

Sequel to Inhliziyo Yami Yopha: My Heart Bleeds

Give Me A Reason

*I want you to love me like you do
her...*

By Zizwe

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Prologue

The weather is sunny today, confirming that it is the perfect day for him to bond with his kids before taking them to their grandparents' place tomorrow. He hasn't seen them in a while now and he misses spending time with them. Work has him travelling quite a lot lately and hopefully, that will soon come to an end.

He is fetching the kids from school and he can't believe just how much they have grown. It has always been a wish of his to witness them grow into decent human beings, which they are proving to be. The fact that one is already in Grade 8 while the other is in intermediate phase, makes him feel like an old man.

A call comes through on his phone forcing him to turn down the music, "Yes, Rosette?"

"Mayenziwe, how far are you from fetching the kids?", she responds on the other end of the call.

No pleasantries whatsoever.

He sighs, "I'm nearly there, I told you not to worry about them. I have everything under control."

"That's exactly what you said the last time before you turned into a ghost and didn't show at their school. You know why I'm being this paranoid, so excuse me for being concerned.", he can just hear the sarcasm in her tone.

"I know I messed up the last time but I promise, this time I really am picking them up. In fact, I am five minutes away from their school so don't stress.", he says.

She sighs softly, "Well good then. Please tell them to give me a call once they have settled in at your house. I want to wish them a good night."

"Sure.", he disconnects the call after saying their goodbyes.

He can't believe just how much the relationship between himself and his ex-wife, has turned into a brawl. Like something one would see on the Jerry Springer show. They are always at each other's throats fighting and one would swear they have always been like that. When in fact, they used to love each other more than they could both describe. But unfortunately, life happened and here they are now two kids later.

Great thing about combined private schools is, he doesn't need to make a lot of trips when he has to fetch them. They are both

in the same premises so he doesn't have to worry about being late to fetch the other kid from school. Just as he parks his car in the pick-up area, the bell goes off and he is glad that he is not forced to wait too long for them.

They know he is fetching them today so he doesn't have to stress about them searching for their mother's car instead of his. Approximately fifteen minutes later, he sees his daughter and son walking side-by-side searching for his car. Since it's busy and there are a lot of cars in the area, he decides to spare them the time of looking around. He gets out of the car and walks to them.

His son spots him first and his lips stretch into a smile almost immediately. It's been over a month since they last saw their father so this moment means a lot to them. It makes them feel loved and valued.

"Ndumiso, unjani? (Ndumiso, how are you?)" , Mayenziwe asks his son who looks excited to see him.

"I'm good dad and how are you? I missed you." , he says as they hug.

"I'm okay but I missed you and your sister way more." , he sulks.

Ndumiso finds this act amusing as he chuckles. Mayenziwe turns to look at his daughter who doesn't look like she shares the same sentiments as his son. Londiwe has always been

tough to please and he can't figure out if it's the older sister role she plays or if she is like that naturally.

"Londiwe.", he smiles at her.

Her blank face is immediately turned into a displeased one, "I told you not to use that name when we're in public."

He smiles, "I know and I'm sorry I just couldn't help myself. Can you give your daddy a hug please?"

She huffs, "Let's make it quick please, before all my friends spot me."

Mayenziwe doesn't further comment as he hugs her. Their hug lasts a minute too long before they pull apart. They then head to the car with their father holding their school backpacks. He loads them in the boot before making sure both his children are safely secured in their seats.

The engine comes to life as he drives off the school premises, "Do you want to play some music honey?"

The question is directed to his daughter, "No thanks."

He wants to ask her about her day at school but she inserts her earphones not minding them. Her behaviour makes him angry but he can't blame her since he is the one in the wrong. They haven't seen him in a while and that was after he made

promises to be there for them. It's his fault she's acting this way. He has to make it right before they go.

"Ndu, how was school?", he decides to ask his son.

"School was good. Dad, is it true that we will be moving to America with mom?", he asks.

This catches Mayenziwe by surprise, "Why do you ask? Do you want to move there?"

The boy shrugs, "I don't know

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I guess it would be okay as long as you come with. Mom said that we will move there by the end of the year and that we shouldn't tell you about it. Is it because you don't want to be with us?"

Now he's pissed, "Oh she did huh? Well, we are still discussing it boy and no it's not because I don't want be with you guys."

"Oh okay then. I was starting to think that you don't love us anymore.", he says.

"I love you and your sister more than anything in the world. And don't you ever forget that okay?", he looks at his son.

"Okay.", he nods.

"So tell me, what did you do today?", the conversation changes.

His son is oblivious to his sudden change of mood as he tells him how his day at school went. This is what happens when you have children with someone who has no respect about how you feel whatsoever, he thinks to himself. Rosette doesn't respect him and maybe it's time he shows her who he really is and get her off the 'White Privilege' stool she is boasting about.

She is the reason why they divorced in the first place and at this moment, he is grateful they are not together. Rosette has always liked making decisions by herself without consulting with him, and that resulted in them being toxic for each other. He is glad he divorced her because she is nothing but a pain in the ass.

"And dad, I have a soccer match this Saturday and I'd be happy if you were to come watch me play.", his son's voice snaps him out of his thoughts.

"Sure thing son, I will definitely be there cheering you on.", he smiles at him.

Ndumiso smiles back at him and he sighs. He has to deal with Rosette before his kids get shipped out of the country. That is one thing he won't allow to happen.

"Azi how could you do this to mom and dad? After all the warnings they gave you, you chose to defy them and now here we are.", Veronica gestures to the clinic.

She hates having to always bail out her sister out of sticky situations but she can't help herself. Azivaishe is her reckless 17 year old sister who chooses to constantly stress and defy their parents. She lives on the edge and always does things without thinking.

"Ndine hurombo chaizvo sisi. (I'm really sorry sister.)", Azi says looking away from her older sister's prying eyes.

"Usangoti sorry Azi. (Don't just say sorry Azi.) Your actions need to change because your words mean nothing if they don't. Look at where we are now. Do you even understand the concept of what we're doing here today?", Veronica is angry at her sister.

She has put her in a position she never thought she'd find herself in. Her heart is beating out of her chest at the thought of getting rid of a life, but she can't turn back now. Since they are in a private clinic and she has already paid for the services, she has no choice but to wait for them to be called in.

"I promise to do better from now on sisi. It is something that only ever happened once and I regret going to that party.", Azi says with her tone full of regret.

Veronic sighs, "I hope that's the case because I will not allow this to happen ever again. From now on, you stay home like a child that you are and focus on your books. Understood?"

Azi nods, "Yes, of course."

They sit in silence as they wait to be called in for their appointment. Both of them don't take notice of the receptionist who is giving them funny looks. Veronica is busy on her phone texting away while Azivaishe can't keep still. Her leg is bouncing repeatedly as an indication of being anxious. She's scared she might die on the table.

"The doctor is ready to see you now, you may both enter.", the receptionist says with her nose wrinkled and her mouth pinched.

Veronica notices this and can't help but to comment, "Maybe you should try focusing on your job lady and stop involving yourself in matters that don't concern you."

The lady is immediately embarrassed and says her apologies before the two sisters walk in. It's clear she knew what they came here to do since she is in charge of setting up appointments. But Veronica couldn't keep quiet while her sister is being judged by somebody else. Only she has the right to do that.

Two hours later they are out of the clinic and driving home. Veronica is ticked off and she wants to say what's in her heart. Yes a part of her feels sorry for Azi to have gone through such a procedure at a tender age but she did it to herself. After she was warned countless times about the consequences her actions might have, she carried on being a rebel.

Veronica sighs before turning to look at her sister, "I won't be able to bail you out of a situation like this ever again Azi."

"I know.", she sighs.

"Mom is dying and she doesn't need all this stress. You have to grow up because she is dealing with a lot already, and so is dad. That's the only reason why I won't tell them about this.", she says.

"Thank you and I promise, I will do better.", Azi says.

Veronica nods, "Are you in any pain?"

"No.", her sister replies.

"Good then. You won't limp when we get home.", she says as she manoeuvres through the streets of Sophiatown.

"Can't I stay at your place for a few days? I'll go back home after a day or two.", Azi begs.

"No! You are going to stay with your parents so you can help dad around the house.", she says feeling annoyed.

"But-", Azi tries to protest.

"But nothing. Come, let's go inside.", she says as she parks her car inside their yard.

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MAYENZIWE

Sorting out paperwork has to be the most exhausting to have ever been invented. Wait...was it invented? I guess I can't be too sure about that but still... it is tiring. I was away for one week and already I have a bunch of papers to sign before they get taken back to my team to look through.

It's almost lunch time and I haven't had anything to eat since morning. My stomach grumbles informing me of what I already know and so I decide to do something about it. Just as I'm about to pick up the phone to call in my PA, a knock on the door disturbs me. I tell whoever it is to come in and just the person I was looking for, walks in.

"Afternoon sir. Your friend Thalente is here to see you but I'm not sure if I should let him in since he didn't set an appointment.", she says.

I smile, "Let him in please. And can you please get us lunch. I haven't had anything since morning and my stomach is complaining."

She nods, "Of course sir. Anything else?"

"Please bring us juice as well, no alcohol beverages.", she jots down the information on her iPad and leaves.

Few seconds later, there's a knock on the door before it opens and Thamente lets himself in. He looks good other than the fact that his clothes are covered in grease and filth. I understand that he is a mechanic but he could have cleaned up before coming here. He has his own scrapyard back in Soweto and sometimes business is good.

"Macala. (Friend.)", he says as we shake hands.

"Ntwana yam'. (My friend.)", I smile at him.

"How are you?", he takes a seat on the chair opposite my desk.

"I'm good and how are you man?", I ask.

"Okay I guess. I'm just tired man and ngapha ne oledi alikho grand. (... my mother is not doing okay.)", he sighs.

His mother has a disability, she once had a stroke and it left her being dependent on others for basic things. She is immobile and it's a sad situation really. I know how stressful it has been for Thamente but he loves his mother and he is doing his best to take care of her with what he has.

"What's wrong?", I ask.

"She is not feeling well and I don't know what's wrong since she can't speak. I'm just tired bro and I don't know what else to do anymore. I don't make enough money to afford those damn specialists she needs. It's just a lot nje.", he sighs.

"I'm really sorry about this man.", I say.

That's the only thing I can offer him because if I offer to help financially, he gets angry at me. He is a very proud man and doesn't want to accept help even when he knows he needs it. There is nothing I can do to change his mindset, I've tried many times and failed so I'm just going to let him do things his way. When he seriously needs my help, he'll tell me.

He sighs, "Thanks man. Anyway, how have things been?"

Before I can reply, a knock disturbs us and my PA walks in with brown paperbags in her hands. She drops them on the table and leaves after we thank her. After years of working with this woman, I still don't regret having her as my personal assistant. She really knows what to get me and when.

"This looks good.", Thalente says as I hand him his food.

It's chicken wraps and bottles of orange juice to go with it. As well as muffins to help fill us up.

"It is good.", I smile at him.

"Why don't you just ask Veronica to marry you?", he laughs.

"What? Dude you are crazy. She's my assistant, nothing else.", I say.

"But you look like you want more macala. Remember, I know you.", he says.

"Well this time you are seeing things. Just shut up and eat your food.", I say playfully.

He chuckles before we start eating. The food tastes amazing that's for sure. Thelente is crazy, Veronica and I have worked well together for years now. And not once have I ever viewed her as more than just my worker. I don't want to complicate things and I believe she is the same way too.

Twenty minutes later, we have finished eating and we are just having a conversation about life in general. The office phone rings and I already know it's Veronica. She informs me that my business partner, Isisa, is here to see me. I tell her to let her through because I totally forgot about the meeting we scheduled for today.

"Isisa is here for a meeting so I guess we'll meet up some other time for drinks.", I say to my friend.

"Sure ntwana. Let me hurry up and leave before that psycho woman walks in on me seated.", he stands up and we shake hands.

"Fede. (Alright.)", I laugh.

Isisa has been asking him out and since my friend over here is not used to women making the first move, he can't stand it. He makes his way to the door and unfortunately for him

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Isisa is already standing on the other side. I don't say a word as I look at the two gaze into each other's eyes. I can tell my homeboy is uncomfortable but I'm not jumping in to save him.

He clears his throat, "Isisa."

Really? That's it? He could have done better than that but I guess he did something right as the lady is blushing.

"Thalente. Fancy seeing you here.", she says.

"It is and goodbye. I was on my way out. Mayenziwe, I'll see you around.", he turns to look at me before walking past Isisa.

"Sure.", I shout just enough for him to hear me.

Isisa walks in with a smile on her face, "So...your friend huh?"

"Yes, MY friend. How are you Isisa?", I stand to hug her.

"I'm great now that I saw my crush. And are you good?", she takes a seat.

I chuckle, "I am good. Let's get to work shall we?"

VERONICA

Being an errand girl is not exactly what I would call a career. The term 'personal assistant' is just another way to refer to someone as an errand person. You get sent around doing

meaningless stuff like getting someone food or making sure their children's dog is groomed.

Like I said, meaningless stuff someone could just do themselves but I'm glad I have a job. Especially with the things that are currently going on in my life right now, every cent counts. My mother is sick and is dependent on oxygen tanks to survive. I know that it's only a matter of time before she passes.

She has an ischemic heart disease which she got through her parents' genetics. This means there isn't enough blood supply pumping to the heart muscles because of the narrow heart arteries. It's hard seeing her bed-ridden because I am used to her doing things for herself.

Life had other plans because a few years ago she had a heart attack that made her symptoms progress. She now has Stage D and reduced EF meaning not even treatment can help her. We are waiting for the day she'll take her last breath and I can't even be there for her.

"Veronica, why are you stil here?", Mr Bhembe, my boss asks me.

I didn't even realise that it's way past my knock off time. Problems can really make one lose focus. I turn to look at him and he's looking at me as if I've lost my mind and maybe I have...a little.

"Sorry sir, I didn't take notice of the time. I'll leave now.", I get up from my chair and start packing my things.

"There's no need to be sorry Veronica. I just don't want you to leave here when it's dark. It's not safe.", he says.

"Yes I know and thank you.", I say finishing up.

If he calls me Veronica one more time I'll throw a fit because it's starting to get irritating. Mr Bhembe is a handsome man, I'll give him that but I'm not sure why he can't last in a relationship. It's sad to be honest and now he has all these millions of rands he can't even enjoy with a spouse in his life. It's true, God will never give you everything.

"Let's walk together since our cars are parked in the underground parking lot.", he smiles at me.

"Uh...I don't think that's a good idea. It might give people the wrong impression.", I say.

His eyebrows furrow, "And what impression is that Ms?"

I start chewing on my lip as I think of how wrong that sounds. If I tell him what I think then it might come across as if I want something between us to happen. This is the first time I've ever been in a position like this and I'm afraid I might say something that will cost me my job.

"That maybe...you and I are...seeing each other?", and now I stutter.

He does the unexpected and bursts into laughter, "That won't happen Veronica, a lot of people have left for their homes. And even if it did, it is none of their business. You and I know that that's not the case."

I decide not to object and nod. As we walk to the elevator, I notice how empty it is up here. Everyone has gone home and I must admit, I like the office better when it's empty. Once we are in the elevator, he decides to start a conversation. We usually talk about work or things I need to do for him, never about family. Today it's different as he tells me about his children.

"We're here now.", he says as the elevator door pings open.

"Oh yes we are. Well goodbye sir.", I say heading in a different direction from his.

"Let me walk you to your car.", he says behind me.

"Okay.", I can never stop someone from being a gentleman.

We get to my car and he waits for me to enter before he walks back to his. I wave goodbye at him as I drive out and he returns the gesture. The drive to my place is short since I live in Milpark whereas our offices are based in Sandton. My apartment is

clean, just as I left it in the morning. I don't know what I expected since I live alone.

I change out of my work attire and wear something more comfortable. There's not much to do since I am alone so I decide to put on my favourite series, 'The Good Doctor'. I love watching anything that involves showing the human anatomy.

Once I've finished eating, I text my sister asking her about things at home. She tells me that everything is okay except for mom's deteriorating health. I tell her that I'll come to visit them tomorrow before work and wish her a good night. As soon as the text is sent, I turn off the house appliances and go to sleep.

It's been a long day, like every other day before this one. Sleep will do me some good.

VERONICA

I woke up twenty minutes late today and now I'm stuck in traffic. Usually it takes me thirty minutes to get to work but I know today it will take longer than that. I blame that snooze option on my alarm for my being late. If it wasn't for it, I'd be at work already. Since the cars are moving slow, I decide to give my sister a call to notify her that I will see her later.

"Azivaishe.", I say as soon as she answers the call.

"Sisi please just call me Azi, you know I don't like the full name.", she sulks.

I laugh, "You are crazy. Your name has a beautiful meaning and it's time you embrace it, or else I'll tell dad you are ashamed of your roots."

Her name means 'God knows' and she doesn't like it because it's in Shona. I think it's because it is in contrast with her behaviour or her way of living. God knows she does nonsense but that doesn't stop my sister from doing as she pleases. But she's been doing better ever since we got back from the clinic.

She sighs, "Whatever. Are you nearby? Should I open the gate for you?"

"No actually, that's why I called. I woke up quite late so I'll see you guys later, okay?", I say

She's quiet for a few seconds, "Okay then but please make sure you hurry. I want to tell you something about...what I did at the clinic."

She still can't say abortion but I understand, I find it hard to say the word myself when we're talking. If it was me, I'd understand but she's still so young. Hopefully she learnt from her mistakes.

"Alright then, I'll see you later. Oh and I'll bring you guys takeaways later on. So there's no need for you to cook.", I reply.

"Thank you and we'll see you later on then.", she says.

"Bye.", I disconnect the call.

Traffic picks up and I'm able to move through without any hassles. I get to the parking lot and luckily, Mr Bhembe's car isn't parked in his usual spot. Meaning he isn't here yet so I hurry and find parking before he gets here. The elevator is in use so I have to wait for a minute or two before I can use it. By the time I get to my desk, I'm already sweating profusely.

Mr Bhembe has a meeting with the CFO and his business partner, Isisa. She's such a nice woman and well, I understand why their partnership has worked out so well even after so

many years. If I'm correct, her and I are around the same age so it's really great seeing a peer be so successful.

His office door is still shut so I rush trying to get my things in order. I need to prepare the boardroom for the meeting they'll be having this afternoon. I start off by making myself a cup of coffee then I go back to my desk to fire up my laptop.

"Ms Sibanda.", his voice pulls me from my work mode.

"Mr Bhembe, sir. Good morning.", I respond with a smile.

He returns the gesture, "I've been telling you to use my first name Veronica. Call me Mayenziwe, please."

"I'd rather not. And plus, you referred to me with my maiden name."

"That's because I knew you wouldn't use my first name. Can I get an update on today's proceedings please?", he says.

"Sure let me grab my tablet and I'll come through to your office.", I say.

He nods and walks inside. I grab my items and walk inside making sure I shut the door. He loves his privacy and I've learnt to do as he requests because well...he is my boss. The man is huge, I can tell he goes to the gym more than necessary. His back is turned away from me and he's still taking off his jacket.

I honestly wouldn't mind having a man like him but unfortunately he is my boss and I could get fired for even having such thoughts. Oh, oh...I'm caught looking at him in ways that I shouldn't be when he turns abruptly. His face is blank so maybe he didn't notice?

He chuckles, "You look constipated. What's wrong?"

Me? I look constipated? This man is starting to lose his mind. But I'll take constipation over lust any time of day. I really need to work on my timing of being infatuated.

"I don't.", I say defensively.

"But you can't see yourself now can you, I see you. And I'm telling you that that's how you look.", he smiles and sits on his chair.

I huff, "Okay then if you say so. Can we get back to the reason why I'm here in the first place? Update?"

He sighs and nods, "Give it to me."

"This afternoon you have a meeting in the boardroom to discuss your plans on where you want your plantation establishment to be. It will be you, Isisa, as well as the CFO. You will discuss what it is you want to plant there.", I say.

"I think maybe sugarcane and vegetables are what we need to focus on now. The best place to have those done is in Swaziland.", he suggests.

