital ward plugged in all the machine. The nurse takes out the breathing pipe and help me with drinking water. This is a private hospital and there's a security at my door and one standing by the window.

"Welcome back Ms Miller," she says

"Thank you. Can I please get an update?"

"The doctor was just here; you and the baby are doing just fine."

"The fluid? I felt it... it was wet and warm..."

"It was just that Ms Miller, fluid but there's no damage done to your baby and you. You do need to rest for a few days and take it easy," She gives me a small smile and I nod.

"My family?"

"Your husband is here, I can call him in,"

"Please, Please," I say almost teary. She walks out and in a minute, he walks in, He drops his shoulders as he exhales in relief with tears prickling his eyes. He looks like he hasn't slept for a long time.

"Hug me," I utter and open my arm wide for him. He takes two steps and envelops me in his arms. I let it all out and almost scream. He holds me tight and brush my back.

“You’re safe now. I’m here with you. I’m here with you sthandwa.” He tells me in a soft breaking tone, he pulls back and cups my face. He sniffs and kisses me ever so gentle, I return it, welcoming him with all of him. He communicates through the kiss... he is here. I am safe. I pull back and make space for him as he joins me in the bed and holds me closer to him. “they say the baby survived. We’re both fine but I need to rest. I want to go home Dali, please take me home.” I shiver and he holds me closer and kisses my forehead.

“That is good to hear. I’ll take you home, okay?” I nod and we sit in silence holding each other. The silence lasts a good minute. He holds me tight and I do too, it feels surreal, it feels like a dream.

His hand travels to my belly and he brushes it over the hospital gown. “I am sorry sthandwa. I am so sorry Lali,”

“There’s no one to blame but the ones who actually took me. We can’t blame ourselves Dali,” I whisper and he looks at me with his teary eyes. He pulls me in closer and I rest in his arms.

The most important thing in life are the people. As we make it back to the house, Lihla is holding me tighter than anyone has ever done. She is silently crying as Dali drives the car. Dali mentioned if there’s anyone who hasn’t slept a wink has to be Lihla, who for the most period of me being missing, she blamed him for not keeping me safe. I had to assure her multiple times

and let her know I am okay. We drop her off at work first before Dali drives me to the house. Not mine, his – which in his mind, it is ours. We walk in and all the furniture I helped him choose fit in the house quite well. It just needs some character. He leads me to the main bedroom upstairs. I look out the window as he runs a bath. He walks out of the bathroom and places his hand on my shoulders which caused me to jump and scream. He quickly let go and turns me to look at him.

“Lali, it’s me. You’re safe. I’m here,”

I breath quickens “Baby it’s me

can you see? You’re safe. I’m here”, “Dali,” I whisper and he nods.

“Your Dali sthandwa, you are safe with me okay?” I nod and he cups my face and kisses me.

He walks me to the bathroom, takes my clothes off and helps me bathe. My eyes don’t leave him, he keeps assuring me that I’m okay until I am dressed in his t-shirt and my underwear. He joins me in bed after the warm meal. He spoons me and keeps brushing my belly and giving me kisses. I can’t explain how I feel but it is safety, in the warm arms of Dali. He gasps out loud and I smile too.

“Baby, you felt that?” He asks in a shock mixed with happy tone. “I did, I did love,” I answer as I feel more kicks come. I

place my hand over his and direct him where they are more intense.

“Hi sweetie,” he says softly and I chuckle. I rest my head back as he is fascinated by everything.

“Yes... you both are safe now. Daddy’s here... Lali the baby’s talking to me,” I laugh and roll my eyes playfully. Men can really act tough but be the dumbest.

I slept peacefully that night with his arms wrapped around me. And kisses all throughout the night.

“Good morning, how are you feeling?” He asked smiling at me as the sun penetrated the windows causing his brown eyes to shimmer under the light. “Never been better. I missed you,” I say parting his legs mine and gently humping against him. He kisses me gently touching me in my spots. I release a soft moan and he groans.

“How would you like it?” He asks ever so gentle and I smile.

“Slowly, intimate... I need to feel you,” I answer him and he nods kissing me.