"But I thought you still had to discuss the place with your partner."

He smiles at me, "Isisa won't mind, she knows I usually take executive decisions since she is away most of the time."

"Okay then

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I'll start searching for land in Swaziland."

"We will be travelling together once again so can you please get someone who will translate for us? I don't want a repeat of what happened in Sudan.", he chuckles.

We hadn't organised a translator since none of us knew how to speak Arabic. What made it worse was when the internet connection was poor and we couldn't make other means of communication. I don't know what we expected seeing that we were in the farms. But at least by the end of our visit, we had accomplished what we wanted to do.

"There won't be a need for that. I am Swati so we won't get lost in translation.", I say proudly.

It feels good being of use to my boss other than running errands.

"Really?", he is surprised.

"Yes I am."

"How? I mean...don't get me wrong, but I thought you were Shona."

"I am. My father is from Zimbabwe and my mother is Swati. Let me get back to work and I'll bring you plans of sites that are suitable for what you are planning.", I get up from my seat.

He says, "You surprise me all the time Veronica. Well alright then, I'd appreciate that. Can you please get me a cup of coffee to get me started?"

"On it sir! Anything else?"

"No and thank you."

I leave his office feeling excited. These trips I've been tagging along on, are my escape. They give me joy because I get to escape my sad reality, that my mother is dying and that there's nothing I can do about it. Of course I feel guilty when I'm away but I try not to let that get to me.

Once I'm done making the cup of coffee, I take it to him and settle back on my desk. There's a lot I still need to do and such little time to cover it. I immediately start doing my research on

the best areas suitable for agriculture in Swaziland. I have to keep on narrowing it down because most of the places aren't for sale.

My phone rings and it's my friend Mantwa, "Hello?"

"Friend, are you free for lunch?", she shoots straight to purpose of the call.

"Yeah sure, I am. Want to meet up?", I ask.

"Yes. I'll send you the details of the place and we'll meet there. See you!", she responds.

"Okay cool!", I say.

MAYENZIWE

Getting into Agribusiness wasn't my first choice, I always imagined myself as a doctor. After doing my matric I got accepted into university for the course of my choosing but it was hard work. So one year after studying to become a doctor, I changed courses and went into studying agriculture.

I'm glad I chose agriculture as my second option because today I am where I am because of it. My father was proud of me, way more than my mother was and I guess it's because I learnt something from him. He has his own farm back at home le

KwaZulu, Estcourt to be exact. And all I can say is, farming is a lot of work and needs a lot of patience as well.

The meeting with my team starts in the next fifteen minutes so I gather my things preparing to leave. Just as I put my Wifi dongle in my laptop bag, someone barges into my office. I'm about to shout when I realise who it is...Rosette. This woman has no respect to be honest because how can you just barge into someone's space like that.

I see Veronica behind her and she looks pissed and frustrated, "Sorry sir, I tried to stop her but-"

"Don't worry Veronica, I got it from here. You can shut the door on your way out.", she nods and leaves.

Now I'm left with the mother of my kids who is breathing heavily, "Rosette, how can I help you?"

"You told Shaun we won't be moving to America!?", she's fuming.

Oh...that's what brought her here. I expected her to do this way sooner than this but I guess she just heard the news.

"Ndumiso is my child sisi and I told him the truth. If you want to move, move. But my children aren't going anywhere.", I say with glazed eyes.

"We'll see about that Mayenziwe. My father will get his best lawyers on this case.", she spits.

"Alright then. If you are involving lawyers already, then bring it on. I'm not scared of you or your family Rosette. Those are my kids and they will live closer to their father. And that's a promise.", I say nonchalantly.

I don't have time for her drama, honestly.

"Fuck you Mayenziwe! You hear me!? You are nothing but a bastard and I swear, you will never see those kids ever again. I promise you!", her nostrils dilated and she bangs on the desk.

I'm doing my best to keep calm, "Akunankinga ke mawabo. (There's no problem then their mother.) Now if you don't mind, I have a meeting to attend shortly. Be a darling and give me space, would you?"

She looks shocked but reaction I can tell but like I said, I'm not in a fighting mood, "This isn't over Mayenziwe!"

I keep quiet and wait for her to leave. As soon as she's out of the door, I sit back on my chair and exhale. Rosette is starting to become a problem and now she's going to involve her racist father. That man has never liked me for his daughter so this will be a good excuse to fight me. I need to start looking for a great lawyer.

I sigh. This is going to be tougher than I thought.

VERONICA

Lunch with Mantwa was good, even though she seemed a little off. I asked her what the reason was and she said that she was having it hard at work. I understood, working in retail is always stressful. And most of her work requires her to get sales in order for her to get a commission. It's not an easy job that's for sure.

By the time lunch ended, she looked a lot better and I was happy for her. I had to rush back to the office after that, even though I wasn't keen about it. Hearing Mr Bhembe getting disrespected by his ex-wife like that was...embarrassing. I felt embarrassed on his behalf because I heard the entire conversation. And I'm sure everyone else on the same floor did too.

The gate is closed when I get home so I call Azi to come and open up for me. She comes out of the house in her onesie pyjama and opens up for me. I drive in and park inside the yard since my father's car is in the garage. Too bad it's small to fit in both cars. I get out of the car with the two Steers paperbags in my hands and my sister rushes to grab them.

"Wow! Not even a 'Hello sister, how are you'? So much for caring.", I sulk.

She smiles at me, "Sorry. Hello sisi, how are you?"

"I'm well thanks and how are you doing?", I lock the car doors and we walk to the house.

"I'm okay but I missed you. A lot.", she sighs.

I smile, "I missed you too little sister. Tell me, where are your parents?"

"They are in their room as usual. We haven't been able to bring mom out to sit in the living room with us. Her body is a lot more painful now and she can't stand the couch. She says it's uncomfortable.", she sulks.

I can tell that this is taking a toll on her and I'm just sad I can't always be here. I HAVE to work seeing that I'm the only employed person in my family. My father retired from work so he could take care of my mom full time but he still has some of his retirement funds being paid out in small portions every month.

"Well let me go and see them. Take care of dishing up for us, will you?", I say.

"Of course.", she says.

I make my way to their room and I knock twice before I finally let myself in. My mother is laying in bed with an oxygen mask over her mouth and nose. She looks so frail and pale.

"Baba, mama.", I say walking further into the room.

My father's lips stretch into a smile, "Mwanasikana wangu, how are you? (My daughter,...)"

"Father, I am okay and how are you?", I help him sit back down on his chair.

He exhales sharply, "I am okay my sweet child but I can't say the same about your mother. She is really struggling."

"I have heard dad. Let me talk to her.", he nods and leaves me alone with her.

"Make, unjani? (Mom, how are you?)", I already know the answer but it wouldn't hurt to ask.

She smiles at me and takes off her mask, "I am okay my child. You look beautiful."

I can't help but smile myself, "Thank you mama. Have you had anything to eat? I brought some chicken and buns, I could warm it up for you if you'd like."

She chuckles, "Don't worry about me sweetheart, I've already had something to eat. Your sister made some oatmeal for me since it is the only thing other than fruits, that I can stomach."

I nod, "Okay then. I just wish I could do more to help you mama."

I really wish I could. Not a day goes by without me thinking of how much I have failed her and dad as their first born.

"Hey now...don't start thinking like that. We all know that there's nothing anyone can do at this point and we all need to accept it. I have, and your dad as well. You and your sister need to start coming to terms with my situation. I'm dying, make peace with it and let me go.", she says in laboured breaths.

"Ma-"

"Please mntanami. Ngyati kona kutsi kunzima but I am not at peace here. (Please my child. I know that it's hard but I am not at peace here.) Every waking day, I'm in pains and I just can't take it anymore. You have to let me go."

"Save your breath mama, you can't be tiring yourself like this.", I wipe the tears that have wet my face.

"But-", she wants to argue but I'm not in the right head space anymore.

"Let me go and check if dad has already got his plate of food. I love you.", I get off the bed and kiss her forehead.

I make sure that her oxygen mask is placed properly on her face before bolting out of the room. The passage is clear so I take this moment to dash to the bathroom to have a little crying session. Her body will give in soon and she'll be gone forever. It's a hard pill to swallow, I won't lie.

After my 'session', I head to the kitchen to fetch my plate and head to the living room. My sister and father are laughing out loud, at something playing on TV I suppose. I join them with my plate in hand and I sit beside my sister as we watch whatever is playing.

Once we have finished supper, my father bids us goodnight before going to his room. We then decide to switch off the TV and wash the dishes. Not much is said as we do that but it's not uncomfortable. I guess we are both lost in thoughts.

"So...there's something I want to tell you but I don't know how you are going to take it.", my sister says.

We are in her room now

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we used to share it when I lived here but she has it all to herself now.

I frown, "And what could that be? Are you pregnant again?"

A scowl is immediately plastered on her face, "No Veronica. Is that all you could think of, really?"

"Okay sorry, but I was just asking. What is it?", I reply.

She takes a deep breath and exhales, "The thing is...the boy I told you about...about him being 17? Well actually I lied."

"Oh wow! Okay. Then how old is he?"

She's a little hesitant to speak but eventually she does, "He is not really a boy...he's 27."

I burst into laughter thinking she's joking, "Stop! You know it's not good to joke like that and besides, why are we talking about this? You said you told him about the baby and he denied it and told you to get rid of it. Right?"

Her eyes don't meet mine as she tries drilling a hole into the floor, "Right but I'm serious sisi. He's twenty seven years old and the reason why I'm bringing this up now is because he wants his child."

I am rendered speechless as what she says sinks in. Azi really wants to kill our parents.

"You are lying to me Azi."

"I'm not sisi. I'm so sorry. Please forgive me?"

"So you dated someone who is even older than me? Are you crazy Azi? Do you ever think before doing something? Worst of all, you lied to me about his age.", I feel my anger rising.

"Sisi I-"

"Shut up! Just...shut up. Your silly boyfriend wants his so-called 'baby' now that you've got rid of it? He is crazy! Give me his numbers and I'll call him.", I say feeling frustrated.

"He is a very dangerous person Vee and I don't want you to get hurt.", tears are on the verge of falling down her face but I'm too angry to care.

"Give me his numbers Azi and YOU, delete his contacts. I'll deal with him.", I say sternly.

She nods and gets busy on her phone. This child always puts us in unnecessary situations.

MAYENZIWE

"I don't know what else to do now baba. She won't let me take the kuds without throwing any nasty comments or anything of that sort. Manje ufuna ukuhamba nabo baye le phesheya. (Now she wants to take them with overseas.)", I sigh.

The first thing I did, when I got home was to call my father. The stunt Rosette pulled today was the last draw and I'm serious about taking full custody of my children.

"Hayi cha, kona kubi. (Yes that is indeed, very bad.) But you have to be rational with any decision that you take because she is the mother of your children after all.", he says.

My father is a wise man and I know for a fact he would never lead me astray. Everything that comes out of his mouth is

profound and has depth to it. That's why I'm willing to listen to his advice and take it into consideration.

"Kodwa uMayenziwe ngam'tshela ngalesi shwapha waye shade naso. (But I warned Mayenziwe about that flat ass girl he chose to get married to.)", my mother's loud voice is heard as she pitches in.

"Awukahle mkami. (Hold on my wife.) Can't you see our son is hurting?", my father defends me.

"I can see very well myeni wami kodwa umfana WAKHO must be to be told when he was wrong. (I can see very well my husband but YOUR son...)", she continues.

"Mama I know I did this to myself but can't we at least focus on getting me help now. I need a good lawyer, matter of fact...I need a great lawyer. Rosette and her family are going to go all out once I fight for custody.", I sigh.

This matter is weighing me down honestly. I never thought we'd find ourselves in such a position, especially since the kids are involved. After so many years of our co-patenting, she wants to ruin things just when things were working out well between us.

"Othi ngikhulume naye baba. (Let me speak to him baba.)", I hear my mother say. "Mayenziwe?", she says audibly.

"Ma?", I reply.

"What kind of a businessman doesn't have a lawyer? Are you crazy wena mfana? (...you boy?)", she is irritated I can just tell from the tone of her voice.

"Hawu ma, of course I do have a lawyer."

"Ntlwayi ma yani? (Hawu ma for what?) I'm just asking.", she mocks me.

"Then what is the problem son?", my father's calm voice asks.

I sigh, "Siyabonga is out of the country baba and he won't be back any time soon. He is the best lawyer I know here in SA but since he's out of the country, I don't know who else is a perfect pick."

"Why don't you ask him to refer you to someone as great as he is? It will save you the time of searching and what-not. You have kids that need your attention, remember that.", my mother says.

My mother is harsh, always has been. But she loves and cares for me so much, that I know. And I know she loves her grandchildren too so that's why her comments never bother me. I guess I'm just used to her.

"Yeah I guess you are right mama, thank you. I didn't even think of that.", I say honestly.

"Yes just like you didn't think when I told you to stay away from that woman you call an ex-wife. Should I find a beautiful young maiden for you here in the village?", she says something so...unexpected?

"No mama I don't want you to organise anyone for me. I am still busy with work and this new land I'm trying to purchase.", I say.

That is another thing that is going to delay me from taking the kids.

"And how is that going?", my father asks.

I say, "It's going quite well I guess. Next week, Veronica and I are going down to Swaziland to see if we can find what I'm looking for. Hopefully all goes well and we'll be back in a day or two."

THALENTE

"Ma oledi ngiyabuya, ngisaya emall ngiyo dopa dopa izinto nyana for la edladleni. (Mom I'm going out, I'll be back I'm just going to the mall to buy a few items for the house.)", I say kneeling in front of her.

Her eyelids flutter repeatedly as a way for her to inform me that she understood the message. I give her a kiss on the cheek before standing up and making my way out. Nokuzola, my female friend is here to take care of her while I run errands.

"Hey! So listen, I'll be back in an hour or two. I just need to take care of a few things first.", I say to her.

She smiles, "No problem lover boy. Take all the time you need."

I chuckle, "See you when I get back."

I leave the house and drive down to the only mall I know best, Westgate mall. It is always busy but I don't mind because I need the distraction any way. Business has been very slow lately and I'm not sure if I'll be able to keep it open for the next couple of months to come.

I am torn between stealing cars to make a living or robbing banks. What I do know is that the life of crime is what I was meant to do. I've tried making an honest living but that alone

won't get me what I need. My mother needs special attention, one that she won't be afforded at a public hospital.

Mayenziwe has advised that I take her to a hospice, which I have considered. But the only problem with that is I can't afford a private one. Not that there is anything wrong with the public ones but I just feel like the woman who gave birth to me deserves more.

The mall isn't packed when I get there so I move around with ease. My first stop is at Dis-Chem to buy more of her adult diapers. She uses them since she can't function properly. I don't struggle in finding them so I am able to move to another store to buy food and toiletries.

Once I've finished I push the trolley to the parking lot and my phone rings forcing me to answer it and it's Nokuzola.

"Sho?", I say as soon as I answer.

"Thalente where are you?", she asks.

"Hawu, what kind of question is that? Didn't I say that I'm going somewhere?", I say unloading the items in my boot.

She scoffs, "You did but this is a serious matter. We just took your mother to the clinic since she looked a little off but when we got there, they said it's a matter that needed the hospital. So I wanted to know which hospital we should take her to. Should we take her to Baragwanath?"

When I left her, she didn't look like she was in any pain. And now all of a sudden she's...sick?

"Thalente? Are you still there?", her voice draws me in.

I clear my throat, "Yes...yes I'm still here. Take her to Tshepo Themba Private Hospital. I will meet you guys there."

"That hospital is expensive Thalente, are you sure?"

"I am sure God damn it! Get my mother to the hospital now.", I disconnect the call.

Once I'm sure I've packed all the groceries in the boot, I get into my car and drive off. The drive isn't that long so I make it to the hospital in less than thirty minutes. I don't check if the car's ignition is completely turned off as I bolt out of the car and run to the entrance.

"Where's my mother?", I ask the receptionist panting.

"Good afternoon sir. Would you please give me her name and surname so I can locate her for you?", she speaks through her nostrils.

You can just tell she's well-learned and that she went to a private school.

"Her name is-", a voice calls out to me before I can say.

I see Nokuzola make her way out of the passage towards me. She looks exhausted, nothing like how she was a few hours ago.

I turn to the receptionist, "Thank you so much Miss.", I meet Nokuzola halfway. "Where's my mother and how is she?"

She gives me pitiful eyes, "She is stable for now and the doctor is still busy with her. They said we should wait while they examine her. And you need to fill in her forms because her information is needed."

"Oh okay then. Do they at least have any idea what it might be?", I feel defeated.

"I heard one of the nurses say it could be another stroke but they can't be too sure. Come, let's go and sit in the waiting area.", she pulls me with her.

I see her father seated on one of the chairs and I greet him then sit down with Nokuzola next to me. She's acting really clingy right now with her hand in mine. I'd tell her where to get off but her father is here.

"Family of Jacobeth Sithole?", a man in a white coat calls out.

I immediately get on my feet, "Sure, that would be me mfethu. (...my guy.)"

He frowns, "And how are you related to Mrs Jacobeth Sithole?"

"I am her son ndoda. Just give me the news. How is my mother doing?", I'm getting irritated.

He sighs, "She is stable for now but I'm sorry to say that she had another stroke. One more severe than the last one which had damaged her left side of the body. This time around, her entire body is affected. She will need to have decompressive hemicraniectomy surgery done."

Those were a lot of words for someone who isn't educated like me.

I am forced to ask, "A deco- what now?"

"There's a lot of swelling in your mother's brain and she needs to have surgery to reduce the pressure it's causing against the skull.", he gives me a sympathetic smile.

He could have just said that in the first place.

"Alright then, do it."

"Well sir, we can't just do that. You need to fill in the paperwork and pay for the surgery in advance before we can start working on her.", these bastards are always looking out for their pockets.

"Like I said wena bhantshi

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do the surgery and I'll take care of the payments. How much are we talking?", as long as it's in the ten thousand range, I can afford it.

"Twenty eight thousand rands for the surgery excluding her stay here.", he says.

Well...that I did not expect.

"Haibo! You guys are scammers. So much money for a mere surgery.", my self-appointed advocate Noku says.

"Prepare for the surgery, I'll get you your money.", I say.

"Thalente? I thought this was you.", an all too familiar voice says from behind me.

ISISA

Time really flies when you are having fun. Phumelele, my friend of many years and I, were having lunch in her office. We rarely spend time together since her job keeps her busy and she hardly gets days off where they are suitable with mine. So I decided to come and see her today.

"Goodbye friend. Hopefully we'll see each other soon.", she says as we hug each other goodbye.

"I hope so too. I love you okay? And take care of yourself.", I say.

"I love you too and take care as well.", we hug one last time before I leave.

I get out of the office and walk down the hallway. Cries of people who have lost their loved one's are heard and the strong smell of medication. That's why I don't like hospitals, yes lives get saved here but they are also lost. It brings back really painful memories for me, ones I would rather forget.

Just as I'm about to turn around the corner, I spot someone who looks like Thallente. The physique looks exactly like his, I mean I can spot those broad shoulders and melanin skin from anywhere. He is a manly man, one that I've been trying to get in between my sheets for a long time now. I do the unthinkable and approach him.

Even when he is faced away from me, I can tell it's him. I wonder what brings him here.

"Thallente? I thought this was you.", I say when his voice confirms my suspicions.

He turns to look at me, "Isisa."

It's time he stops calling out my name like that. The only time that will be acceptable is when he is about to climax and the

only word that comes out of his mouth is 'Isisa'. Now THAT, that would be a day to remember.

"What are you doing here? Is everything okay?", I ask feeling concerned.

I've had my fair share of playing around and being with different men but when I'm in his presence, something is different. If he were to ask for my hand in marriage, I'd probably say yes. He makes me feel...weird.

He sighs, "It's a long story."

"Well good thing I've got time then. Come, walk me to my car and so you can tell me all about it.", my eyes land on the young woman standing not far away from him.

She looks livid, like she could just burst right now and cuss at me. Since I don't know her, I don't bother saying anything to her so my eyes settle on my future husband again. He looks like he's having a battle between his heart and mind as he makes a decision. I guess he settles when he walks to where I'm standing.

"Thalente uyaphi? (Thalente where are you going?)", the little miss asks.

"I'll be back Nokuzola.", my man says.

We leave her looking dumbfounded and walk to the parking lot. Not a word is said as we make our way to my car. He looks stressed and I'm getting stressed myself. My feelings for this man confuse me. We get to my car and I tell him to join me inside.

"Beautiful car.", he says relaxing on the seat.

I drive a GLC 300 Coupé, Mercedes-Benz. Of course it's a beast.

"Thank you.", I say genuinely. "What's wrong? You don't look like your usual self."

If anyone were to ask me what his usual self looks like, I wouldn't have an answer. I just know it's not like this.

He takes a deep breath, "Kuningi Isisa. iOledi lami alikho grand. (There's a lot going on Isisa. My mother is not doing good.)"

My eyebrows pull together, "What? Is she going to be okay?"

"For now she is but if I don't find money for her surgery any time soon I don't-", tears flow down his face.

I've never seen a man cry in real life, "How much is it?"

"Twenty eight grand. Angazi nokuthi ngizothi ngizoyifuna kuphi leyo mali. (I don't even know where I'll start looking for that much money.)", he rubs his eyes in frustration.

Seeing him like this hurts me and that's why I can't help myself,
"I'll borrow you that money."

His head snaps to my direction, "What?"

I can tell he's shocked, and so am I but I'm confident about this. I want to help him and no, I don't want anything in return. His tears set me off and I can't explain why. So I want to help him, hopefully he will accept my offer.

I nod and smile at him, "I want to borrow you the money for the surgery. No strings attached."

MAYENZIWE

We landed at King Mswati III International Airport a few hours ago. It wasn't a struggle getting from the airport to the Bhubesi Camp which we'll be staying at for the next three days. I don't want us to spend a lot of days here since I need to do things back home. Ndumiso has a recital I need to attend and I can't miss it.

"Sir, we will be leaving at 08:45 tomorrow morning to meet the owner of the plantation site. From there, we need to see another potential seller in case the one we will be seeing first, decides to change her mind.", Veronica says as she goes over tomorrow's plans with me.

I nod, "Alright then. I suppose we will still have enough time to do other things after that. What will it be?"

"I don't know sir. I haven't checked for any activities that weren't work related. I will get right on it and search if I can get anything for you to do while you're here.", she notes down on her gadget.

"It's for us both.", I say.

She lifts her head to look at me, "Excuse me sir?"

I chuckle, "You are going to look for something we both can do. I do things with you."

The emphasis on the word 'we' has her giving me a quizzical look. I mean it though. It wouldn't make sense for me to go out and do all kinds of activities without the only person I came here with, beside me.

I don't know if she's bored or what but she doesn't look pleased, "Alright we will do things your way Mr Bhembe."

I have given up on trying to stop her from referring to me as Mr Bhembe. It's annoying but she doesn't care.

"You can say no if you don't want to join me Veronica. This is not a part of your job so you are not forced to come with me.", I say softly.

"I didn't say I don't want to join you Mr Bhembe, of course I want to. I will take my leave now and I'll see you in the morning.", she leaves just after saying that.

I don't really understand Veronica and maybe that's because I haven't given myself enough time to get to know her. She has been working for me for the past six years now and all I know is that both her parents are still alive and that she only has one sibling. Other than that, I'm clueless. Maybe it's time I start being attentive to those around me.

I take out my phone and dial Thalete, he picks up on the third ring.

"Sho ntwana, z'khiphani? (Sure man, what's up?)", he says.

"Nothing much ndoda I was just checking in to see how you're doing.", I say.

He sighs, "My mom got discharged from the hospital today and she's home now. She is still in pain but I'm hoping she'll get better with time."

"She will, I believe she will. If there are any changes, let me know and I'll be there in a split second."

"I know ntwana and thank you. Look, I am still busy fixing up someone's car we'll talk later."

"Of course. Later.", after the call I decide to send goodnight texts to my children.

Each of them have cellphones so I don't have any troubles reaching them. After that, I decide to take a nap just so I can rest. There's a lot that I need to do and all of it needs my focus.

ISISA

Today I decided to pay my family a visit. I always make time to visit but since this month has been quite busy, I just hadn't

found the right time for it. With Mayenziwe meeting up with the land owner today, I just couldn't sit idle in the office. So here I am in my parent's house in Westcliff.

"Hello? Is anybody home?", I yell as soon as I walk inside.

I know my parents are home but I just don't want to find them in any compromising situation. It would be weird and totally uncomfortable for me.

"In here sweetheart.", my mother's voice calls out.

By 'in here' she's referring to the living room and I find her cuddled up to my father. They make such a beautiful couple and I can only hope that one day I will find myself a partner who will love me as much as my dad loves my mom.

"How are you Mrs Jackson?", I tease my mother as we hug.

She hates it when I refer to her using her surname because it makes her feel like she's less of a mother. The reason why she even feels that way is because they adopted me when I was 14 years old. It's a long story as to how and why they took me in but they've loved and cared for as one of their own ever since.

"I told you to stop that Isisa.", she sulks as we pull away from each other.

"Sorry mother, it won't happen again.", I giggle.

"How are you baby?", my father asks kissing my cheek.

It was so hard at first for me to have a male figure who shows you affection and not in a perverted way. There was a time when I didn't trust to be left alone with him but he never backed away even when I wouldn't let him in. And then when the time came where I could be myself around him, be really comfortable to be in his presence, it was the day I found happiness.

"All good dad and how are you guys holding up?", I sit in between them.

He chuckles and brushes my head, "We are doing really good. Your mother and I are already planning the family vacation for this September."

"Yes, and please make sure you are available this year. We can't go on another vacation with you staying behind. It's just not right and your siblings are already complaining.", my mother adds.

Yes I have siblings. My parents have three children of their own, who are theirs by blood. I am the only adopted child, one who is black and way different than they are. But not once have they treated me differently

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to them I'm just their sister. Regardless of the difference in our skin types.

"This time I'm definitely making it. Mayenziwe went to Swaziland to finalise this last deal which will ensure that we don't go around looking for any more plantation sites. This one is the real deal.", I say excitedly.

I am nervous and excited at the same time. After this, we won't need to be this busy because the people who will be working on all of the sites we own, will take care of everything that needs to be done. From the production, processing, and distribution of all the farm products. It's going to be tough but we will manage. Hopefully.

"That's good baby. Tell us how it goes.", my father smiles at me proudly.

I nod and we talk about how things are going since they have retired. Mom used to be in the same business that I'm in and dad, well he comes from generational wealth where they produce jewellery and all sorts of stuff. To be honest, I was lucky to get taken in by a family that is so rich.

Morgan and Tyler, who are older than me, run dad's business. And Kylie who is a year younger than me, is into photography. She chose it as a profession and it was not easy for our parents to accept her choice. At least now, they are all in a good place in terms of her choice.

My cellphone rings and it's my business partner. I excuse myself from my parents and answer the call as I make my way outside.

"Give me good news man.", I say immediately after answering.

I'm anxious so nobody can blame my behaviour. I'll greet him after I get the news.

He sighs heavily, "Isisa I..."

This can't be good. If he sounds like this then it can only mean we didn't get the plot. Which means we have to go back to the drawing board and check for other places we can use. This sucks.

I sigh, "It's okay buddy. We will look for another plot. Just come back home so we can start brainstorming ideas."

"We got the plot Isisa!", I hear his sad tone change to an excited one.

"What!?", I can't believe it.

"We got the plot buddy so prepare a celebration party.", he laughs.

I jump and squeal in joy, "Oh my God this is amazing news Mayenziwe. Well done!"

I see my parents in a state of panic as they look at me as if I've lost my mind. It must be the yelling I just did so I apologise and

they return back inside the house. Mayenziwe tells me how the meeting went and that the price for the land was reasonable. He also informs me that they will be having dinner with the seller tonight. We end the call in high spirits as we make plans for their return.

"Mom, dad. We got the plot and we'll start working on it next month.", my smile probably looks like it belongs to a serial killer.

My parents congratulate me as they pull me into a group hug. I get kisses all over my face from my mother and I giggle like a child. Mayenziwe and I will be moving up the charts.

VERONICA

The meeting between Mr Bhembe and Mrs Shongwe, the previous owner of the land, went very well. So well that they decided to have dinner together tonight. Mrs Shongwe said she wanted to introduce him to her husband who was busy when they met up earlier. This all seems a little unnecessary to me but then again, I'm just an assistant.

I've been trying to fit into this midi dress for the past twenty minutes now and I'm struggling to zip it up. Time is not on my side, in fact, I am already very late and it's only a matter of time until my boss calls to ask about my whereabouts. A call comes

through on my phone and what do you know? It's the boss himself.

"Sir?", I say trying to calm my heavy breathing.

"Where are you Veronica? I've been waiting for you at the car for almost ten minutes now.", he says.

"Well sir...thing is...I have a slight problem."

"And what is that?", he asks annoyed.

"I can't reach the zip on my dress and it's stuck. I need help to pull it up."

I know he is pissed when he doesn't joke about the situation. Instead he asks which cottage I am in and I tell him. He says he is on his way and that I should keep the door open. I wait for him for a while before he knocks once and lets himself in.

The door shuts close, "Let me see."

He is referring to the dress and since I was wearing a gown, I have to take it off. My entire back is on display and I can't help but feel insecure. This is my boss and now he is seeing parts of my body. I hear him suck in his breath as the gown hits the ground.

"What is it? Is it badly damaged?", I ask in panic.

He clears his throat, "No, no. I can fix it. Let me pull it up. I'm approaching you now."

"Okay.", I nod.

His hands come into contact with my back as they brush over it lightly. I immediately feel jolts of electricity through my skin, as if I'm being charged by a live wire. As if that wasn't enough, I feel him move closer to me and his warm breath fans the nape of my neck.

"Don't worry, I'll fix it in no time.", his voice has suddenly become low.

"Uh...sure. Okay.", and all of a sudden I stutter.

After a few seconds, I feel the zip come up and I'm relieved. He steps away from me as soon as that's done.

"I'll...I'll see you outside. Hurry.", he clears his throat.

I turn to look at him but he's out of the door before I can even thank him for helping me. I wonder if he felt what I felt or maybe he is just mad that I made him late. Either way, I'm confused as to what just happened. Does this mean I feel something for my boss or what? I'll just blame the feeling of jolts on his hands being cold. Yeah that's the only plausible reason why what happened, happened.

VERONICA

We are on a flight heading back home and the mood is...well, off. It's been like that since yesterday at dinner and on the drive to and back from the place. I have no idea what the problem is but he has been keeping his distance. At first, I assumed it was nerves playing with him but even at the dinner table, he was just off.

Mrs Shongwe and her husband were very welcoming and understanding. They asked questions and were open to answer any questions we might have had which made the dinner enjoyable. At one point, they thought Mayenziwe and I were a couple which we had to clear up at that moment. That made things even more awkward between us.

"Are you okay?", he asks as we take our seats.

This is the first time he has said anything to me today other than 'Hello.', which is good I guess.

I look at him briefly before turning back to the window, "I'm okay thanks."

I don't have much to say to him and I guess he takes the hint because he nods and focuses on his phone. Like I said, things between us are different. We can't even have a decent conversation which is pathetic seeing that we work closely

together. I plug in my earphones and listen to my favourite playlist. 'Ego talkin' by Saint Harison which is the top on the list, I close my eyes and let the music take control.

"Veronica.", I can hear his voice from a distant.

"Hmm...Morris no.", I mumble.

"Wake up Veronica! We just landed.", his voice comes out more clearer and aggressive.

With difficulty, I rub the sleep off of my eyes and take in my surroundings. Indeed, we have landed. My eyes settle on the man I call my boss and he doesn't look pleased. What's his problem?

"Thanks for waking me up.", I yawn stretching myself.

The crease between in his brows hasn't been wiped off, "Let's go. The driver is already waiting for us."

He leaves me behind and walks ahead. This man knows how to act childish and unfortunately, I don't have time for whatever game he's playing. Be it tantrums or mental breakdown episode, I don't care. My family needs me and I need to focus on them. I follow him out to the car and it starts moving as soon as I shut the door.

"Should we take you home or do you want to start elsewhere?", he asks looking out the window.

Somebody get this man a camera because he's clearly acting. He probably thinks this is another episode of 'The Godfather' and I just can't help myself, a chuckle leaves my mouth.

"What are you laughing at? I just asked you a question.", he turns to me.

I calm myself down before speaking, "Nothing. Uhm...I'll put in the address I want to be dropped off at, I'm not going to my place."

A scowl replaces his blank stare, "Are you going to Morris?"

"What?", I ask.

"I asked if you are going to Morris. You called out for a Morris in your sleep, so I was wondering if he is something to you.", he shrugs.

Now I remember. I had a dream about my celebrity crush Morris Chestnut, and we were at a park laughing and tickling each other. It was a wonderful dream and I guess the name just slipped. But seeing the look on Mayenziwe's face makes me want to mess with him. It shouldn't concern him if a certain person means something to me or not.

"Uh yes. Not that it is any of your business but that is my boyfriend. And I am going to spend the night at his place. It's been too long since I last saw him.", I sigh and fake a blush.

I might be oversharing but he asked for it and I just simply replied.

He scoffs, "Stop being dramatic Veronica, it hasn't even been that long. Mere two days and you think that's long."

I roll my eyes, "It is for two people who are deeply in love and can't keep their hands off of each other. But I guess you wouldn't know that, now would you?"

"What?", he asks with shock written on his face.

I might have crossed the boundaries between employee-employer relationship but he pushed me to do it. He looks like he wants to give me a piece of his mind so I react quickly and say something to him instead.

"I'm sorry I-", the car stopping puts a stop to my half apology.

I look around and I realise we're already at my parent's house. Sophiatown is quiet at this time of the day and that's exactly how it is right now. I'm sure it can be mistaken for a ghost town. I use this opportunity to escape.

"Goodbye sir, I'll see you at work Monday morning.", I say before dashing out through the door.

I hurriedly make my way inside my parent's house with my heart beating fast. This little stunt I just pulled might have

caused me my job but I prefer stressing about that some other day. Not today.

MAYENZIWE

Sam, my driver, just dropped me off at my place. The house looks exactly like how it was before I left and I'm happy that nothing bad has happened to it. The first thing I do as I enter is throw myself on my bed. I am tired, physically as well as emotionally. My emotions are definitely all over the place.

Yesterday when Veronica asked that I zip up her dress it was just so unexpected. I would have told her to look for someone else to do that but I couldn't because we were already late. I can't hide how much effect seeing her show so much skin had on me. She looked amazing, and I'm sure I wouldn't have had any other thoughts of her had I seen her once she was fully dressed.

But instead

I had a wet dream about her and I. It was some crazy stuff and that's why I hadn't been able to talk to her in any way. That's because I'm starting to view her as more than just my assistant. I thought I felt something yesterday when my hand accidentally brushed her skin but I guess that was unrequited seeing that she's dating someone.

Ever since she started working for me, I've only ever seen her date one person. They were in a very serious relationship that was until the guy cheated on her. And she's been single ever since. Well...that was until I found out she's dating a moron called Morris. I just hope I can get rid off whatever it is that I'm feeling.

And that gives me an idea. The only way to get her out of my system is by getting a distraction. I take out my phone from my pocket and call a woman I know can never resist my charm.

"Sizakele.", I say as soon as she answers my call.

"Hi sexy. How are you?", she responds in her smooth voice.

"I'm good and how are you?"

"I'm great. What's up?"

I sigh, "I was hoping we could meet up, at our usual spot."

I'm hoping she says yes because I'm down to have a good time. She is a lot of fun and sure knows how to give a guy a good time. Sizakele is beautiful and she knows that. That's why she lets her looks do the talking for her. The only reason why her and I have been friends with benefits for so long is because she doesn't get attached. Exactly what I want with her.

"Of course honey. You know I'd anything to have a session with you.", she says in a sultry voice.

That alone has my dick reacting, "Alright then. I'll see you at six, later tonight?"

"Sure thing sexy. See you!", the call disconnects.

Maybe this will help me get rid of this disgusting feeling of jealousy I feel now that I know Veronica has a man in her life. It's crazy how 48 hours ago, I saw her as nothing but my assistant. And now, one wet dream later, I feel overprotective of her.

This is really sick. That comment she made about me not knowing anything about being deeply in love with someone did something to me. In a way, I was hurt that that's how it looked like to everyone else. Nobody actually knows what happened between Rosette and I and how we came to divorcing.

Yes, her annoying desire to always have things her way contributed played a role in our divorce but it wasn't the entire reason. Rosette cheated on me with one of the businessmen I used to attend conferences with. It was a bitter pill to swallow knowing that she was doing that but I decided not ruin her reputation.

Of course, I also started doubting if the kids are mine and had to get DNA tests done. I was scared and anxious of the outcome that I had planned on killing myself had they not been mine. But by God's grace, the children are mine and I was able to

move on from her without actually dragging her name through the mud. Speaking of my kids, I miss them already. I decide to give them a call.

"Ndu, unjani mfana wami? (Ndu, how are you my boy?)", I ask.

"Hello baba I'm good and how are you? Today I was practising for my recital this Friday.", he could have just said tomorrow.

"That's amazing boy and did it go well? Where's your sister?"

"It went okay and Londi is in the kitchen helping mom cook.", he says.

THALENTE

"Ma oledi, here is some porridge. I know this is the only thing you're able to keep down for now but I am hoping by next week, it will be better.", I say to her with a bowl of porridge in my hands.

She blinks as her way to tell me she understands and so I pray for the food before feeding her. I love talking to my mother, even though she can't reply but it helps knowing that she's listening.

"A female friend of mine helped me pay for your hospital bills. I'm not sure if she's even a friend but she really pulled through

for me ma. I really thought I was going to lose you.", I wipe her mouth before continuing to feed her.

For a long time now, I've been unable to make out my mother's facial expressions. Especially since she can't speak but today is different. I guess hearing that a female friend helped me out makes her have questions. Her eyes lit up at the mention of me having a female friend. The only friend she knows and acknowledges is Mayenziwe, nobody else.

I chuckle, "Well don't get too excited ma oledi. She is just a friend and nothing is going on between us. I guess she was just being a nice person."

She blinks as if she's in disagreement with my status so I laugh, "I'll give her a call then to check on how she's doing. Is that okay?"

Her eyes flutter and I see some sort of smile on her face. It's hard to see if it were any other person but since it's her and I know how she usually looks, I can tell she's happy with what I said. I finish feeding her the porridge and wipe her face clean. The next thing I do is help her have a sip of juice. She likes it.

Since I promised to call Isisa, I decide to do exactly that.

The phone rings for a few seconds before it's answered, "Hello?"

I clear my throat, "Isisa, hi. How are you?"

"Oh Thalente. I'm well thanks and you?"

"I'm okay. Uh... I was just checking up on you."

"Well thank you, I guess."

"Actually, I was hoping we could talk about how I'm going to settle the payment.", I say.

Talking to her makes me nervous. I think it has to do with how wealthy and powerful she is. It intimidates me but I'm glad I didn't let that get in the way of getting my mother help. Who is looking way better by the way.

"I didn't think you'd call to talk about that any time soon.", she says.

"Well I did. And maybe because I wanted to hear the sound of your voice.", I blurt out.

"You what?", her voice tells me she's shocked.

I am too. I never thought I'd hear those words leave my mouth but they did. And now I can't take them back.

7

ISISA

"Hi, I'm on my way.", I say on the call.

"I've been waiting for more than fifteen minutes now Isisa. My husband is waiting for me you know.", my sister replies on the other end.

She never fails to remind me of that. I'm meeting up with Morgan today and I'm not sure how that is going to go. She and I have always had a love-hate kind of relationship which is only understood by us.

"I understand. I'll be there in a few.", I end the call.

I'm in the parking lot so I pick up my speed and walk to the restaurant she's in. That is if she's still there. Morgan is short-tempered and our parents always questioned what caused her to be that way. Only to find out that she didn't like that her parents adopted a child while they had their own children.