Dali is the man that delivers exactly what you ask, he has me in tears as I let go and scream at the orgasm overcoming me ever so intensely and beautifully. He also *cums* after me and then pull me closer to him while kissing me.

“I knew that letter was faked. I didn’t give up on you, I never did. Because you never give up on someone you love, you did that for me too. I can never stop loving you, it would be impossible. I went through hell searching for you in that entire hotel, I thought I was going to go mad! And when we found the location and saw that they moved you, I had no idea where to start looking...”

“I’m here now, I’m safe because you didn’t stop. I don’t want to focus on anything but you and me. Our marriage and our child, I want to focus on us and leave whatever happened in the past stay there, okay?” He nods and kisses me.

“I’m never letting you go,” He whispers. So am I.

The morning kicks comes and I pull his hand to feel it, he gets giddy and all excited like a child with a lollipop. We spend the day in the bedroom and as much as we said we didn’t want to talk about the kidnapping; we had to because there were things, we needed to understand with each other.

Dali confirms he knew Eliza’s husband but only because of Mam Brenda.

Dali had been approached by him multiple times for certain ‘jobs’ but he always turned them down. He never knew Thomas let alone Jason, he had nothing to do with their deaths. I also mention my past and everything I did but I don’t mention killing

Thomas, which will die with me. There are some things you just never mention to other people no matter how much you trust them. You lock it in your brain and don't even think about on a daily. We are people with flaws and a perfect person doesn't exist.

"We're starting over. This is us choosing to focus on the future we have with each other." I say to him as we kiss and hold hands.

"I'm hungry," I cry and he laughs out loud.

"Let's get up and get dressed my love, we'll make food together and tour the rest of the house." "That sounds good,"

I'm in all smiles and we do all that. I feel ready to spend a lifetime with this man, I love him but before we do that, there are some things that need to be done.

"I'm ready to meet her, can you arrange for it to be here?" I ask and he looks at me for a minute before he gets it.

"Are you sure?" I nod.

"I'll arrange it," He smiles and kisses my forehead.

She is here, she's sitting in the dining room waiting for me. My palms are sweaty, I've seen her pictures and we look fairly alike. I am shaking and Dali keeps begging me to just go, she won't bite.

"What if she rejects me Dali? What then? If she speaks to me rudely or anything of that sort, what do I even say. I can't do it baby, I can't..." He takes my hand and make me look at him. "You are an intelligent woman, okay? A smart woman and I love you very much. I would burn down this whole world for you. Don't back out now, you can't decide for her okay? I'll be here no matter how it goes,"

"I love you," I whisper.

"Not as much as I do, not go in there and talk to her," He plants a light kiss on my forehead before I walk from the kitchen to the dining table. The minute I walk she raises her head and looks up at me like she has an idea of who I am. Like she's known me my whole life and I'm returning home from school to find my mom sitting at the dining table.

"The man who called said he had found my daughter... I couldn't believe it, I..." she chokes and her eyes get teary. I walk up to her and she welcomes me in her arms. She gets up from the chair and brushes my back like a mother do. After all the

hugs I've ever received my whole life, they do not amount to the kind of warmth I am feeling in this woman's arms. I cry, I let it out. I cry for the young Nobulali who had to clean corpse the young Nobulali who wishes she knew her people. I cried for everything and she let me, she let me cry and kept brushing my back. She kept telling me I've come home and indeed I have. After what feels like forever, I pull back and look at her. She smiles at me.

"You look like a younger version of me," She comments wiping my tears, the sweet gentleness of her warm hands causes me to smile and feel like a little girl. She kisses both my cheeks and pulls me in her arms again, the kicks from the person growing inside of me are too intense that she feels them too.

"I think the baby feel very much neglected," I mention laughing.

"Can I touch your belly?" She asks and I nod.

"You don't even have to ask," I pull her hand and direct it where the kick hails from like I do to Dali.

"Hello baby," She says and the kicks come back again, it amuses her that she laughs and smiles.

"She's communicating," She says and I laugh at how she just decided it is a girl.

“What if it is a boy?” I ask and she shakes her head.

“Not at all, you are carrying a mini-you over here, this is a baby girl,” She giggles.

We walk to take a sit outside on the couch. The backyard is just green-grass. It is funny how I am meeting her and already she’s a grandma.