If anyone from the outside point of view would see us interact with each other, they would think we completely hate each other which is not really the case. I understand her and so I'm able to treat her how she treats me. She asked that we have lunch together which is something I'm not looking forward to. But I decided to honour her invite and here I am.

"Hey! Sorry I'm late.", I say when I get to her table.

She chose to meet up at Spur. I'm convinced she doesn't want to spend a lot of time with me.

"Isisa, how are you?", she kisses my cheek.

Her actions are sometimes very self-contradictory, something mean might come out of her mouth while her actions say another thing. I know she loves me though and today she looks like she's in a good mood.

"I'm well thanks and how are you?", I say sitting on a chair.

"I'm okay. What took you so long?", she asks.

"The pipes in my bathroom were giving me problems so I had to call a plumber to take care of it. I'm sorry I didn't inform you.", I say sincerely.

She nods, "Yeah right. I already ordered some food for us. And since I know your favourites, I took it upon myself to order something for you as well. I hope that's okay."

I mean, it's a little too late to be asking that but since the order is already on it's way, there's nothing I can do. I tell her it's okay and we start talking about what's been happening in our lives lately. She tells me that business is going great and that there is a new line of jewellery they are working on.

Our food is brought to us, "Thank you!", we both say to the waitress.

We start digging in, "So how are things going between you and Bruce?"

Bruce is her husband, and they have been happily married for five years now but have known each other way longer than that. Since they were in high school together to be exact. She told me that they have been trying to conceive for years now with no luck.

Morgan exhales heavily and shakes her head, "Things between us are going okay I guess. But I fear that he will some day move on to someone else, someone who will give birth to his child."

I can tell she's on the verge of tears so I reach out to hold her hand, "Hey Morgan, don't say that. Bruce loves you and he has proven to love you regardless of having kids or not. Tell me, did he give you any reason to think he'd leave you if you don't bare kids for him?"

She shakes her head and tears fall staining her now pink face, "No he didn't. I just...I guess I'm letting my insecurities get the best of me. He is truly a great husband but I wish could gift him the one thing he so badly wants. Which is of course, children."

"I understand why you'd feel this way but maybe you should try telling Bruce how you feel. How you truly feel and then maybe,

take it from there. You could come up with different ideas and try using the IVF route once again.", I smile at her.

Her lips stretch into a small forced smile, "Thank you and I will do exactly that. You are so smart you know that?"

Well that is all I need to convince me she's feeling better already, "Always have been but you were always too jealous to admit it."

Without extra effort, we are back to being jolly and sharing jokes once again. Morgan is putting way too pressure on herself to have kids which is understandable since her biological clock is running out. If she gets to 40, she'll have troubles getting pregnant. She is 31, so she really is in a rush to have kids of her own.

They tried the IVF process twice, and it's failed on both attempts. It's sad really. Anyway, I'm surprised when the lunch takes longer than I expected but I have fun either way. By the time we leave, I feel happy about our relationship. This was the first time we've gone without an argument.

"Goodbye sis. I'll see you when I see you.", she says as we hug.

"Bye love. I'll organise a get-together soon and I'll tell you when it will be.", I say.

She nods, "Sure. Let me get going then. Bruce is waiting for me at home. Call me once you get to your place safe. Okay?"

"Okay, I love you.", I say.

"I love you too.", she heads in a different direction while I do the same.

She parked on an entrance different from mine so she has to go to another side to get to her car. In a few minutes, I get to my car and I realise that it's actually late now. The sky has turned darker meaning we've been in the restaurant for way too long. I check the time and it's still early, 16:23. This means it's about to rain soon.

I get into my car and to my luck, the car doesn't start. Thinking maybe it's a glitch, I try over and over again and still the same results.

"Fuck!", I yell in frustration.

I'm clueless when it comes to cars so this means I'm stuck here. There aren't any people out here and there are a few cars meaning people are still doing their own things inside the mall. Just as I try to come up with an idea on what to do, it starts raining. I take out my cellphone and call my sister. I'm sure she's not far from here.

"Morgan?", I say as soon she answers the call.

"Isi, what's go-", I can't hear her properly since the call is cutting.

"I'm stuck Morgan and I-"

"What? I can't...speak louder...Isisa?", I didn't hear the rest of the call as it disconnects.

It must be the bad connection. She didn't hear what I had to say I'm forced to think of something else. I relax on my seat and listen to the patters of rain when an idea hits me. Thacente is good with cars and he might be able to help me. That's if I'm able to reach him.

"Thacente, it's me Isisa.", I say as soon as the call goes through.

"Yes I know. I have your numbers saved on my phone.", he says groggy voice.

He must have been asleep and now I've disturbed this man's sleep.

"I'm sorry to disturb you but I need your help. My car won't start and now I'm stuck at the mall. I'm starting to get scared since the sky has turned dark. Please help me. I wouldn't ask if I wasn't stranded.", I plead hoping he hears the desperation in my tone.

He sighs, "Sure. Tell me where you are and I'll be there. You just stay put."

I tell him which mall I'm at before we cut the call. Well it seems God is on my side since there weren't any disruptions during

our call. I push back my seat and lie there while closing my eyes. Hopefully, Thalente will get here soon enough.

MAYENZIWE

"Dad

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thanks for coming to see me perform today.", Ndumiso smiles at me.

His school recital just ended and I must say it was amazing. He knew what to do and was always on cue. I am so proud of my son. I'm glad that all the money I cough up for school fees isn't going to waste, it means the teachers are doing exactly what they need to.

"I'm so proud of you son.", I pull him into a hug.

"Ngiyabonga baba. (Thanks dad.)", he says as we pull apart.

I brush his head, "Londiwe, won't you greet your father.", I turn to my daughter.

She rolls her eyes, "Hi dad."

"Just hi?", I frown at her.

"I missed you dad and I hope you are okay. I'm going to the car now. Mom, can I have the keys?", she turns to her mother who has sly smirk on her face.

"Sure baby. Say bye to your father.", she says.

"See you dad.", she attempts to leave but I grab her arm.

"Ngizok'bhonya Londiwe. Ibizwani lento oyenzayo? (I'll hit you Londiwe. What is this thing you're doing called?) I'm your father and I deserve some respect. I've apologised for missing some of your events but I'm trying to make up for it. The least you could do is meet me half-way.", I say looking into her eyes.

"Leave the child Mayenziwe.", Rosette says harshly.

Londiwe's tears are quick as they drop, "I know and I'm sorry baba. I was just so angry at you and I'm sorry for being disrespectful. Forgive me please."

I sigh and pull her into a warm embrace, "I forgive you baby. I forgive you and I'm sorry too."

Once she has calmed down, she and her brother go to their mother's car. That was after kissing them goodbye of course. Rosette and I are the only people left in the school hall. She's giving me an evil eye and I'm certain I won't like the words she's about to spew.

"How dare you grab my child's arm like that Mayenziwe? How dare you!?", she huffs.

"First of all, Londi is my child too and I have a right to reprimand her when I believe she's wrong. Secondly, you stood there and watched at her disrespect me. Now you want to claim that she's your child as if you're a great parent? Spare me the bullshit Rosette.", I say.

She looks shocked and hurt, "Mayenziwe, how could you say such? I'm always here for the kids when you are out there doing business as you say. Your kids always feel neglected because you are not there for them. So excuse me for letting my kids showing how they feel about their absent father."

"I am not an absent father Rosette. So don't you dare test me by spewing such nonsense. I do my best to be there for my kids and support them, it might not be as much as you do but don't refer to me as an absent father. Don't!", Rosette really knows how to get me riled up.

"Believe what you want Mayenziwe. My lawyer will contact you soon since I'm filling for full custody of the kids. You will never see them again once I'm done with you.", she gives me a dirty look before walking away.

It takes every bit of self-restraint not to do anything to her. Once I've calmed down, I walk out of the building and run to my

car since it's raining. I'm extremely wet by the time I get inside. As soon as I drive out of the school premises, I call the lawyer Siyabonga referred me to. Apparently, she is as good as he is if not better so I trust him.

"Sure Amanda, the time for battle has come.", I say to her.

THALENTE

I was asleep when Isisa called and I wasn't so happy about being woken up. But once she explained the reason for her calling me, I understood why she did. That's why I'm rushing to get to her before this rain gets even worse. It's hard enough that I'm having a hard time manoeuvring through the wet, slippery streets.

Finally I make it the mall so I give her call which she takes a while to answer, "Which entrance did you say you were parked at konje?"

"Third entrance.", she responds.

"Okay, I'll be there just now.", I cut the call.

I drive to where she said she's parked and look for her car. Once I locate it, I drive to park beside her car. There's empty spaces so I'm not worried about anyone complaining about me

taking their parking spots. The rain hasn't subsided so I make a dash for it and knock on her passenger door before getting in.

"Hi.", I say looking at her.

Her eyes don't meet mine, "Hello Thalente. I'm really sorry I disturbed you."

Oh! That's the reason why she can't look at me. She thinks I'm angry at her for calling me for help even in this rain.

"It's not a problem Isisa. I really don't mind. So what did you say the problem was again?", I ask.

She huffs, "I don't know but the car won't start."

"It's probably because the battery is dying or maybe faulty cables. It could be anything really, so I'll check once the rain clears. For now, we're stuck here together.", I say.

"Oh!", she says before looking out the window.

"What? Does that not sound like a good thing to you cheese girl?", I tease.

Her head snaps back to me, "Don't call me that and I didn't say that."

"I was just teasing you, don't bite my head off.", I chuckle.

She nods, "And I enjoy being around you."

"The feeling is mutual mamas.", I smile at her.

"Mamas?", she raises her eyebrows.

"Yes, it's a nice way to refer to a pretty woman ekasi. Mara grand grand, uyi cheese girl vele. (...in the township. But really, you are a cheese girl.)", I laugh.

"Thalente stop it!", she says out of the blue.

I can see this really doesn't sit well with her because there are tears in her eyes. That immediately makes me regret doing what I just did. She told me stop and I didn't. But I honestly thought it was a harmless tease. I guess it isn't.

"Sorry Isisa. I didn't mean to...make you...cry.", I sigh and look away from her sad facial expression.

VERONICA

Mr Bhembe isn't coming in to the office today, says he's not feeling well. He requested that I bring the important files to his home for him to work on while he's still able to. I suggested he rest but he said that these files needed his attention so here I am driving to his place.

The only time I've ever been to his place was when there was a function but never alone with him. And now what makes things even more awkward is the fact that things between us are still not okay. Ever since the Swaziland trip, we have been acting like teenagers around each other. I'm glad that we're still able to keep things professional at the office.

I get to his place and put in the gate's passcode before driving in. He sent me the passcode this morning so that I don't struggle once I arrive. He sounded like he was really sick even though he assured me it wasn't as bad as it did. I am yet to find out what sickness has him on a chokehold. I take out the files and my laptop bag from the boot and make my way to the house.

I ring the bell, "I'm coming!", he replies on the other side of the door.

I wait for a few seconds before the door is opened. His smile greets me first before he can even say anything. I instantly feel worried seeing his red nose and watery eyes, not to mention the fluffy fleece he has wrapped around him. Being light skinned really gives away how he is feeling some times.

"Mr Bhembe, hi. Are you okay?", I ask.

He nods, "Hi Veronica, I am okay I guess. Come on in. Let me take these off of your hands."

I walk in with him taking the files. I wait for him while he shuts the door and allow him to lead the way. We get to the living room and I see he has set up for us there. His furniture has been moved to one side of the living room and his computer; keyboard; stationery as well as other things he needs to work.

"Please, take a seat.", he gestures to the floor.

I would yell at him if he weren't sick. I don't like sitting on the floor because I easily get constipated when I do. The cold does that to me a lot. Luckily, there's a carpet and a pillow for me to sit on. I nod and sit down taking out my things. We are separated by the coffee we have placed our things on, with him sitting on the opposite side of me.

"So what is this I hear about the farm in Limpopo?", he asks taking a sip of whatever it is in that mug.

"The fertilizers used for some of the crops wasn't good. 40% of the crops are damaged, beyond repair. So the farmers will have to replant most of the vegetables and fruits, which will take time to grow.", I say going through my notes.

"And what does this mean for the consumers we have to supply with goods?", he is getting stressed I can tell.

"It means supply is going to be less, and thus the company will suffer a loss.", I give him a pitiful look.

I know how hard Isisa and him have worked to get to where they are now. Now this kind of thing happens and they are forced to find a solution to all this.

He sighs, "What did Isisa say? Is there a plan on how we can get more of what we've lost from other farmers? Maybe we could buy these crops from them and supply them to our consumers as our own. Yes we will lose some money but it's better than not living up to our standards."

"She said she'll think of ways to deal with this and that you should rest. Take time to heal so you can get back to the office soon."

"Okay. I'll let her deal with things for now. What else do I need to know?"

"Oh! These were delivered to the office yesterday. I signed off on them for you.", I say handing him an A4 brown envelope.

He frowns and reaches for it, "What is this?"

I shrug, "I don't know."

His facial expression changes as soon as he reads what is written on the papers. Anger is all I see. His hands are clenching on the papers as he breathes heavily.

"What is it?", I ask.

He exhales deeply, "These are from Rosette. She's filing for full custody of the kids."

That's bad, "Oh I'm sorry. I didn't know that you were going through this."

"It's okay. Can we talk about something else, please.", he says drinking from his mug once again.

I nod and frown, "What are you drinking?"

"MedLemon. I have the flu and I'm feeling feverish. It helps.", he grins.

"You have the flu?", I ask puzzled.

He nods, "Yes."

It takes a minute for it to register in my mind as I burst into laughter. He looks confused by my reaction but I find it hard to even explain. I laugh until I'm satisfied.

"Sorry, I...I thought maybe you had something more serious. I didn't think it would be flu. You look really bad and yet, it's something that can be treated.", I say after catching my breath.

He catches on and chuckles, "Yeah, my immune system is weak. The rain that happened two days ago left me feeling sick. It started out as a small cough and now I can barely move around."

"Well I'm glad it's nothing serious. For a second there, I thought you had a chronic illness.", I sigh.

He grins, "I'm glad you think of me even when I'm sick. Tell me, does this mean you care for me? Or better yet, that you have feelings for me that you wish to confess?"

I laugh, "You wish Mayenziwe. Let's just get back to work."

"Sure.", he chuckles.

ISISA

I'm swamped with work today, I haven't even had the chance to have something to eat. My stomach is complaining but the thought of leaving this desk even for a minute, makes me anxious. Calls from our clients have been coming in left and right. I've lost the number of times I have had to lie to them.

Each one that called, got the same response. That our drivers went on a strike for an increase in their wages but that their goods will be delivered in a matter of a week. I'm starting to lose my shit because all this isn't my department. Mayenziwe deals with the office work while I spend most of my time traveling to our plantation sites to check on things.

This is my fault. I was supposed to double check on the fertilizers they chose to add on to our materials. The one we usually used had run out so I didn't think a different brand would have made a difference. And I was wrong because here we are facing a major crisis.

A knock comes through the door, "Who is it?", I ask still looking through the different ideas I could do.

"It's me, my love. Can I come in?", my PA, Kamo responds.

"Sure.", I reply.

He walks in with food in his hands and I couldn't be more happier to have him here today. Kamo and I have been friends since college, we did different courses but our bond was strong. I guess our feminine energies were drawn to each other. But I must say he is more flamboyant than I am.

"Thank you! You have no idea how much I needed this.", I say reaching for the food.

He gives it to me and settles on the chair, "I know you phela. You've been locked in here for hours now Isisa, you have to get some fresh air. How about a 5-minute walk outside to clear your head?"

"I can't Kay. There's so much I need to do and such little time. I'm losing my mind over this.", I take a bite of my ham and cheese sandwich.

He nods "I understand but clearing your head will give you more ideas. And I'm sure they'll be better than the one's you have now."

I sigh and swallow before continuing the conversation, "Okay. I'll give that a try. It might do me some good. Let me finish eating then I'll go."

"Good. So how are things going with Thalente. The last I heard of him, you were coughing out sums of money to him.", he chuckles.

"Don't say that Kamo.", I shake my head.

He raises his hands in surrender, "Whatever. So tell me, z'khiphani kuwe naye. (...what's going on between you and him?)"

"I don't know.", I shrug and finish the last piece of my sandwich.

"What do you mean you don't know? Hayi wena, spill it. Did he flee with your money?", he folds his arms across his chest.

"What? No, no. That's not what I meant. We are still in contact but something happened a few days ago and I've just been so embarrassed to even talk to him.", I say.

I tell him what happened and he immediately understands why I feel like this. Remorse fills his face but that's not what I want right now. If he asks me how I feel about what happened, I'll just start crying. And I don't want that, not when I still have a lot of fixing to do.

"Did he call you after what happened?", he asks.

"Yes he did but I just couldn't get myself to answer his calls. He saw me crying Kay and for something meaningless. I know he'll ask why I was crying but I don't think I'll be able to answer him. I'd have to tell him about what I went through and I don't want to scare him away so soon."

His hand reaches for mine, "I understand love but he deserves to know that you're okay and that he didn't hurt you. You can't let what you went through dictate how you will live the rest of your life. If it means you have to tell him why you were so easily triggered then do it."

"I can't Kay. I would risk losing him and we haven't even started dating. Hell, I'm not even sure if he likes me. What if he sees me

as baggage and decides not to give us a chance? I just...can't.", tears fall.

"If he really wants you then nothing you tell him about your past or upbringing will make him less interested in you. Trust me. But what I do know is that it's not fair that he is in the dark about your well-being. Talk to the man.", he smiles at me.

I nod, "Alright then, I'll do that."

"Good. Now wipe your tears love, you look ugly.", he chuckles.

I laugh and do as he says, "Oh fuck you Kay!"

We laugh and chat a little before he leaves going back to his desk. When I'm sure that the door is shut, I take out my phone and send a text to Thalente. I asked him to come over to my place later today so we could talk. No, I'm not going to tell him my life story but I just want him to know that I'm okay.

Once the text is sent, I get back to work. My bladder will need me to go to the bathroom soon but I am trying to send an email to one of the farmers in Limpopo to inform them that I'll be coming down to see the progress next week. The email is gone and I rush to the bathroom to relieve myself.

MAYENZIWE

Her scent is intoxicating, much like flowers which leaves me momentarily disoriented. I'm not sure if it's all the medicine I've

drank or what, but I am aware of everything that she does. And I mean everything. The way her lips move when she speaks or how she bites on her nails when she's frustrated.

I can't control my roaming eyes as they occasionally land on her cleavage. Is it okay if I say my eyes have a mind of their own? Anyway, I thought I'd be able to work today but that is proving to be impossible. I am coughing now, worse than before and I can't do a thing. Veronica suggested I rest on the couch while she fixes up a flu concoction for me.

Speaking of her, she walks into the living room with a mug in her hand, "Here drink this. It will help you feel better almost immediately."

"Thank you.", I say accepting the warm mug.

There is a green liquid that is up to the brim of the mug. It looks disgusting but smells great. What puts me off more than anything, is the fact that it looks gooey and sticky. God! This might be the thing that kills me.

"What the hell is this Veronica?", I ask clearly disgusted.

She chuckles, "Just drink it Mayenziwe. Stop asking too many questions."

For the few hours she's been here, she has started using my name. That 'Mr Bhembe' nonsense was just boring. I nod with a scowl on my face and chug every bit of the contents in my hand

down. Once I'm done, I hand the empty mug to her and she grins foolishly.

"It doesn't taste as bad as it looks.", I exhale deeply.

"I know. Don't worry, you'll feel better soon.", she says and walks away.

A few minutes later, she comes back with snacks and juice for herself, hot chocolate for me. She sits next to me and we watch a movie. I don't know what the movie is about because her presence is disturbing me. She smells good and the occasional touching of our hands make me aware of the effect she has on me.

"This movie is good.", she giggles.

"Yeah.", I agree even though I have no idea what is happening.

I start feeling drowsy and my body feeling numb. I feel tired all of a sudden.

"Veronica... I feel...tired.", I say through laboured breaths.

"This means the concoction is working. You need to rest.", she says.

"Wait...I need to tell you something. You..smell nice."

"Well thank you Maynziwe.", she chuckles.

"Can you give me...a kiss? Please?", I ask.

"What?"

"A kiss. Please.", my heart is beating fast right now regardless of how tired I feel.

I hear her sigh before feeling the heat from her body as she gets closer and closer to me. Soon enough, our lips meet in a slow, unrushed pace. Her lips are warm and soft as they parted slightly, allowing my tongue to slip inside. Our bodies are pressed together and I can taste our shared breath.

Her cellphone rings disturbing us. With great difficulty, she pulls away huffing.

"Azi?", she says answering the phone.

It's silent for a while before she speaks again, "Okay I'm coming. I'll be there in thirty."

She cuts the call and gets up off the couch hurriedly.

"Hey...is everything okay?", I ask.

"No...sorry. I have to go now.", she says in a trembling voice.

"Vero-", she's out of the door before I can say the rest of her name.

And just like that, she has left me feeling confused yet wanting more the taste of her lips. I relax back on my couch and let sleep consume me.

VERONICA

I don't think I've ever driven this fast in my entire life. I am travelling at 100 km/h on a busy road and I am surprised I have not yet been pulled over along the way by traffic cops. My heart is beating out of my chest the entire way to Sophiatown. When I got that call from Azi I knew something was wrong because we never call each other unless it's important.

Apparently my mother doesn't want to use her oxygen mask and that it had been like this for almost an hour with her doing this. Azi said she and dad tried changing her mind but mom didn't want to hear any of it. They are hoping I'll be able to change her mind which is crazy since she is closer to them both.

I get home and I leave the car's engine running as I rush to the house. The door is opened by Azi whose face is drenched in tears and since I'm in a hurry to see our mother, I don't stop to talk to her.

"Please go park the car properly and turn off the engine.", I say heading to our parents' room.

She doesn't ask questions but does as told. When I get to the room I knock once before letting myself in. The first thing I see is my father kneeling beside the bed holding my mother's hand. They both turn to look at who just walked in and they see me.

My father's face is covered in tears and mucus. I've never seen him in this state.

"Baba, what is going on? You are crying.", I say stating the obvious.

"My daughter...your mother she...please talk to her.", he sobs.

He can't even finish his sentence. Like I said, I've never seen my father cry and seeing him break down like this hurts. I look at my mother and she has a sad smile on her face. I walk to the other side of the bed and hold her hand in mine giving it a gentle squeeze.

"Mama, talk to me. What's this? Why are you doing this?", I ask.

She turns her head to my side and says, "I told you...that I am...tired. Let me go my child."

"But mama you can fight this. Don't give up just yet.", I beg her.

She starts crying as well, "I can't Veronica, you know that. I thought your father understood but clearly, he doesn't."

"I can't do this! I'm going out for some air Veronica, call me when she's come back to her senses.", my father gets up and storms out banging the door.

I'm now left with my mother and it's just silent. I don't know what to say to her exactly because if she didn't listen to her

husband of so many years and her last born child, who am I. The silence continues for a few minutes with our breathing being the only thing heard. Even though her breathing doesn't sound too great.

"This is the right thing to do baby.", her voice comes out in a whisper.

"What if it's not ma? You know dad won't cope if he loses you.", I say.

"It is and your dad will cope just fine. He has you guys so you'll take care of each other. Please Veronica, I know you are the strongest out all you three. Help them see that this is the right choice. We have spent so much money on medical bills, oxygen tanks, different kinds of foods and many other unnecessary things. It's time to stop now. I'm tired of being in pain.", she says all this while taking deep breaths in between.

I sigh, "I'm not as strong as you think I am Make. I'm not."

"Maybe not but I trust you'll be the glue that holds this family together when I'm gone. I need you to promise me something.", she wheezes and coughs.

I nod, "Calm down ma. Here, have some water."

I help her drink before she calms down, "As I was saying, I need you to promise me something."

"Anything."

"Your father...make sure that he finds a woman who will make him happy when I'm gone. He deserves that much after taking care of me for so many years. He deserves that much.", she wipes the lone tear that just escaped her eye.

"Okay, I will. I promise."

"And also, please take care of your sister. She still has a lot of growing up to do but you are a good role model to her and I hope she will learn from you. Lastly, make sure you find your happiness. Don't let anything or anyone, get in the way of your happiness. Okay my baby?", she brushes the side of my face.

I smile at her, "I promise to do my best make."

She nods and smiles, "Thank you. Now call your father and sister for me."

I do exactly that and they walk in, they sit down on the bed. She starts telling us that this is something she wants and that she'd appreciate it if we could accept her last wish. We all listen to her and as hard as it is, we accept her decision. For the first time in years, we sit and talk about our fondest memories we spent together as a family.

An hour or two later, my mother closes her eyes and takes her last breath.

"Amai mukai! (Mom wake up!)", my sister lets out a piercing cry.

THALENTE

"Sawubona magriza. Ngizolanda incosi yami. (Hello granny. I'm here to fetch my child.)", I say after knocking on the door.

"Awu mfanam

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unjani? Ngena. (Oh my boy, how are you? Come on in.)", my daughter's grandmother says.

"Ngiyabonga ma. (Thank you ma.) I brought this for you.", I say giving her the plastics of goodies.

"Thank you so much baba ka Fezeka.", she says joyfully.

"No problem mama. Where is Fezeka?", I ask sitting on the couch.

"She's in her room. Let me call her for you.", she disappears down the passage.

Fezeka is my daughter, she's 14 years old. The same age as Londiwe, Mayenziwe's daughter. I don't know how but our exes got pregnant the same year when we were still in relationships.

Mayenziwe and I were happy back then that our daughters would grow up as friends just as we did.

"Baba! (Dad!)", her voice startles me.

I get on my feet and lift her up as she crashes her body on to mine. She squeals as I spin with her in my arms a few times before I set her down on her feet. We share a hug before pulling apart, and I can't help but admire her beautiful face. She looks so much like her mother.

"Hi baby. You look so beautiful.", I say sitting on the couch with her beside me.

She giggles and tries hiding her blushing face, "Thank you baba. I missed you."

"I missed you too my love. Actually, I came here to fetch you so you can see gogo. Do you think you can go and pack your sleepover bags for me?", I say just as her grandmother walks in with a tray of delectables.

"Yay! Let me go and do that now.", I nod as she hurries to her room.

"Here son, have some scones and juice.", her grandmother says placing the tray on the table.

"Thank you ma. I actually came here to fetch Fezeka for the weekend. iOledi lami doesn't look happy so maybe seeing her

granddaughter will uplift her mood.", I take a bite of one of the scones. They taste amazing.

She nods, "Oh yes. Unjani uMa Ndlanzi vele? (How is Ma Ndlanzi by the way?)"

I sigh as I drink the juice, "She's okay ma. Of course nothing will change because we can't afford physical therapy but I try to make her comfortable and happy. She deserves that much."

"That's true ndodana. (...son.) I am just glad she has someone like you as a son and I'm sure Zanele is proud of you being a father to your daughter.", she responds.

"Thank you for those beautiful and kind words ma.", I say.

Zanele was my girlfriend, Fezeka's mother. Her and I had a good thing going and until life happened and she passed away. She died during labour and it hurts that I never got to say goodbye to the only woman I've ever truly loved. It's been 14 years and still, nobody has managed to fill the hole she's left in my heart.

"Baba, I'm ready now.", my daughter beams in joy with her overnight bag in hand.

I smile and stand up, "That's good baby. We can go. Ma, let us take our leave now. I had already told my mother that I'll be bringing Fezeka with and I'm sure she can't wait."

"Kulungile ndodana. Nami ngiyoke ngiphumele umsindo ka lo sisi kancane. (It is well my son. I will also get the chance to rest from the noise this little one makes.)", her grandmother chuckles.

"Gogo!", Fezeka exclaims feigning hurt.

"Just go. Nihambe kahle mfana. (Go well boy.)", she bids us farewell.

We get into my car and we drive to my home. On the way there she tells me she's hungry so I make a stop at KFC to buy us takeaways. I then drive home and when we get there, I relieve Nokuzola of her duties. She greets Fezeka before she leaves.

"Gogo, I missed you!", my daughter rushes to my mother's side.

She kisses her on the cheek and forehead before she starts telling her how her day went. I told her to treat her grandmother the same way she does everyone else. Regardless of her state, she's still a person and she deserves to be treated as such. They talk for a long time until it's time for Fezeka to go to bed.

"Baba do you think you will move on some day?", my daughter asks as she prepares for bed.

I frown, "Move on how baby?"

She sighs, "Do you think you will move on from mom one day? I mean, I know you loved her and still do but I think you should find someone who will make you happy as well."

"Where is this coming from Fezeka?"

"I don't know baba but I've been thinking about this a lot. I see how my friends' parents are together and I wonder if you are missing out on having someone because of me. Maybe don't want to be with you because you have me."

"No baby, that's not why. I just haven't been focused on getting into a relationship but when I do, you'll be the first to know. Okay?", I smile at her.

She giggles, "Okay baba."

MAYENZIWE

It's Saturday today and I am at work. When I woke up this morning I felt better, more than better. I feel fresh and energised so I decided to come down to the office to get some work done. Not that I didn't trust Isisa when she told me everything was sorted but, I tend to be a Thomas sometimes. I want to see things for myself.

Another thing that made me come in on a weekend is the fact that I love the design of my office. It has a glass top desk, one of those chairs that lets you lean way back and put your feet up, two less comfortable chairs across my desk, a small bar in the corner of the room, and a whiteboard that I use when I meet up with my team in the office. I've been going through some files and everything seems okay.

Since I'm already here, I decide to work ahead and work on the packages that need to be done next week. It isn't much but I don't mind getting started on it. Next week is pay day and I know most of the workers will be way too lazy to work once that alert comes in. I push through the work for almost three hours when I hear a sound outside my office.

When I came in, nobody was here so I have no idea who it would be. My people don't work on weekends, they just don't.

It's probably one of the cleaners doing their job. I decide to focus back on what I was doing when the sound of typing on a keyboard peaks my interest. I decide to stop being lazy and go out to check who it is. I'm met by a not-so-good looking Veronica busy on her computer.

"Veronica? What are you doing here? You should be at home relaxing like everyone else.", I say.

She looks shocked, "What? What do you mean I need to be home? Isn't it work day?"

"No it's not. It's a Saturday."

It takes a moment for her to realise that and she slaps her forehead, "Ugh! I'm sorry. It totally slipped my mind. I really thought today was a Friday."

"It's okay. Mistakes happen.", I say and glance at her outfit.

She's wearing a white blouse that looks very thin underneath an expensive looking lady's suit jacket, and a pencil skirt that shows off an impressive amount of leg. I don't know why but particularly today, I find her more attractive. It's like a magnetic force is pulling me towards her.

"I never got the chance to thank you properly for that flu mixture you made for me. It really helped.", I smile at her.

"It was my pleasure. I'll leave now.", she smiles and stands up.

Only now do I notice that her eyes are red and eyelids puffy,
"Hey Veronica what's wrong? You've been crying."

She shakes her head, "It's nothing really. I'm catching the flu as well."

"Oh! That's my fault. I'm sorry."

She nods and starts walking away but she stops and a son leaves her mouth. That has me rushing to her side to pull her into my arms. I thought she'd calm down but she doesn't so I pull her to my office with me. Here, nobody will see her crying. I know nobody's here but being careful won't hurt anybody. She sits on one of the chairs and I pour her a glass of water.

"Here, drink this. It will help you calm down.", I give her the glass.

She takes it, "Thank you."

She gulps the water down and we sit in silence with me rubbing her back. I don't know how to comfort her and more now that I don't know why she broke down like that. After a while, she has calm down so I decide to take this opportunity to ask her what's wrong. It seems like a good idea seeing that she is not willing to say it out loud without me asking.

"What's wrong Veronica? Did something happen to you?"

"No I... I just felt like crying. I'm sorry if I scared you.", she offers me a weak smile.

"You can talk to me you know, about anything. I might be your boss but I'd like to believe we are also friends. And friends help each other."

"You think we are friends?", she asks stunned.

I nod

"Yes. Now tell me, what's wrong?"

"I need something."

"Tell me what it is and I'll try my best to help you."

"I want you to fuck me Mayenziwe."

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Hurt is what pushed her to this point. She now finds herself begging her boss to have sex with her as if it's a normal thing to do. His face speaks for itself, he's shocked by the words that just came out from her mouth. She knows this is wrong but she won't apologise for saying it. It's what she wants right now and she can only hope he agrees.

Mayenziwe gasps, more than shocked by what she just said. It's not that he doesn't want to do it but he is more concerned on

whether or not she is serious about it or not. And if she is in the right state of mind to be wanting such. Finally, he summons up the courage to ask her is she's sure.

He clears his throat, "What- what are you saying Veronica? I mean, are you sure?"

She nods her head looking at him eagerly, "I'm one hundred percent sure. Please Mayenziwe, do this one thing for me. I'm hurt and I want to get rid of this pain I feel."

"You are not telling me what's wrong Veronica. Maybe if you tell me what's wrong, I can help you with that and not have to do this. I doubt you're thinking straight Vee.", he starts feeling hot.

The idea of having sex with Veronica stirs deep emotions within him. He has only ever dreamt of such a thing happening and now it is and he can't help but feel different emotions. Scared that he might get caught and this would turn into an office scandal. Nervous that she might have high expectations of his libido that he might not live up to. Excited that this is finally happening. It's just a lot.

"I don't want to talk about it Mayenziwe. Now you can either help me with this or I can ask someone else.", she clicks her tongue and gets up her seat.

Mayenziwe pulls her back, "Wait... I'll help you."

She smiles and hugs him, "Thank you."

They hug for a while before they pull apart and look into each other's eyes. He moves his face closer to her's and they start kissing. It is a rushed and sloppy kiss as their emotions are running high. Veronica comes up for air and smiles at him.

"Hi there.", says in a husky voice.

She starts by taking off her jacket, then her shirt follows. Her skirt follows and now she's left in her heels. Luckily she didn't wear any underwear so it makes access easier. In her naked glory, she stands in front of him and tries not to let how nervous she is show. Even though she's confident about her body, she can't help but feel a little worried. It just happens.

"Wow! You look so beautiful.", Mayenziwe whispers.

"Thank you, but now that I'm naked, you need to get naked.", she says.

"Right!", he chuckles awkwardly.

He strips off his clothes and they share a kiss once again. His hands move involuntarily all over her body trying to hold as much of her flesh as he could. He was losing his mind wanting to be inside her already. The words that leave Veronica's mouth next leave his already erect dick even harder.

"I want you to fuck me!"

With that statement, Mayenziwe bent her over the desk and spreads her legs. Her perfect ass was now his and he could hardly control his excitement. He moved into position and grasps his cock into his hands directing it to her love tunnel and slowly inserted the head. He could feel her wetness but he could also tell that she was tight. In one push, he eases into her pussy.

"Uuhh, I have wanted this ever since that night in Swaziland.", Mayenziwe groans as he thrusts slowly in and out of her.

"Me too.", she moans meeting his thrusts.

VERONICA

After that session with Mayenziwe yesterday, I thought I would be feeling better by now but instead, I feel way worse. My mom's family from Swaziland is coming in the next few days to stay with us until the funeral. I am not looking forward to seeing most of them because they are very shady.

My aunt Mazwi is coming today to help with the preparations of the funeral and for the family members that will be joining us as well. She lives in Nelspruit, Mpumalanga where she had gone for work purposes but ended up falling in love and decided to get married. Six years ago, her husband died and the cause of death was natural causes. She's been single ever since then.

I can confidently say that she's my favourite person from my mom's side of the family. She gets me and always knows what's best for me. I take her as my second mother because that is what she always says we should refer to her. Not only that, but she has a kind and loving heart as well. I'm glad she's coming first so that she can help me mentally prepare for the drama that the family will cause.

"Your uncle Conrad will be coming later today with his wife. They won't sleep over so don't worry yourself about fixing up any room for them.", my father says brushing my shoulder.

I look at him, "Okay baba, thanks. I think it's almost time for me to go and fetch aunt Mazwi. She said she'll arrive around 13:00 so I need to get there before her."

"Alright, I understand. Do you want to go with your sister?", my father asked.

"Yeah sure I don't mind.", I say.

He goes to call Azi for me and I wait for her for a few minutes before she comes to me. We get to my car and I drive out. Azi and I haven't talked ever since the moment Mom passed. We both have been avoiding having the conversation about it. I feel like we're just afraid of talking about her in past tense, I know I am.

"Do you think we'll ever heal sisi?", Azi says out of the blue.

I sigh, "I don't know. Maybe we won't but I think we'll learn how to live without her. Now we just have to accept the situation."

"But it's so hard Veronica. Knowing that I'll never see mom again and I'll never get to make her oatmeal again. It hurts so bad sisi.", she sobs.

Time is running out and I can't stop the car because my aunt has probably arrived at the taxi rank. I know how packed it gets at MTN Noord taxi rank, so I don't want her being stranded. I reach out for my sister and brush her back as her painful cry

cuts straight through my heart. She's my one and only sibling, so seeing her shed tears like this hurts and it's sad I can't do anything to stop the pain she feels.

We get to the taxi rank and I give her a call telling her I'm parked at a bakery opposite the taxi rank and she tells me she's on her way to me. After the call, I pull my sister into a hug hoping that will help calm her down. Just as we pull apart, I see my aunt crossing the street with her bags in both hands. I wonder how long she's planning on staying here.

"Are you feeling better now?", I ask brushing my sister's face.

She nods, "Yes. Thank you."

"You're welcome.", I smile at her.

She still has hiccups but she looks a lot better now. I know there's still a long way for us to go as a family but I believe we'll get through this if we stick together. All I hope for, is that she doesn't become closed off. The more she talks, the more I know that she's actually processing this and that one day she'll find some healing. I get out of the car to help my aunt put her things in the boot, and we share a hug after that. She gets in the back seat and greets my sister.

"How are you sesi?", she asks Azi.

"I've had better days MaAuntiza. How are you?", Azi responds.

"I'm hurt yati. Ngiyati kutsi sesi beka gula, but I didn't think she'd leave us so soon. (...you know. I know that my sister was sick, but...)", she sighs and starts crying.

She didn't think it was bad because my mom asked us not to tell her family how bad the situation was with her. I understand that she didn't want to hurt them but her passing like this is very sudden for them and it's sad they never got a chance to say goodbye. I start the car and drive home. I can only wonder how sad the funeral is going to be.

MAYENZIWE

Today I'm hanging out with Thalente and the rest of the guys. It's been a minute since we had the chance to just hang out and talk about things. Besides Thalente and Siyabonga my lawyer, I have two other friends that I'm close to, Mangaliso and Zakhele. I met Mangaliso when I was in college and we clicked ever since. As for Zakhele, I've known him ever since I was a kid.

Our parents were friends, just like Thalente, but I was closer to Thalente than him. I still am. And the reason being that Zakhele is a troublemaker and he never knows when to stop and do the right thing. One time, he stole my mother's antique vase back when we still lived in Soweto. I think after that incident, my parents decided to move back to the bundus. They just couldn't

deal with it and decided things are probably better in the countryside.

The guys and I aren't doing anything hectic today, just a couple of drinks and maybe some braaied meat. I offered to cook some pap' for them but they said they'd rather have buns than food poisoning. They are fools for saying that because I'm actually a good cook but I didn't argue with them. Thalente is currently busy with the meat on the braai stand and I'm helping out where needed. The other two are sitting comfortably on the camp chairs.

"So how are things going at the office?", Thalente asks as we're both having a separate conversation from Mangaliso and Zakhele.

I sigh and smile, "Things are going great bro. Isisa managed to salvage things and she was able to make sure the company's reputation is still maintained. I honestly don't know what I would have done without her."

His lips stretch into a very small grin, "Yeah I guess she's great at what she does."

I nod with a frown on my face, "She is. And also, Veronica has been helping me with a lot of things. And I mean...a lot of things."

"Okay and what does that mean? The last time I checked, you were having wet dreams about her.", he chuckles.