“I have questions,” I mention to her and she sips on the water and smiles.

“I know you do baby, I have all the answers,”

She reaches over her hand to touch mine as she begins to narrate the story. “You dad and I had been married for 5 years and you were our first baby girl, you were so plummy and beautiful. The most gorgeous little person I had ever seen and I loved you dearly, we both did. I wouldn’t leave your side, didn’t want you to cry, your dad thought I was getting too obsessed. It was funny you now, we would fight about who gets to feed you because we both wanted to do it, you were like this spark in our marriage. A spark we didn’t necessarily need until it was there.

The night of the car accident, I had sprained my ankle and couldn’t walk. I was already in the hospital and your dad was coming with you to fetch me, our babysitter unfortunately had a family emergency. It was raining, the roads were slippery and

as I am told, he collided with another car in the highway which caused a line of other cars being affected, it was such a big accident that... that the road had to be closed for 3-weeks straight. My husband was pronounced dead on the spot and I'm guessing, since the accident was so bad, they thought you had belonged to another couple who had passed on. That.... That day I lost everything I was living for.

It was the most painful day of my life and when I tried to find you, they told us that it is possible you burnt with the car as it exploded and maybe your ashes were washed down by the heavy rains. I still remember how I screamed on top of my lungs; I had lost everything. I tried taking my own life but I did not succeed, then they ultimately said I was a danger to myself and they checked me in to a mental hospital. I spent years of my life trying to deal with grief and I lost people. Friends stopped visiting, and people I thought were family distanced themselves from me. I don't blame them, I mean, why would you wait on someone who is not getting better? But eventually, I got better and was let go. I used the money we both had in joint accounts and renovated the house but even with all the construction and meeting Zuko, finding work and just coping again, I never touched the nursery. It is still as it was when you were a baby, the housekeeper goes in once a week to maintain it but me? I've never had the guts to."

By the time she is done, my eyes are burning with tears and I'm sniffing.

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serif; mso-fareast-font-family:"Times New Roman"> "Did they take care of you? Love you and give you everything?" she asks and for a minute I do not know. I do not know the kind of love the Millers gave me, they did to their best of their ability but hearing how she and dad loved each other with me, I just don't know anymore.

"They did the best they could but had their flaws. It was not simple but it was life and they were white – well off couple from Stellenbosch." I exhale and she nods. I also give her a history of my growing up with the Millers, I mention everything, even Naye but I leave out killing Thomas.

"Yes... we always kept your clothes with a sew-in tag of your name." She mentions as she smiles and asks me to tell her about Naye. And I do, I narrate my history for her so she can understand me and all that I am.

"I have a daughter and now I'm to be a grandma," she says as we watch the sunset causing the sky to be orange. We've been doing nothing but talking the entire day, the bond we have and the love was instant.

She understands me and keeps mentioning that she also had a girlfriend once upon a time but the girl broke her heart and married another girl. She tells me about what she like and doesn't, it feels like we needed each other. The timing and all were just on time. She is still concerned over the ramifications of me being kidnapped, she is concerned over the causality of things and that causes me to open up about it, tell her my truest honest feelings and they end with me lying on her chest being rubbed my back ever so warmly.

She doesn't make me showing affection to her weird, she is open, welcoming and total opposite of how I thought this would turn. I now have a mother and I get to tell everyone about that. Proudly.

When it gets too dark, we walk in the house and we have dinner with Dali. Their conversation picks up and they are laughing and telling each other silly stories. I am content and my hand goes to my belly again feeling the kicks, I smile to myself.

“Ma, do you do parties?”

She's taken aback at first and smiles.

“It feels good to be called Ma and I don't want to cry on this table so yes, darling, I do parties,” She has one of the gorgeous smiles.

“Dali and I just moved into the house. I was thinking of having family over and just have something to celebrate and introduce you to my friends, I don’t have a lot of them but having family over would be nice,” She smiles and nods.

“I would love that very much.” She says and I’m all giddy like a little girl. The child in me – not the one I’m carrying but the young me is happy, ecstatic and I feel like jumping.

After dinner we ask her to sleep over and she agrees but she first calls her man and let him know that she will be over at her daughter’s house.