"Ugh no man, don't put it like that! I just happened to dream about her a lot. That's all.", I shrug.

"Yeah right!", he scoffs then looks at me, "But you are glowing. Who did you smash? Is it Sizakele?"

I can't even remember the last time I spoke to Sizakele. After that hookup, I didn't meet up with her again. One thing I like about her though is the fact that she's not troublesome. She doesn't nag me and she knows that our thing isn't serious. We help each other then go our separate ways. The one thing we decided on a long time ago was that

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should either of us find love, we'll stop this arrangement and move on with our lives.

"No! It's not her and can we just not talk about this.", I say.

He's quiet for a while as if he's thinking, "It's Veronica right!? You're sleeping with your PA."

"Who is sleeping with their PA?", Zakhele asks.

I didn't even think they heard but they did and now they are staring at us waiting for us to give them an answer. I look at Thalente and I feel like I could just give him a punch for being a

blabbermouth, which is surprising because he's not much of a talker. He gives me a sympathetic look and I guess he can tell I'm pissed at him.

I clear my throat and look at the guys, "I am okay. But it's more than just sleeping with each other."

"Woah buddy! Did she say that or are you assuming?", Mangi asks in his American accent.

I guess after years of living in South Africa, the accent just won't go away that easily. But that's what happens when someone grew up at a certain place, they develop their habits. He lived in the USA for almost his entire life but moved here when he was 19. His parents thought it was best he came here and lived with his grandparents.

"I don't know...I think the feeling is mutual. We had sex yesterday so I think that says it all.", I say.

"No it doesn't. Ntwana, le ncosi izokulahla ungabhekanga. Grand grand, uthole ukuthi ujola uyi one njayami. (Dude, this girl will leave you when you're not expecting it. In fact, you are probably dating yourself.)", Zakhele adds.

"What do you mean?", I ask confused.

"Not all women want the same thing ntwana. She probably just wants to smash. I mean, think about it. You've worked with her

for years and only now do you get to smash. She is not all in.", Zakhele says.

"That's probably not the case man but I think you should talk to her first. Explain to her what you want and ask her what she wants as well. Only then can you be sure where you stand with her.", Mangaliso says.

I look at Thalete who is now quiet, "What do you think I should do ntwana?"

He shrugs, "I don't know. Just do what you feel is right. Only you and her know the dynamics of your relationship so thina asingeni ndawo ngalezinto zenu. (...so we don't have any say in how you guys should do things.)"

"Sho ntwana.", I say.

Maybe it's time I ask her to give us a shot. I know this is against the company's conduct but I feel something for her. And I'd be happy if she felt anything for me at all. Of course if things get serious, we'd have to report to HR but I can't worry about that now. I still don't know where we stand. I should give her a call later today.

"So uthini ntwana, bekamnandi lomntana? (So what are you saying man, was this girl good?)", Zakhele asks with a smug look on his face.

I frown, "Aii voetsek ndoda! (Ugh fuck you man!)"

ISISA

I just got a text from Thacente saying he's outside. I didn't expect him to come over today. First of all, it's already late in the day and second of all, we didn't plan on meeting today. Now I'm running around like a headless chicken looking for something decent to put on. These pyjamas I'm wearing are too short and I'm not about to parade outside in them.

I find a comfortable pair of leggings to wear and a big baggy T-shirt. I'm not going to change the shoes because slippers are easy and comfortable. I make my way outside and I see his blue Tazz parked outside the gate. Just seeing it gives me butterflies, I guess it's because I know that the man I've been crushing on for so long is inside it.

Before I can even open the passenger door, he opens it from the inside. Smoke immediately comes out and I know he's been smoking. I didn't even know that he was a smoker so I'm surprised. Either way, I get inside and close the door. It's not cold per se but I don't like leaving doors open.

"Hi, sorry for the smoke", he says and opens the window.

I nod and smile at him, "It's okay I don't mind. I'm a smoker myself."

He looks shocked, "Oh okay. Thanks."

"Okay.", I say before it's silent.

I never know how to act when he is around, I always feel nervous. The silence starts getting awkward so I clear my throat and hope he says what he called me out here for. He looks startled before turning to look at me. I match him and sit in a position where I'm facing him.

"Isisa.", he says in a gruff voice.

"Thalente.", I smile at him.

"Uh...I was with Mayenziwe today and I realised something.", he scratches his beard.

"Oh yeah? And what is that?", I ask staring at his beard.

A man with a beard is just everything and more. Honestly I love me a man with a beard, but only if it's kept clean. He keeps staring at his hands and wipes them on his pants. He must be sweating like hell then.

"That I- I want us to date. I mean...I want you to be my girlfriend.", he stutters.

What? This I didn't expect.

"What?", I ask with my eyes wide open.

"Yes, I want us to be a couple. You don't have to answer me now but this is what I want. Think about it okay?", he says.

"Okay.", is all I can say as I digest the news.

He grins and nods, "Thanks. Let me leave now. But can I get a kiss before I leave? It doesn't have to mean anything but I really want to taste your lips right now."

I have no idea what has got into this man today but I like it. I nod and he leans forward so that we're breathing the same air. His lips meet mine and I can't help but gasp. I can't help but marvel at how soft his lips are. I can taste the hint of beer he was having. I guess that explains the confidence.

"Goodnight.", he says pulling away.

"Night.", I say out of breath and get out of the car.

MAYENZIWE

I just got to the office and I'm told Veronica won't be coming in today, as well as for the rest of the week. Noni our receptionist told me this as well as the reason behind her absenteeism. I don't want to believe this because it would mean Veronica didn't trust me enough to tell me this herself. Noni said she told her that her mother passed away and she's planning the funeral.

Now I can only wonder if this was before or after we had sex. To say I'm disappointed would be an understatement. The least she could have done was tell me so that I could support her in any way that I can or at least offer my condolences. This is frustrating and that's why I decided to give her a call just so that she can be the one to confirm whether or not what Noni told me is the truth.

I decide to dial her number and it rings for a while before she picks up, "Mayenziwe?"

I can tell from the tone of her voice that she's not doing too good. Over the years I've grown to predict how she's feeling by looking at her body posture or the tone of her voice. Most of the time I am right and I'd like to believe that I'm right even now.

"Veronica hi. I just got news from Noni that you won't be coming in today and she also told me why. Please tell me this is not true.", I say.

"It is. My mother passed away last Thursday.", she sighs.

"What? You should have told me Veronica. I'm so sorry for your loss.", I say.

"Thank you and I didn't tell you because I knew you'd start feeling sorry for me. I just can't stand all the pitiful looks I get from people. And I know you would have done the same as well.", she sighs.

"Maybe. How are you feeling?", I know it's a stupid question to ask but I can't find anything better to ask.

She's quiet for a while, "I don't know Mayenziwe. Sad, hurt, relieved. I feel a lot of things all at once and I can't even cry in front of my family because I'm supposed to be the strong one. To be honest I don't even know if I can go through the funeral at all without breaking down."

For the first time since we started talking, her voice breaks giving me a hint that she's crying. I know what to say but I'm not sure of how I say it is going to be the right way. At this moment she's sensitive and anything I say might make her feel worse. So I decide to say the only thing I feel is right.

"Can you please send me your home address? I just want to pay my condolences.", I say.

"Okay. I'll send you the address as soon as you hang up. And thank you for calling.", she says.

I pause for a bit, "You're welcome."

After the call she sends me the location and I grab my stuff walking out of the office. When I get to the reception, I inform Noni that I'll be out of the office for the rest of the day and that if anyone comes looking for me, they should leave a message. I drive out of the parking lot with the sole purpose to start at a flower store first.

A call from my mom comes through so I put it on speaker, "Mama, unjani? (Mom, how are you?)"

"Mfana wami, ngiyaphila wena unjani? (My boy, I'm doing well and how are you?)" , she says.

I sigh, "Angikho right ma. (I'm not okay ma.) Veronica's mom passed away and now I'm on my way to their home to offer my condolences. I don't even know what to get them."

I hear her gasp, "Haibo! Do you mean uVeronica wakho lo okusebenzelayo? (...your Veronica that works for you?)"

I chuckle, "Mama, she's not mine and yes I'm speaking about her. She's sad and I don't even know what I'll say or do when I

get to her. I mean, I've been her boss for so many years and still, I don't know much about her."

"Oh nkos'yami! (Oh God!) That poor girl, she doesn't deserve this. Nobody does but it's the way of life. I hope you bought something for the family Mayenziwe because I know I raised you better than that."

"I am actually on my way to buy them flowers. It's the only thing I think makes sense."

"That's a good idea but maybe add a sympathy gift basket for them. I'm sure you can find one nearby because you can't just show up with flowers. People don't eat flowers."

"Okay mama, I hear you and thanks.", I roll my eyes.

"Thanks yani wena mfana? (Thanks for what you boy?) I told you a long time ago to take that girl as your wife but no, you never listen to your mother. We wouldn't be struggling like this to find a gift for our in-laws. Just like you didn't listen to me when I told you to leave that bloodsucking white whore. By the way, where is she?", she clicks her tongue.

"She's still the mother of my kids mama and she's with the kids I guess. Listen, I have to go now mama. I just got to the mall.", I say turning off the car's engine.

"Okay then my son, take care. And pay our condolences to the Sibanda family as well.", she says referring to Veronica and her family.

"I will."

"And by the way, I dreamt of fruits. Big, juicy looking fruits and you know that can only mean one thing my boy. I already asked your sisters, and none of them are pregnant so I have to ask.", she giggles.

I frown upon hearing this before it clicks, "No you don't have to ask mom. Nobody is pregnant on my side, I'm sure of it. Ask your daughters. Goodbye."

I end the call after hearing the laughter coming on the end of the call. She's laughing because she knows having any kind of conversation relating to my bedroom affairs makes me cringe. And plus, Veronica is on contraceptives so I have nothing to worry about. I'm sure one of my sisters is afraid to admit that they're pregnant. When I get to the flower shop, it's empty making my task here even easier to do.

THALENTE

I'm someone's boyfriend, again. After so many years of living a bachelor's life and not committing to anyone

I've finally done it. I asked Isisa to be my girlfriend and I can't exactly say I have any regrets about doing that. I mean...I like her, a lot. Yeah sure, I've been turning her down for a long time now but I guess I realised she's not who I thought she was.

Every time I'd see her, she would be loud and so...I want to say opinionated? She just always had something to say and I'm not looking for a partner that is like that. Not to mention how much of a spoiled brat I thought she was. That was until these past couple of weeks that I learnt there is more to her than what she portrays. The love of the elderly, sickly and kids.

She does so much and yet she hides it all from the public's eye because she's doing this to help people, not for attention. I believe that is what made me have so much interest in her. She helps people not because she wants to have a moment of spotlight or to be praised, she's doing this because she cares for all these people. Anyway, I'm just glad she said yes to being my girlfriend.

Her and I are probably so different that a lot of the time we'll have to explain to each other what we're doing. But I think I'm ready for all that. Today I'm working on someone's car and I must say that it's pretty damaged. I have no idea what this person was doing but I highly doubt that this car will be able to get fixed.

"So how much is this all going to cost?", my customer asks.

"I am not sure man but I think we're looking at 25 thousands. That is just an estimation. I'll still have to look at the car thoroughly before I can give you the exact price.", I say.

"Fuck! Okay man, I'll leave the car here and come back to check on it tomorrow.", he says.

"Sho.", I say.

Once he leaves, I use that as an opportunity to eat some lunch. The last time I ate was eight in the morning and it's already way past afternoon. I grab my sandwich and juice, and sit down, say a short prayer before eating. Just as I think I'm having a great day, the one person I wasn't expecting here walks through the garage doors.

"Nokuzola, what are you doing here?", I wipe my hands with my handkerchief.

"What do you mean what am I doing here Thamente? Did you think I wouldn't find out what you're doing with that snob of yours?", she huffs and folds her hands across her chest.

"My snob? Ukhuluma ngani manje mfethu? (What are you talking about now dude?)", I stand up and shove my hands in my pockets.

"I'm talking about that little Cinderella you are always busy with these days. So you are really dating her? I mean why else would you be spending time with her.", she shakes her head.

Nothing you do in the township can ever stay a secret. If one person sees you doing something then they go around telling every and anybody about it. I know because one of Nokuzola's friends saw me bringing Isisa over just to see my mother for a while after being discharged from the hospital. Now imagine how all that turned into a big deal.

"It doesn't matter what I do Nokuzola. You and I aren't a couple so I don't have to explain myself to you. Just mind your own business.", I say in a calm voice.

"Oh but this is my business Thalente. See, if you carry on seeing this girl, I will make your life, as well as her's miserable. And I hope she knows that she's sleeping with my man."

I frown, "You and I only ever hook-up. I've never been your man and I never will be your man, so know your place ntombazane. (...little girl.)"

"Ntombazane yama simba wena Thalente. Ukhumbule kuthi yimi osala nomamakho hayi lo Cinderella nyana wakho. (Little girl for shit Thalente! Remember that I'm the one who looks after your mother and not this Cinderella of yours.", she clicks her tongue and shakes her flat behind as she walks out.

VERONICA

The pity I see in his eyes right now is exactly what I was avoiding in the first place. I wanted us to behave like we always behave when we're together. We always have this flirty banter between but all I see in his eyes today is pity. Just like how it's been since we started the funeral preparations.

"Do you want to cry?", he asks.

I didn't expect this question from him. When he called me out here, I thought he was going to be like all the people who have been coming to pay their respects. I was sure I was going to get the endless lecturers about why I should have informed him about this. "I... don't know.", I scoff.

"Well I'd like it if you cried. You look like you haven't shed a single tear in a long time and this is your mother we are talking about.", he gives me a warm smile.

"What kind of question is that Mayenziwe? I thought you wanted to see my dad and sister, now what the hell is this?", I ask feeling a little frustrated by his awkwardness.

"I am but I also wanted to see you first. I want you to cry so you can be able to be strong for the people inside there. You need to let it out."

"No I don't!" "Yes you do because if you continue bottling things up, you are going to die inside. Trust me, if it's one thing I learnt about dealing with loss is that you have to go through all

the phases. Crying will let you relieve some of that pain, believe me.", he pulls my hand into his and brushes it.

I look at our intertwined hands, "I can't..." "You can.", he whispers.

"It's so...hard! So so hard Mayenziwe. I just can't believe that my mom is gone and that I'll never be able to see her again. All the regret of not spending enough time with her while she was still here is eating me up.", I start sobbing.

"Shh come here.", he pulls me into his arms regardless of how awkward it is with how we're sitting.

I try wiping my tears, "I'm sorry but I just really regret it."

He brushes my head, "There's nothing to be sorry about. This is a normal reaction. Cry and vent as much as you want to. I am here for you. After you're done being strong for everyone else, you can come to me and cry on my chest. I will be whatever you want me to be to you."

Instead of replying, my sobs increase as they turn into piercing screams. This...crying and letting someone else know how I really feel is exactly what I needed. As much as I'm still crying, I already feel better. I'm letting it all out and I feel really good. So good. Hopefully now I will be able to be of help when my father and aunt require my assistance.

NARRATED

The yard starts filling up with the mourners who just came back from the cemetery to pay their final respects to Hlengiwe Elizabeth Sibanda. Everyone who came here today is saddened by the death of such an amazing, loving woman. Those that knew her can testify that she was a force to be reckoned with. That she loved her family so much and that she'd do anything for them.

Sadly, the chief mourners, which is her family, are too sad to even celebrate the life she lived before the heart disease took its toll on her. The kids, Veronica and Azivaishe, are still processing the loss of their mother but the pain is different for their father, Victor. He feels broken and is not sure if he'll ever recover from such hurt.

"Baba munofanira kudya mukasadaro mucharwara. (Dad, you have to eat or you will fall sick.)", Veronica says walking into her parents' bedroom and closes the door behind her.

Her father is seated on the bed with his head hung low, his breathing is shallow as tears roll down his face. Losing his wife has to be one of the hardest things he has ever had to face. He has been with her for at least 27 years and now that she's gone, he feels empty. Like a part of him is missing.

"Handisati ndanzwa nzara Aneni. (I'm not hungry yet Aneni.) I'll eat later.", he says wiping his face getting rid of the evidence that he was crying.

Aneni is Veronica's second name meaning 'God is with me'. Hlengiwe had given him the task to name their two daughters, one name of each while she gave them the other names. The point is, he chose names that suited the children at that time, after they had struggled to have kids for a while. But God blessed them with two daughters and he decided to have their names have an element of God in it.

"You've been saying that baba but two days later, you haven't had anything solid to eat. Why are you doing this to yourself? To us? Do you want Azi and I to lose you as well?", Veronica sighs and sits next to him.

"How could you say that Veronica? You know that's not what I'm trying to do. I told you, I'm just not hungry yet.", he breathes deeply before looking at his daughter.

"Well you are behaving a little suicidal now and we can't have that dad. We just lost mom, we can't lose you too. You know that.", she says looking at him worriedly.

"Okay then my daughter, I will eat. Not too much though. But trust me, I wasn't doing this because I was having suicidal thoughts. I am just having a hard time processing all this but

believe me my angel, I would never leave you all alone. That is until God decides it's time for me to.", he pulls her into a side hug.

She squeezes her father, "Don't talk like that now baba. Not now. Come, I'll go warm up some food for you. Uncle Conrad and the other men are seated outside under the tree. They are all still eating so I'll bring your food over there. Okay?"

"Okay. Thank you my angel.", he brushes the side of her face and gives her a peck on the forehead.

They both get up and leave the room. Mr Sibanda goes outside, where he was told his brother and friends are. The yard is packed and people are still lined up at the food station waiting for their food. He can't believe just how many people came through today to say their goodbyes. It's a Thursday so he wasn't expecting such a big outcome, but it is.

He walks to the gentlemen and takes a seat beside Conrad who gives him a pitiful smile. They are both quiet as they listen to the other men converse. After few more minutes, Conrad decides to break the silence between him and his brother.

"Maswera sei mukoma? (How are you brother?)"

"Ndakasimudza mukoma. (I'm holding up brother.)", he smiles at him briefly.

Conrad nods, "That's good Victor but if you ever need to talk, I am here for you. Always."

Victor nods, "I know. And I, for you."

"Good, as long as you know that. We only have each other here.", Conrad says.

"I know."

"By the way, how is Elizabeth's family doing? Are they still crazy?", Conrad chuckles.

Victor chuckles as well, "They always are."

VERONICA

I saw Mayenziwe earlier on, with Thalente and Isisa. I didn't even think he'd come, let alone bring Isisa and Thalente with. Him being here means a lot to me. I can't even explain how much their support means to me because I had only expected Mantwa to be here. She's the only friend I have so this really just made me feel better in so many ways.

Speaking of her, she showed up late and she's been acting a bit off. I expected her to come and see me as soon as I had told her about my mother's passing, since we're close and all. But she surprised me when she only showed up today with a tired bouquet of flowers. It's as if she didn't want to be here, as if she

was forced to come. I'm dealing with a lot right now so I'm not paying that much attention to how she's behaving.

I just finished plating food for my father and I'm taking it to him. I see him seated on one end of the semi-circle formed by all his friends. He sees me as I make my way to him and, his eyes light up and his lips stretch into a smile. I know he's hurting but seeing him smile gives me hope that one day, he'll be okay. Not now, but some day he will be.

"Here's your food baba. I made small portions because I don't want you to have excuses and have leftovers.", I whisper beside him.

"Thank you Aneni.", he smiles.

I kiss his cheek and talk to Uncle Conrad for a bit before leaving. Just as I'm about to entire the house, I see Mayenziwe, Thalente and Isisa seated inside his car. They are chatting and I can tell that only the other two are actually engrossed in the conversation. Mayenziwe looks distant, as if he is not interested in what's being said but still responding to whatever is being said. I decide to change paths and head to them.

It would be rude of me not to acknowledge people who came here to support me. And plus, I just want to thank them for being here. I get to the car and I immediately recognise Isisa's giggles. She and Thalente are sitting very close to one another

Advertisement

busy smiling at each other. I guess I now understand why Mayenziwe seems so uninterested.

"Hi guys! Thank you so much for being here.", I say as soon as I'm in earshot.

Mayenziwe looks in my direction and he grins, "Veronica, you are welcome. We wanted to be here so really, there's no need to thank us."

"Yes, that's true. We're so sorry for your loss Veronica.", Isisa says as they all get out of the car.

They take turns hugging me and I thank them in return. Isisa asks how I'm holding up and I tell her that I'm taking it each day as it comes. We talk for a while before Thallente asks to leave and I assure him that it's no problem. Isisa decides to join him. Apparently they came here in his car so she has no choice but to do what he does. Once they leave, I'm left with Mayenziwe.

"So...those two huh?", I chuckle.

He laughs softly, "Yeah I know right. I told them that I don't want to know about their business lest they start fighting and I'm forced to pick a side. That drama is not something I ever want to be a part of."

I nod, "I understand."

Today I'm finding it hard to look him straight in the eyes. It must be the fact that I cried in front of him, he saw a part of me I never show to anyone unless I trust them. I can feel his heavy stare as my eyes sweep the floor. There are papers everywhere in this yard. Azi needs to start pulling up her socks and clean up well.

"I saw you didn't cry at the cemetery today.", his smooth voice catches my attention.

I look up at him, "Yeah I didn't."

"And why is that? Were you bottling up your emotions?", he asks.

"No, the tears never really came. I believe it's because a part of me has accepted what has happened. Plus, I did all the crying when I was with you so I guess that compensated for today.", I smiled at him.

He returns the gesture, "I'm glad that that is the case. I was really worried about you."

"Thank you but there's no need to be. You helped me and I'll reach out to you should I feel like crying again.", I chortled.

"Good. So I wanted to tell you that there's no need to come back to work immediately. You can take as much time off as you need. Don't rush things.", he takes my hand into his.

I looked at our joined hands then him, "I know and thanks once again but I promise you, I'm okay. I'll be ready to get back to work on Monday, I don't need any more days off."

"Okay then but the offer stands. I'll go now but I'll come back to see you later once more people have left and it's not that busy anymore. Okay?", he grins at me.

"Okay.", I say in a whisper.

"Do you think I can get a hug now or will that be disrespectful to your father?"

"It's okay, I don't think he'll mind. He is actually a calm person.", I shrug.

He doesn't ask any more questions but pulls me closer to him. We look into each other's eyes for a moment before we share a hug. A citrus scent emits from his body and I can't help but try and sniff more of it. He smells good, really good and I don't think this is a usual scent. Our hug lasts for a minute or more before we pull apart. I watch him drive away then make my way back inside.

I find my aunt Nosibusiso looking out through the window and with the nasty side eye she's giving me, I'm sure she saw me and Mayenziwe hugging. I'm already waiting for the lecture.

"Nyalo umatasa nemadvodza lasakhulile ngalokwenele kutsi angaba nguyihlo, Veronica. Wena awunalo lihlazo! (You are

now busy with men who are old enough to be your father Veronica. You really have no shame!)", she half-shouts.

The drama!? Yes Mayenziwe is older than me but, one couldn't tell by how in-shape he is. And plus, nothing screams old about him. Except maybe the full beard that's covering half of his face.

"Oh Ma auntiza, akusiyo indvodza yami futsi akusiyo lendzala kangako. (Oh aunty, that is not my boyfriend and he's not that old.)", I try to defend him.

But he really isn't that old...okay maybe that's a stretch. He doesn't look old that old.

"Tintfo lotatisho kute uchubeke uchumana nalomkhulu wakho. Ngitjele, babe wakho utawutsini nakakubona ukanye nalendvodza!? (Things you will say to keep dating that grandpa of yours. Tell me, what will your father think if he sees you with that man!?)", she places her hands on her wide hips.

Grandpa? Nosibusiso needs to calm down. I see aunt Mazwi walk in and I can't help but feel relieved. I know she's going to save me from this nightmare.

"Nosibusiso shiya lomntfwana. Kute umuntfu lowakwehlulela ngesikhatsi uchumana nalomfana wakho lomncane. (Nosibusiso let the child be. Nobody judged you when you were dating that

small boy of yours.) Veronica, go check on your sister.", Aunt Mazwi instructs me.

The shock and anger on Nosibusiso's face can't be missed. I thank Aunt Mazwi and leave holding in a laugh. Once I'm out of earshot, I burst into laughter. I always knew Aunt Mazwi was a savage but this? This takes the trophy.

NARRATED

"I told you to stay away from me. Why can't you listen? I don't want you anymore Sabelo!", Azivaishe says to the young man standing in front of her.

"And I told you that I want my baby. You can't just get rid of my child and think I won't react. Give me my child and I'll go.", he says as though he is speaking through his nostrils.

"You denied the pregnancy and told me to get rid of the foetus Sabelo. So why are you causing so much drama? This is not the time nor the place for you to be doing this.", Azi says in a pleading tone.

"Oh! I'm causing drama? You don't want to know what I'm like once I start doing that so don't annoy me. Give me what's mine or I'll do something you'll never forget.", he huffs and steps closer to her.

Tears start forming in her eyes, "Please Sabelo, don't do this now. I just buried my mother and my entire family is still mourning. Give me this chance to grieve and we'll meet up some other time to discuss all this."

"No, no little girl. I gave you the time and you started ignoring my calls and texts, more than enough for us to talk. I won't be patient with you anymore because you're making me a fool. My baby or else...your entire family will know about this. And you know I don't bluff.", he shrugs.

Azi starts shaking as she thinks about what this would do to her father. He is still so fragile and hearing such news will not be good for his heart. The evening has set in and the sky has started turning darker but a few of the mourners are still here at her home. They are having drinks while talking about whatever it is old people talk about. This could embarrass her family and she can't have that.

"Please Sabelo. Okay, we can meet tomorrow and we'll talk. I promise.", she puts her hands together as she pleads with him.

"Not good enough so you will have to deal with the shame of what you did.", he pushes her aside.

"What-", she doesn't get to finish her question as Sabelo starts shouting about how he wants his baby.

"AZIVASHE ABORTED MY BABY AND I WANT THAT BABY BACK!"

"I WANT MY BABY BACK AZI!!"

"YOU ARE NOTHING BUT A WHORE, A LYING KILLER OF BABIES WHORE!"

He continues to yell as he grabs the attention of everyone in the yard and on the streets. Veronica is going to kill her now that's for sure.

THALENTE

"Ma oledi do I look good in this?", I say looking at my mother.

Her eyelids flutter and I know that this is a good choice for my outing today. I am wearing khaki pants, a golf t-shirt and my All Star sneakers. This looks good for any venue Isisa is going to pick for our date today. She said it's a surprise.

"Thanks ma. To be honest, I'm feeling nervous about today. I'm going out with Isisa today and she's nothing like all the other women I've been with before. She makes me nervous. And yes I've been out with her more than once but she makes me nervous all the time.", I say truthfully to my mother.

I see her face change to that of someone confused so I explain, "Well ma oledi, Isisa is from a wealthy family ngapha mina ngiwu lazaro. (...I on the other hand, am loser.) I honestly hope that our date will go well."

Her facial features relax and I know she understands. I know that if she were still able to talk, she'd encourage me like she always did. I finish brushing my hair and decide to prepare something for my mother to eat later today. I'm not planning on coming back, we'll spend the night at Isisa's place. Her choice of course. We've been dating for 3 months now and we still haven't had sex.

Our schedules usually clash or something comes up, so we never really got to it. But I can tell she wants more and I do too. That's why I asked my daughter's grandmother to look after her. Of course I lied to her and told her I'm going out for business purposes because I couldn't tell her I'm going out with a lover. Her daughter died giving birth to my child, I don't want to seem insensitive about the situation.

"Ma oledi, I already cooked for you and I made enough for Fezeka and Ma Dontsa as well. They will be here to stay with you for the night but I promise, I'll be back tomorrow.", I kiss her cheek.

I've already finished cooking so all I'm waiting for now is my daughter and her grandmother. Isisa told me to wear anything I'll feel comfortable in and I can only hope I won't disappoint her. Speaking of her, I managed to make three installment payments returning the money she loaned me. I only managed to give her fifteen thousand and I'm hoping I'll be finished before October.

My phone pings and it's a message from Isisa of the location we'll be meeting at. Looking at the name of the place, I'm sure I have no idea where it is but I'm trusting her with this. And just as I'm worrying about getting there late, Ma Dontsa and my daughter arrive. I take my time welcoming them in and making

them feel comfortable. What I love about Ma Dontsa is that she loves being in my mother's presence.

Once I'm certain that they are all comfortable, I leave. It takes a while for me to get there because of traffic. The place is packed, I can tell by the number of cars parked here. I wonder what's happening here. I text Isisa just to inform her that I'm here already and she responds almost immediately. She asks me to tell her where I'm parked exactly, which I do, then she tells me to wait as she's on her way to me.

I wasn't lying when I told my mom that this woman makes me nervous. I see her walking straight to my car and she's still a bit distant so I take this opportunity to admire her. Her short legs suit her and make her have an adorable walk, almost as if she were a penguin. And her big forehead makes her stand out, which is something I'd never say to her of course.

"Hi baby, I missed you.", she smiles and shuts the door.

I am yet to get used to all these pet names she uses when speaking to me. It changes all the time, one minute I'm Sugar Pie and the next, Baby Cakes. I've expressed to her repeatedly that I don't like them but she insists on using them. It came to a point where I got tired of expressing my hate for them, to me letting her do as she pleases.

"Hi. Am I late? Was it hard to find my car? I'm sorry if I-"

"Babe, relax. There's no need to apologise because I didn't struggle to find your car. You look good, handsome.", she beams in joy.

Yeah right! I might look good but I don't feel great anymore. I did this to myself though. I asked if it was hard to spot my car and she said no. This parking lot is filled with some of the latest car editions, expensive car brands. I might as well have shot myself in the foot for this one. My car is the only Tazz parked around here and I can only hope I don't embarrass her.

"Thank you and you look beautiful as well.", I try shaking off my insecurities.

"Thanks. I've been here for a while now and I know where we need to go. So, let's go.", she says excitedly.

I nod and we both get out of the car. I lock it before walking to her and pulling her into a hug. Followed by a very long kiss. My feelings for this woman are growing by the day and I can only hope that nothing comes between us.

VERONICA

I just got back from work and I'm so tired. My feet ache and it feels like I got hit by a bus, which is weird seeing that today wasn't really a busy day. Mayenziwe didn't even send me around that much so I guess I'm just being lazy. Cooking is out

of the question today because all I want to do now, is close my eyes and go to sleep. Sleep has been my comfort these past few months, it helps me in so many ways.

My dad thinks I sleep so much because I'm depressed and because I don't want to talk about mom. In my opinion, that isn't even the reason why. I think it's just a phase and that maybe one day it will pass. And I mean sure, I haven't left my place in a long time except for work but that's just because I don't have a 'going-out' spirit. Definitely nothing wrong there.

Before actually getting some rest, I decide to give my sister a call. As much as I'm not happy with how things are between us, she's still my sister and I won't stop being there for her. She's been a bit reserved since the saga at our mother's funeral and I really wish she could understand that that didn't mean it was the end of the world. Her phone rings for a while before she picks it up.

"Sisi.", she says.

"(Little sister.) How are you today?", I yawn.

My body is telling me to just give in and sleep but I am pushing to hear if my sister and dad are still okay.

"I'm okay I guess. How are you?", she asks.

"I'm tired, really tired. Even now, I'm preparing for bed.", I say.

"Oh okay then sis

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you should get some rest. We'll talk tomorrow."

"I will. First, I wanted to know how you and dad are holding up with Nosibusiso around."

She never left after the funeral. After that stunt that Sabelo pulled shouting telling everybody my sister's business, the family thought it was best a "mother figure" stays to help around. I for one know that she wasn't needed and I was outvoted when the suggestion took place. If only it was aunt Mazwi, I wouldn't mind but she has work to get to.

"Dad looks fine I guess but he hates not being free in his own home. And aunt says she'll only go back to Swaziland once she's sure I've matured enough. Honestly, I think she just enjoys being in Johannesburg now.", she says in frustration.

I laugh, "I do too but don't worry, I'll be there this weekend and hopefully we'll be able to get rid of her."

"Thanks Vee and I hope so too. Get some rest we'll talk tomorrow."

We say our goodbyes and end the call. Hearing that my dad is fine is more than enough for me. After what happened on the day of my mom's funeral, I really thought that wouldn't sit well

with him and that he'd have a heart attack. But little did we all know that he can get pissed at people as well. He beat Sabelo up to a pulp and by the time he was, Sabelo got up there running with blood and bruises covering his face. Let me just say that it was the most satisfying thing ever and Azi hasn't heard from him since.

I am too lazy to search for my pyjamas so I decide to sleep in the nude. Of course, I get under the covers to keep warm. Sleep soon takes over and it's lights out for me.

I'm deep asleep when my phone rings beside me disturbing me from my state of bliss. I answer without looking at the caller ID or even opening my eyes. Hopefully after the call I'll still have more of that sleep in me.

"Hello.", I say in a croaky voice.

"Veronica hi, how are you?", Mantwa's voice comes through.

"I'm okay and how are you?", I respond surprised.

She and I have been kind of distant lately and that is from her end. I've tried asking her what the problem was and she only gave me an excuse saying that it's because we're getting older and always busy. Like I said, it's an excuse because I don't believe a word she says.

"I'm great. Listen, I have something to tell you.", she says excitedly.

"Oh okay, what is it?", I refuse to open my eyes because I fear sleep will elude me.

She takes a deep breath, "Well...here goes nothing. I'm getting married this weekend and I'd like it if you could come to my wedding."

"What!?", is what I find myself saying as my eyes open wide as saucers.

So this is what she's been hiding. Oh and not to mention that she kept it away from me for so long. As her supposed best friend, I really thought I'd be the first to know but instead, I'm probably the last. Why the hell would she keep something so big, a secret?

MAYENZIWE

I am a few months away from forty and I can't help but feel under accomplished. Yes I have all the money I need but my children aren't always here to enjoy it with me. When they are with their mother, I feel lonely all by myself in this huge house. Now more than ever, I'm starting to understand the importance of marriage. See, I've come down to the solution of asking Veronica to be my wife.

Sure we are not even dating but for the fact that we have sex more than ever, gives me hope that she might say yes. I don't

know how she's going to take it but I'm growing old now and I need some stability in my life. Of course I enjoy our stolen moments we have at work but I need more now.

She will probably think me crazy for such an idea but I have grown to love her over the past few months. It might also seem insensitive seeing that she lost her mother not so long ago and now I'm already proposing marriage. But I firmly believe that we should take risks because life is short and tomorrow is not guaranteed. I don't want to die with any regrets.

"Baba I think I'm ready to get married again.", I say over the call.

I called my father for some guidance because he is the only man I trust to give me sane advice. The man has been married for over three decades so I trust his judgement.

"Son, that is great news. But what made you change your mind so fast?", He asks.

"I don't know baba, maybe it's because I fell head over heels in love with someone. I truly believe she is the one baba and I don't want to waste anymore time. I'm getting old and I need a warm home to get back to after work.", I say.

That is not necessarily true, but my parents are old school and if they don't like my reasoning, they'll think I'm wasting my time. Just like they did with Rosette.

"I'm proud and happy for you son. I really am and hopefully this time it will be a good choice.", he chuckles.

"Oh it will be baba.", I laugh.

"And another thing, do you think you'll manage with wedding preparations while still focusing on the whole issue of custody? I mean, you still have court to attend.", my father reminds me of my unfortunate situation.

Rosette is still fighting me for the kids. She is set on moving to America even after I expressed how badly that will affect the children. She just doesn't care so we have been in and out of court for the past two months. It's not easy but I trust my lawyer to do a good job. So far, she is doing an excellent job and I have no complaints about her work ethics whatsoever.

"It doesn't seem ideal right now but I don't want to change things. I have decided I want to get married and I just wanted to let you know before I ask my woman to marry me.", I say.

He laughs, "Kanti you haven't even proposed? Hayi cha, wena mfana uyangiphoxa. Akusenani, ngikufisela inhlanhla. (No ways, you really disappoint me boy. Anyway, I wish you luck.)"

"Thank you baba and please tell mama about my decision. Bye!", I cut the call.

I know he's angry at me for doing that but I have no choice. My mother is dramatic and I really don't want to talk to her right

now. She'll blow this entire thing out of proportion so I will deal with her later. Now hopefully Veronica will say yes to my proposal. It's a crazy idea but I'm willing to fail trying than to just assume that she would have said no. I'm hoping for the best.

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ISISA

Thalente is like a child in a candy store. For today's date I decided to bring him to a Car Show held in Nasrec. It's very hard to get into one of these but one of my clients was planning on coming here and I just had to ask him to squeeze me in. And so here we are. I know how much Thalente loves cars but I didn't know he loved them this much.

Of course he keeps on touching and admiring all these cars, some of which I know nothing about. But most of the cars here are BMW so I think he knows a lot about them. We keep walking around until we reach what I know as a Gusheshe. It's bright red in colour and has a rooftop that can open all the way to the back of the car. He stares at it for the longest of time until I disturb him to ask if he likes it.

"You're kidding me right!? I love this car Isisa. I've always wanted to own one, ever since I was a teenager and my love for cars was just starting. It's...a masterpiece.", he says in awe.

I swear he looks more in love with this car than he is with me. It stings a bit but I'd take this on any other day. Seeing him happy automatically makes me happy.

"Well I'm glad you do baby.", I side hug him hiding my blushing face.

He turns to me and gives me a kiss. His lips against mine feel amazing. I swear this man makes me feel like a baby and I know he thinks I care more about the materialistic things in life which is not true. Our relationship is going great right now and hopefully I'll get the chance to introduce him to my family like he introduced me to his mother.

The car show goes on for an hour more or so, until it ends and people get to mingle with each other. I'm hungry so I ask my dearest boyfriend if we could leave earlier. He agrees and so we leave after bidding some of the people we had mingled with, goodbye. I came here with an uber so I tell Thalente that I'll be leaving with him.

He opens the passenger door for me and I get in before he moves to his side to enter. We drive out of the place in a joyous mood, he is happy about today's date and I'm happy about the outcome. He stops at the nearest McDonald's and gets us food before driving to my house. The lights are off when we get there so I hurry to switch them on.

Thalente is right behind me and I know he'll lock the door behind him. Today I went the extra mile when I was cleaning the house. I wanted it to be clean since he'll be sleeping over. This is the first time he is spending the night over so a part of me is nervous. I tell him to make himself comfortable as I'm going to warm up our food. I grab two plates and glasses to

pour juice for us, and I plate the food before popping them in the microwave. Once the food is warm, I carry all the food in a tray and take it to the living room.

"Thank you.", he says accepting his plate.

"You're welcome.", I say.

This man is weird, he was just staring at a blank TV screen. I turn on the TV and put on a movie channel. Luckily a good movie is on so we watch in silence as we eat. We're done soon after and we are now sitting next to each other awkwardly. I decided to ask him a question just to ease up the sexual tension in this room.

"So how's your mom?", stupid question Isisa.

He turns to look at me, "Uh...okay I guess."

"Cool.", I nod. "Do you want beer?"

"Yeah sure.", he says.

I run to the kitchen to fetch him a bottle and pour myself a glass of wine at it. This will help get rid of the nerves I feel right now. I give him his beer and he thanks me before drinking it. The wine does what it's supposed to and I feel myself loosening up. I move closer to him and I place my hand on his thigh. He smirks looking at me and I don't know how or when but I find myself straddling him. This man is strong, fuck!

"I've been wanting to do this for a fucking long time now.", he grunts.

That grunt alone has shivers running down my spine, "You can do whatever you want baby. Anything."

He chortles and pulls my head toward him. He kissed me gently as his lips met mine and I made sure my tongue explores his mouth. I yelp from the sensation of his one hand wrapping around my waist and the other fondling my ass. We kiss for what seems like eternity before pulling apart.

I say, "Come, let's go upstairs."

He grins and lifts me up and carries me up the stairs. The lucky stars are on my side today because finally, I'm going to get laid. It's been a long time coming but it's here and hopefully it was worth the wait.