“You look happy,” Dali mentions as we get the plates from the table.

“I am. I feel happy,” he smiles at my giddiness and kisses my forehead. I make us tea, Dali kisses me goodnight and head upstairs.

Ma asks if we could sleep in the same bed and I agree like I was waiting exactly for that but we don’t just sleep. We talk and laugh about everything the entire night; she tells me all her funny life stories and I tell her mine. We bond over our missed years and she kisses my forehead goodnight as we finally drift off to sleep.

The next few weeks are surrounded over me and her planning the party, she ends up staying the entire week at our house,

she helps me with decorating the house, teaches me how to care for house plants and baking banana bread. We shop together and she goes with me to my check-up, the doctors indeed confirm that I am carrying a baby girl and we smile at each other as that is confirmed. I'm given pregnancy tips and at every inconvenience, I'm calling her and asking for her advice. It is like we are riding our own wave until we turn and we have partners who are feeling neglected.

"We love you but we feel neglected," Uncle Zuko mentioned as he and Dali partner up on us. We also saw that we were spending way too much time together.

"We may have missed so many years with each other but no matter how hard we try we can never make up for them. Look how we've ignored the people we love in our lives, we found each other and We should look forward to the days we have other than trying to make up for the ones we missed. I love you darling and I am happy God brought you back where you belong," she said to me putting everything in perspective.

And from there we spent an hour on a phone call every day and meet on the weekend. I've visited her house, I walked in that nursery with her and saw a wall full of all the pictures they had taken. She said I could have it revamped for the baby but I told her we should keep everything as is, we will just change a few things. This will be the girl's bedroom when we visit her.

She has met Lihlangene and calls her a girl that is always on sugar rush with how hyper she always is, which is the exact way to describe Lihla.

“The lawyers called sweetheart,” Dali mentions as we both climb on the bed. “What did they say?”

“They were able to prove that Naye’s mother organized your kidnapping. She also confessed to everything she’s done,” he says and that is weird. Very much unlike her. “I don’t get it,” I say.

“Neither do I but apparently, word has it that the money is driving her insane thus she decided to confess to her crimes and is willing to give everything back. She was admitted at a mental ward a few days back,”

“What? You’ve got some news!” I laugh and he huffs.

“If you hang out with me more, you’d see I’m not just a serious person,” I throw my head back and laugh. He pulls me closer and hugs me tight.

“It is nice to have you back in our bed, Lali,” He kisses me and I snuggle closer to him.

I would still choose him over any amount of money because it will always return but not a love like I am getting from these people that are my family.

Everything we have been through, rose through has led to this defining moment. Right here where my husband has his arms wrapped around me in our backyard full of our close family and friends celebrating everything in life. There's music playing, children running around and a steam of braai meat followed by laughs going on. I lay my head to Dali feeling a cutting pain, I am due any day now and the pain keeps coming and going which is why I am leaning on him with my glass of ice-water. I wince and close my eyes. He keeps rocking lightly with me to the beat of the music playing.

“Are you feeling good?” he whispers and I nod.

“Yes, yes, sweetie.”

We hear the sound of glass for attention and Uncle Zuko is standing up there with his beer bottle.

“Fellows, we are gathered her...” Chuckles hits all from everyone in the yard. It is no doubt he is wasted.

“Zuko!” mom calls and he smiles lovingly at her. “I need to say a few words,” He says and my mom shakes her head but let him.

“We are gathered here in celebration of this family we've formed. I am very blessed to be a part of it. I found myself a beautiful flower in your Mother Lali, one of the best decisions

I've ever done in my life; it was to love your mom. I love her so much and my love extends to all of you here. Ay batwana basekhaya that is all I want to say. DJ play the music." Everyone erupts in laughter.

"Baby," I whisper to Dali and he kisses my cheek

"Love," he says as I feel the contractions getting intense, my water may break anytime soon and I don't want to ruin this party.

"We need to get to the hospital..." I whisper and he walks me inside the house. He taps Ma on the shoulder and she immediately attends to me as he goes upstairs for the bag. I kick the damned heels off me and hold on to the kitchen counter. She unlocks the door to the garage and walks me to the backseat. Somi walks and stands on the door and take one look at me.

"I'll keep the party going," she says and I nod at her feeling them coming hard. I hold mom and we wait on Dali for the hospital bag.

"Ma, this is painful!" I cry out and she brushes my back

"I know baby, I know darling, just keep breathing, okay? We're almost there,"

As the car move, they worsen and I let out wails and screams, cursing at everything on the way. I'm in labor and the pain is worse than anything I've ever felt.

I scream and curse as we reach the hospital. I am taken to the delivery ward directly as my water broke in the reception. They quickly set me up, reminding me to breathe. Dali isn't allowed in the delivery room; man have a tendency of fainting and they do not want that. Mom holds my hand throughout the delivery process which feels like I'm burning in a furnace and everything in me has shifted. I scream in pain but all they tell me is to relax, keep breathing and push. I am losing my brains at this whole process.

"We can see the head, please take a deep breath and push for us mommy,"

"You can do it darling, you can do it baby," I shake my head no and Ma holds my hand and brushes my forehead. "Breathe baby and push, okay? You can do this,"

I nod and comply with all in me, I go in again and at my last push I hear loud cheers in the room as a screaming cry of a tiny human being filled the walls of the delivery room.

I exhale and all I heard was "You did it darling" before I passed out.

I woke up to a sound of a crying human being in pink, Dali has her in his arms and trying to shush her, I remove the oxygen mask and try to seat up wincing in pain.

“Hey sweetie

you did it,” He smiles at me. “She looks exactly like you,” he says and he walks to me and as he hands her to me, I fall in love. She is the most beautiful little person; I am overwhelmed by emotions and look at him. He kisses my forehead.

“I passed out,” I laugh and mention to him. He kisses my forehead again,

“You did extremely well sweetheart,”

He sits next to me and hugs me “Look at our cute little family,”

I laugh. “That time we are clowns, now we have to take this stranger home with us?” I joke and he shrugs. “I guess so...”

“Where’s ma?” I ask looking around expecting to see her for some odd reason.

“I told her she could go home I can care for the baby and wait for you to wake up, she really wanted to stay. but I kind had to use a little blackmail which actually worked,”

“You and your tricks,”

We are so taken by our little human being. Watching her sleeps and wrapped in all those pink and white blankie with a name on her wrist tag; Nalilitha.

She's our ray of light. The person who brought brightness, she burns as the sun and she's strong like it at that. My tiny fighter with full cheeks. She does her little cry again. For a minute we're mesmerized by such a whispery cry that is so sweet. The nurse walked in and shakes her head.

"First time parents?" she asks and we both nod.

"She needs to be fed mommy," She says as I laugh while agreeing with her.

I position Nali and then watch her latch so gently on the nipples. She is already showing dimples. I gave birth to a beautiful human being. I'm a mommy to someone now, my sweet little best friend. I get discharged from the hospital after two days. Lihlangene, Somi and Ma cannot get enough of this little human being that they practically squat in my house for weeks. But I don't complain because I got to fully rest and heal while still having the energy to care for my baby with their help.

"I am in all the element of the earth..." I say out loud holding Nali.

“Mhhh,” Murmurs Dali, we’re standing by the window watching the sunset. It’s just the three of us this night, they have gone back to their houses. Nali turned 4 months last night and they all collectively agreed that the child is old enough now and we can manage. They really helped me and I am grateful but Dali and I also need time to figure out the parenting ourselves, we are parents after all.

“Baby you’re saying something?” He asks and I smile.

“Nope, nothing,”

I smile to myself and kiss Nali’s plummy cheeks.

Dali wraps his arm around my waist and kisses my cheek. Nali babbles something and we laugh at that.

“Baby Nali, what are you saying?” she babbles more excitedly stretching her arms out and almost jump out of my hands.

“Nali...” I softly call out and she babbles more spitting out baby saliva in our faces and we laugh. With every decision we have taken, it has all come down to this single moment of us watching the sunset with my husband’s arm around my waist and our babbling sweet honey of a baby.

“We should try for a sibling yazi,” He says and I give him the look.

“If you’re going to carry that sibling then you can go-ahead, I am not doing that shit again.”

He laughs hysterically throwing his head back.

“Okay. No sibling for Baby Nali,” He pulls her cheeks and she excitedly bounces.

“See, she’s happy being the only child,” I chuckle throwing it in his face. “We’re a little family,” He mentions and I look at him with a smile before resting my head on his shoulders.

“Just the three of us,” I say feeling a rushing warmth of content holding our little baby in her pink romper with bunny eyes. She has Dali’s eyes and mommy’s hair.

The joy this little person has brought in our lives is out of this world. Every day she does something else, you can never catch up with her.

FOUR YEARS LATER...

“Nalilitha! We’re going to be late for grandma’s party, what are you doing up there?”

“Coming Mommy!” Her sticky and whispery voice shouts and I huff. This child is going to make us all late and Dali isn’t even here I’m panicking. We were supposed to have left for the party an hour ago but my 4-year-old girl is being a diva. The door opens and Dali walks in while I’m packing Nali’s clothes. They are all over couch along with her toys and teddy bears. “Finally, you are here, we are going to be late for the party and your child here is being a diva,” I stress out sorting her clothes and stepping on the Legos.

“Ouch! Oh, my goodness, Nali! Legos in the box!” I am losing my shit trying to get everything in order and before I know it warm hands wrap around me from behind. I exhale and I lay my head back.

“This child is going to be the death of me” I call out, I can’t believe it took just one human being to bring this much chaos.

“Hey,” Dali whispers and for a moment, I relax and breathe out loud. “Hi,” I reply.

“Why don’t you sit down and I’ll get all of Nali’s things together?” He asks and I turn with my hands going over his shoulders. “I would love that very much,”

He presses his lips on my forehead and then down to kiss my lips, gently pulling my bottom lip. I release a moan and respond to him feeling every part of me getting heated.

“Daddy!” Nali calls from upstairs and we groan letting go.

“What’s a ‘just the two of us moment’ when you have a child?” I ask and he huffs before giving me a perk.

“Don’t let her get into your head baby. She finds joy in seeing you miserable,” I gasp and he laughs at me before stepping back and taking the stairs. One can never know with children.

I sit down and wear my shoes before packing the rest of all the things Nali’s taking to Ma’s house. “Guys, what’s going on up there,” I ask standing at the bottom of the stairs. “We’re coming sweetheart,”

I shake my head and look myself in the mirror. I look and feel great except for everyday being something new with Nali.

They finally come down the stairs and Nali has a totally different outfit from the one I had dressed her in. she’s wearing a pink tutu skirt with a white t-shirt.

White socks and the sneakers she never takes off. I breathe in and out. She's looking cute but I'm not going to give her the satisfaction of seeing me miserable.

"You are looking cute baby Nali," I smile and a face of shock overcomes her and she turns to look at Dali then back at me. That is my husband little baby, I was bound to know your secret. I laugh and take my purse and her backpack.

"Thank you Mommy," She says and pulls her Teddy. I exhale and look at Dali.

"Baby, get Daddy's keys," I say and she runs to the kitchen. Dali looks at me with eyes that are clearly undressing.

"You are looking beautiful and hot and... my goodness Lali!" He huffs I giggle.

"Look forward to your hands taking it off me this evening," I tease

"More like reaping it off," He whispers and growls leaving me amused. Nali bounces back with jiggling keys, she is really feeling her pink skirt. Dali pulls his cell phone out to take a picture of Nali.

"Baby Nali pose,"

We are indeed parents now. She hands me the keys before her dad snaps pictures of her doing multiple poses and being all giddy.

“Mommy, come,” She instructs me and I look at Dali, he laughs and nods. “Join in love,”

“Yes, come love please!” She says in her tiny whispery voice and we spend the next five minutes taking pictures and posing with this little human being.

The whole ride to Grandma’s house she is swiping through all those pictures laughing at each one she likes the most. Dali pulls my hand and kisses me at the stop sign, I glance over at him and we smile at each other. Our love for each other has grown because of this little human who sometimes sends me over the edge but we remind each other that she’s young and still figuring out things. She’s been quite somebody to raise.

We arrive safely at Ma’s place but terribly late. Everyone is here for the New Year’s Eve party. The moment we make it inside, Nali is sweeping everyone away. Uncle Zuko comes and hugs me, oh he’s already drunk. “Go check on your Ma, I think she thought you all were not coming.

She’s in her room,” I nod and then walk upstairs to her bedroom. I knock and walk in, she’s sitting on the bench by the window looking through a photo album.

The minute she sees it's me walking in she smiles but before I could say anything a little somebody rushes in and straight to grandma's arms. "Baby Nali," she cooed as she hugs her tightly.

"Hi grandma," Nali says with her sweet little voice, she cups Ma's face and kiss both her cheeks and grandma does the same for her. I just laugh and watch them.

"What is this?" Nali asks about the album. "Pictures of mommy when she was young, myself and grandpa"

"Mhh-hh, where is grandpa?" "Heaven sweetheart, with all the angels,"

"With Aunt Naye?" She asks ever so innocently and I feel tears prickle my eyes.

"Yes baby, with Aunt Naye..." She kisses her again and then Nali pulls the photo album and sits with it on Ma's bed looking through the pictures. She gets up and walks to hug me.

"I was getting worried," She says and I take her hands.

"She wouldn't leave the house without that skirt she's wearing. Dali had to intervene," She laughs and shakes her head. "Nali is one of a kind," she says.

She pulls Nali off the bed holding her in her arms as we head back to the party. It is everything and more, we take family

pictures, play games and listen to uncle Zuko tell his silly stories. I grab myself a glass of wine and as if he knew I was searching for him, an arm holds my waist and we walk outside to join the rest. "Do you two never get bored with each other?" Somi asks causing everyone to laugh

"They never, you'd swear they are glued together these ones," Lihla mentions and we all laugh shaking our heads.

"That is love right there, young man," Uncle Zuko mentions with his drunk-British accent. It always seems to pop every time he's rather drunk. He wraps his own arms around Ma's waist and kisses her on the cheek in all smiles. We stand around the bonfire as we begin to countdown to a New Year. We write our wishes for the New Year on a paper and the clock struck midnight, we burn them to the fire and wish everyone a new year as firecrackers sound at a distance. The wine is getting in my head and I'm searching for Nali... "Ma, where's Nali?" I ask

"She's sleeping baby, happy new year," She hugs and kisses me.

"Happy new year mommy, let me go and find that granddaughter of yours," I shout over the music and she nods as I go back to the house. I walk upstairs to the bedroom and the door is already open.

I find Dali kissing her forehead and tucking her in. Nali is terrified of firecrackers, I walk in too and close the door.

“Hey baby,” She smiles looking at me.

“The firecrackers are scaring you?” I ask as I sit on her bed and brush her forehead then kiss it. “It’s going to stop any minute now, try and get some sleep, okay? Where’s teddy?”

I ask and she points to her backpack. I pull teddy out and hand it to her to cuddle. “It’ll die down any moment, okay?” She nods and we sit there until she drifts off to sleep. We both get up and I stumble and she holds to the dressing table. He walks to my side and holds me as we exit silently and close the door. We lock hands and walk back to the party. We stand near the bonfire with me snuggled up to him. We share a kiss and my head is on his chest.

“To another year sweetie,” I whisper with my arms around his waist and his over my shoulders.

“To another year my love,” he replies with a smile and our lips meet as we get into a slow gentle kiss. It is heated and full of passion. We pull it off feeling our bodies getting heated. I turn facing the bonfire again “Don’t move just yet, okay?” He whispers and I chuckle pressing my butt on his hard-on.

“Lali...” He drags my name and I laugh

“I won’t move darling,” I say and my head rests on his chest.

Had anyone told me that coming to Port Elizabeth would end up in this manner, I wouldn't have believed them. I would have said there is no way I'm going to end up married and raising a child with a man who will sweep me off my feet the day I got in a wrong taxi. This love with this man is unending, it is gentle and with every low that we go through together; it is worth all that because at the end of the day, we will find each other. I wouldn't trade him for anything, he's mine and I would go to the ends and back for him because I know he wouldn't hesitate too. As the blazing furnace of the bonfire warms our faces, I am reminded that you can never figure out life. It is not a binary of either this or that. Life is not Black and White; it has colours and I found mine in him.

.....**THE END**.....

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