NARRATED

As soon as the two love birds made it to the room, their hands were all over each other's bodies. Clothes started flying off of their bodies until they got to the bed where Isisa fell on top of it first, then followed by Thacente. The sexual tension was high and it had been building up for a long time now. Finally, they are going to do this and they are both so impatient.

With its own volition, Thalente's mouth starts exploring Isisa's neck and shoulders. That of course has Isisa sighing loudly when he reaches her perky breasts. Her nipples are already hard as he suckles on them making her moan out loud. He lowers himself before her sucking on her boobs, her stomach and finally, her navel. His hands reach for her ass which he lifts up and it has him staring at her neatly-groomed pussy. He can't help but bury his face into her.

"Oh, my God!!", she moans.

His mouth explores her eager pussy and he sucks on her lips and split them with his tongue. He squeezes her ass and flicks his tongue on her swollen clit.

"Oh, fuck...", she starts thrashing on the bed.

Her hands clutched his head and she pushed her pussy into his face, as her clit delved deeper into his mouth. She rocks back and forth, to and fro, over and over until her body quakes. She shook and shivered from head to toe and she let out a shriek as an orgasm hit her.

"Thalente!"

her hips buck.

It takes a few minutes for her to ride out her orgasm which soon subsides. He moves up to look into her eyes and all he sees is love and lust mixed altogether. She smiles and giggles,

this is way better than she had expected. And that was only his tongue game, she can only imagine what his dick game is like.

"That was...amazing.", she breathes heavily.

"I know. Now it's time for you to taste the real thing.", he responds.

He directs his cock to her entrance and he pushes in. He is glad when he is not met by much resistance, so he pushes in and finally gets to the hilt of her pussy. His cock is covered in warmth he decides to take a moment to calm down his raging hormones. If he continues like this, he will blow his load before she can reach her peak.

"Fuck me please.", she begged as she bites her lip and grabs at her breasts.

He obeyed and began to pound into her over and over again.

"Yes!", she screamed.

Thalente felt the warmth and wetness of her pussy soak them both. He watched her eyes close contort in pleasure and that just made him feel his own orgasm come on the rise. He continues to rhythmically thrust into her until they both reach their climax.

"Fuuuck!", he groans and empties his load.

"I love you.", Isisa says panting.

"I love you too Isisa. So much.", Thalente says and collapses on the bed, beside.

He pulls her to him and they cuddle each other. This night was epic, for them both. And they can only hope that their bond solidifies further from hereon out.

MAYENZIWE

We are going into the weekend and the question I want to ask Veronica has been burning my chest. I know that this will shock her so I want to give her a chance to process what I'm about to ask. She might need time to process all this which I totally understand. I can see she's moving to and fro, from her desk to wherever she goes. She's been very busy and I have no idea what it is that is keeping her busy.

"Veronica, can you come in here for a second.", I yell loudly enough for her to hear me.

She was about to move again so I had no choice.

"Be there in a second Mr Bhembe.", she responds.

At the office, we try to keep things as professional as possible. That is at least until after hours then we are left alone to do as we please. We've been very careful, with our sneaking around but sometimes I tend to forget where we are and I do

something unprofessional. Like one time, I spanked her forgetting that the door was wide open. Luckily nobody saw us but it was a very careless move on my side.

She walks into the office with her tablet in hand, I doubt she goes anywhere without this thing. I tell her to close the door before she takes a seat and she does so. Once she's seated the nerves start settling in. What I'm about to do might be the best thing I've ever done or the dumbest. It has the potential to ruin what her and I have going on but I want more than that now.

"You called for me Mr Bhembe.", she speaks in her eloquent voice.

"The door is shut now Veronica so there's no need for you to still be referring to me as that.", my tone sounds cheekier than it should.

She frowns and I know that that was unexpected. It was, on my end as well but I guess I'm letting the nerves control me. So I do the right thing by apologising and we soon move past my mini episode.

"So what can I help you with Mayenziwe?", she asks.

"Well actually, it's about something personal. And no, this cannot wait for until we knock off.", I say hurriedly.

"Oh okay, what is it?"

"Veronica, I know we've been seeing each other for a while now but I have caught feelings. Genuine feelings for you and I've decided I want more. I'll understand if you don't feel the same way about me but I need to get this off my chest."

"Alright then, say it."

"I have fallen in love with you and I would appreciate it if you and I could be more.", my foot keeps tapping on the floor indicating how anxious I am right now.

"You want us to be boyfriend and girlfriend?", she asks confused.

Oh boy, this will definitely shock her but hopefully it won't make her run for the hills.

I chuckle nervously, "Well I was thinking something more permanent. I am talking about us being husband and wife."

Her jaw drops and nothing comes out of her mouth. I'm starting to think I'm insane but I can't take that back now. I said what I said.

"What?", is the only thing she says.

VERONICA

"Baby, you haven't touched your food ever since you sat down.", my father's voice snaps me out of my train of thoughts.

I look at the plate and indeed, it's still full.

"Sorry baba, I'll eat later I'm just not feeling well. I think I'm going to go to bed.", I say.

"Oh my angel, is there something I should get for you?", he asks looking all worried.

"No thank you. I think resting a little will help. Goodnight family.", I say.

"Goodnight.", my dad and sister reply but as for aunt Nosibusiso, I don't know and frankly I don't care.

I put my food in tupperware before putting it in the fridge. From there, I go to the room I share with Azi and I lie on the bed we'll be sharing. At this moment, I wish I was at my place because I really need some time to think. What Mayenziwe said really shocked me, not once did I expect him to suggest such. Sometimes I wonder if he ever thinks things through or if he even thinks at all. My mind keeps on replaying what he said in his office.

<<< "What?", I asked staring at him.

He looked nervous, that I won't deny but even that didn't stop him from spewing such... nonsense. I can tell he wants to explain what he meant by this so I just stared at him for a while longer until he decided to break. My eyesight has that impact on people.

He gets off his chair and walks to where I'm seated, "Look, I know this sounds crazy..."

"You damn right it sounds crazy! What are you even thinking?", I get off my chair and start pacing from one end of the room to the next.

"And you didn't let me finish. I know it's crazy but I really do feel like you and I could make this work.", he said casually.

What bothers me is how genuine he looked when said this. From his tone, I could tell that what he said was coming from a good place and not at a place of ill intentions. But my heart and mind just couldn't come to terms with what he just said.

"Excuse me sir, I think I'm going to head home now.", I said as I got out of my seat.

He stood up almost immediately, "Veronica, I'm sorry if I scared you but I just couldn't go on any longer without getting it off my chest. I know I might have ruined things between us now but please, give it a thought. I'm not rushing you but all I ask is that you be open minded and just think things through."

I looked at him one last time before I left his office, "Goodbye sir."

As soon as I was out of the door, I grabbed my things and headed straight to the elevator.>>>

That was how things ended this afternoon and I still can't stop replaying it in my mind. Sure, I admit that I've developed a liking to him but I'm not sure if it's enough for me to get married to him. I need someone to talk to about this but I don't have anyone to confide in at the moment. Mantwa is probably already having fun at her bachelorette which I got a last minute invitation to.

I declined for obvious reasons, it means she didn't want me there in the first place so why the hell would I bother by going there. Since she invited me to the wedding a bit earlier, I will go and I'm taking my sister with me. I need someone I trust to have my back no matter what happens there with me. My intuition is telling me that I'll have the shock of my life but I guess I'll see when I get there.

"Aneni, are you still up?", a knock on the door comes through.

Only my father and his side of the family use this name. I tell him to come in and the door opens. The lines of worry on his face cannot be missed.

"Is something wrong baba?", I ask sitting up on the bed.

He sighs, "I am hoping it is. You don't look okay so I wanted to check in and find out what's wrong."

There's a chair situated at my sister's study desk so he grabs the chair and sits near the bed. If I don't at least say something to ease his mind, he'll keep on worrying which is something I don't want. He is doing his best to show my sister and I that he is here for us no matter what. I think I can tell him some things without actually giving away everything.

"Dad, when did you know that you've fallen in love with mom?", I ask.

He chuckles, "Well what a change of topic my dear.", he then sighs and brushes his head with a goofy smile on his face, "I would say it was love at first sight. She was a cleaner at some company that I had gone to with some of my colleagues. I bumped into her and she told me where to get off. Since I have always been the calmer one, I explained to her that it was a mistake and we solved it like two rational adults."

"Really?", I frown.

It seems I didn't know the entire story of how they met. I thought maybe they were grocery shopping and their carts touched, and they...ugh who am I kidding!? Let me get back to listening to the story.

"Yes Aneni. Then from there I just couldn't keep my eyes off of her even though she was oblivious of my staring. I decided to cease the moment and asked her out that same day. Who knew that three months later, we would be tying the knot. So you see, love has no timing, I knew from then that I loved her and I didn't want to waste any more time. Years later, we had you guys.", he smiles.

"Oh dad, that is amazing. I was asking because well, Mantwa is getting married tomorrow and she told me she met her boyfriend seven months ago. Hearing you say this eases my mind a bit.", I lie through my teeth.

Hey, if anyone is going down, it should be Mantwa. Plus, I'm not totally lying, she is getting married tomorrow so why not use her situation as my excuse.

He nods, "Well congratulations to her and hopefully they will have a blessed union. Are you feeling better now baby?"

I nod, "Yes I am dad. Thank you so much."

"It's my pleasure baby. Now, get some rest and I will have Azi bring you something warm to drink before you sleep. You have to get better if you'll be going to that wedding tomorrow.", he pulls me into a warm hug.

"Thanks once again dad. I'll see you tomorrow. Goodnight.", I say getting into bed with my leggings and t-shirt on.

"Goodnight my daughter and I hope you will have sweet dreams.", he says before walking out.

THALENTE

"Baby please don't go.", Isisa sulks as I put on my clothes.

I chuckle, "You know I have to get back home love. I have to relieve Ma Dontsa so she can do whatever she had already planned on doing for the weekend. And also, I want to spend an hour with Fezeka."

It's morning already and Isisa is sulking because I have to go back home. I can relate to how she feels because I feel the exact same way too. Last night was amazing

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I think it was way more magical than we both anticipated. After the rounds we had yesterday, I guess she still wants more but not only am I tired, I have people waiting for me back home.

"Yeah yeah, I understand. But I really wish we had more time together.", she really looks saddened by this.

"I know love, me too.", I say as I finish tying up my shoe laces.

"I'd say greet them for me but I remembered only Ma Ndlanzi knows about my existence in your life. Anyway, when are you

planning on introducing me to Fezeka?", she asks resting on her side.

I turn to her, "Love, remember I told you that I'm going to need more time introducing you to her. She's never seen me in a relationship before so this is going to be something quite different for me. Not once have I ever introduced her to a woman so you'll be the first and I need it to go well when it does."

She nods, "I hear you Thacente but it's been months now. You have been saying that with no actions and I'm starting to doubt if you really want to do this or not."

One thing I don't like about Isisa is that she wants things to be done at a time that she wants. I don't know if it's because she's used to always getting what she wants or whatever, but all I know is I won't be able to live with that.

"That is not the case Isisa. Just give me more time and I promise, you'll meet her. Now can you please give me a kiss before I leave?", I smile at her trying to avoid any conflict.

She giggles, "Sure, you can get a kiss from me."

We kiss for a while before I grab my things and head to my car. She accompanies me to the car and waves me goodbye as I drive out of her house. There isn't any traffic as I drive to my destination which is home. I stop at a garage first to buy a few

things including loaves of bread and something for them to snack on. After that I drove home.

Fezeka is outside busy on her phone when I get there and she doesn't see me. I get out the car with the plastics in hand and I make my way inside the yard. Only then does she look up from her phone and pay me any attention. She walks to me and gives me a brief hug before taking the plastics.

"How did you stay with your grandmothers?", I ask we walk to the house.

"It was good, I always enjoy being around them even though granny can get too bossy sometimes.", she shrugs.

Ma Dontsa likes having things done her way, so I guess my daughter's not a fan of that. I'd like to think that that's because of them being so alike. When we get in, Ma Dontsa is cooking and I must admit that it smells amazing. I greet my mother who is in the living room and give her a kiss on the cheek. From there I head to the kitchen.

"Good morning Gogo ka Fezeka.", I greet.

She stops what she's doing and turns to me, "Morning ndodana, you are glowing this morning."

"Hawu Gogo ka Fezeka! I've never heard of a man who glows and I think that's because that doesn't apply to us men.", I say.

"Yeah keep telling yourself that.", she chuckles.

I laugh, "I bought all these for you and Fezeka."

"Thank you so much son. Tell me, did the business thing you went to go well?"

Oh yes... how could I forget that I lied about going to a business event. She has this sly grin pulling at her lips and a part of me is starting to think she doesn't believe me.

"Yes it went well, thanks for asking Ma.", I look at the floor.

"That's good mfana. At least these meetings leave lipstick marks on your t-shirts. Excuse me.", she laughs and leaves the kitchen.

I look at my shirt and there's a visible lipstick mark on the collar of my t-shirt. Oh shit, there's no way a business meeting would end in kisses. I feel embarrassed.

VERONICA

My sister and I are on the way to Mantwa's husband's house. It's in Northgate and they decided to tie the knot at his house since it's spacious, so she said. Azi isn't talking much, she only responds if she's asked questions. Honestly, Sabelo broke something in her when he pulled that stunt. My mother's family

used that moment to belittle her and I guess she hasn't gotten over their comments.

"Hey, should I buy you anything before we get there? We don't know what time they'll serve food there.", I say trying to cheer her up.

"No, thanks sis.", she shakes her head.

"Well alright then. How is school going?", I try to get rid of the silence.

"School is okay I guess. I'm learning and doing what I'm supposed to."

"That's good. And have you been able to make any friends? The year is almost over."

Her friend, Karishma, moved to Durban with her family. Apparently her father got a higher paying job so they had to move down there. Azi was sad when that happened because Karishma is the only friend she's had since started high school. She confided in me once, and told me that none of the kids want to be friends with her. And the reason was because she looks like a weirdo, I tried telling her she didn't need friends but she's a teenager.

"No and frankly, I'm not looking for any at the moment. Teenagers suck, and I'm good without their bad vibes.", she shakes her head.

"Oh okay. I hear you.", I reply even though I am not sure what the bad vibes actually are.

For the rest of the drive, we talk about different things and I almost blab about what Mayenziwe asked of me. Which reminds me, I still need to give him an answer. I'll focus on that when I see him but for now, I'm attending this wedding. We get to this beautiful townhouse and I am in awe of its beauty. There are a number of cars parked near the house so I leave mine at the far end.

I knock on the door and we're let in by a waitress. I guess her guy is loaded because I can tell there's catering services here. The pretty lady leads us to the garden where the wedding is already underway. Since we got here late, we get chairs situated at the back of the aisle. I can barely see what's happening at the front but I'm going with the flow.

"I now pronounce you, husband and wife. Mr Tau, you may now kiss your bride.", I hear the pastor say.

Cheers and applaus emit from the crowd and I join them even though I'm clueless as to what's happening at the front. So much for being a best friend, I don't even have a seat in the front line reserved specifically for me. Mantwa's actions as of late, have me questioning our friendship. They start walking down the aisle I guess because some of the guests start ululating in joy.

"What the hell!?", the words leave my mouth before I can even stop myself.

To say I'm shocked would be an understatement, I am flabbergasted. This bitch is getting married to Kabo Tau, the bastard who attempted to rape me during our matric dance. He had put something in my drink and if one of my school mates didn't find him, I'd be a part of the statistics. How could Mantwa do something like this? Especially after I confided in her about the things this nonsense she now calls a husband used to do to me.

I walk to her and grab her arm, "Mantwa, how could you?"

There's silence as everyone looks at us. Most of them probably think I'm a side chick but I feel betrayed and I want to know why she's doing this. It can't be my best friend who is doing this.

"Let go of me sisi weh!", she shrugs my hand off of her and continues to walk to the house.

VERONICA

"Sis, let's just go. She's not worth your energy or time.", Azi said as I stood in place processing what had happened.

Most of the guests looked at me as if I were crazy and I had no choice but to leave the place. It was awkward and tense, not to mention how a part of me felt embarrassed. Mantwa had acted as if I were a stranger, someone who irritated her. That's why when I left that place, I didn't look back. I was hurt, really hurt but I feel better today.

The weekend is over and I'm back at work. I want to say that everything is great and that there's no awkwardness between Mayenziwe and I but I can't be too sure about that. He has been in his office a lot today because he has back and forth meetings with his team and clients. From the little that I've heard, there are some marketing strategies they need to go over.

So for now, I'm focused on making sure that each meeting doesn't go over the time set. I am also mentally preparing myself for giving him an answer. What I've learnt this past weekend is that, life is too short and that sometimes you just have to do something outrageous in order to live your best life. That's why I'm going to accept his offer. Of course there's a lot

we still need to discuss but for now, I've made up my mind and I'm saying yes.

I'm going into this marriage with an open mind and open eyes. Mayenziwe is a good man, that I know from being in his presence for the past few years I've worked for him. I see how much he loves his kids and I've also seen how deeply he loves his women, that's why I'm confident that this might work. But at the same time, I personally don't know him as a lover. This is an irrational decision for sure but I am willing to get to know him once we make things official.

"Veronica, can you get us four cups of coffee please? Mayenziwe suggested it.", Nhlanhla says peeping out from the door.

I give her a nasty look, "Sure. I'll get them for you."

"Thanks doll!", she smiles and shuts the door.

I sigh and get up from my chair to get them coffee. Nhlanhla is what I would call my work nemesis. She is just one of those girls who think they are all that and more, I'd categorise her in the list of slay queens. I don't want to lie, she is beautiful and she knows it. Very confident about it too, way too confident if you ask me. What really annoys me the most about her is how she turns everything into a competition.

Oh and how could I forget, her obsession with Mayenziwe. She really likes going all out to get his attention, which she never gets by the way. I didn't care about that before, but I'm not so sure how I feel about it now. I mean this man and I are having sex, which is a big deal to me because I don't just sleep with anyone. Anyway, I can only hope Mayenziwe ignores her hints like he's been doing ever since she started doing this.

Once I have the cups of coffee, I take them to his office. I knock once before I hear Nhlanhla's eager voice telling me to come in. As soon as I walk in, my eyes search for him and I locate him seated on the floor. Nhlanhla right beside him, sitting way too close to him for my liking.

I clear my throat, "Sir, I brought you all the coffee you requested."

He lifts his eyes to my direction at the sound of my voice, "Veronica, uh thank you but I didn't ask for any coffee."

I frown, "You didn't? But Nhlanhla said..."

"Boss! I just figured we could all do with coffee since we've been brainstorming for hours now. I hope you don't mind ", she pipes in as she speaks in what is supposed to be her seductive voice.

This girl rubs me off the wrong way in so many ways. I give her a quick side eye before looking back at my future husband. He

looks confused by what's happening but he thanks her either way.

"Of course boss. It was no problem at all. Anyway, can you be a doll and give us the drinks Veronica.", she slightly moves even closer to Mayenziwe.

I don't know how he's not seeing these signs but he's not because he's busy gawking at me.

I nod, "Sure."

I walk around giving the other two guys their coffees before giving Nhlanhla. As I'm handing her the cup, a huge part of me wants to throw the coffee in her face but that would get me fired and I need this job. She thanks me with a smug look on her face. Then last but not least, I hand Mayenziwe the cup and our hands touch. I immediately feel a spark run through my body and I know he felt what I felt because his eyes go wide.

The bitch next to him clears her throat, "Thank you Veronica."

The emphasis on my name has us breaking out of our trance. I could just land a hot slap on her face just so she could understand what a bitch move that was.

Mayenziwe clears his throat, "Yes, thank you Veronica."

"My pleasure sir.", I say and leave the room in a hurry.

He has this effect on me that after one touch, I'm already wet for him. I head to the bathroom to freshen up. I'm sure the other guys saw what just happened because I know that the bitch did. It's only a matter of time before I become the hot topic in office gossip. If only they knew that it's more than just hands touching we do. Batawutishaya! (They are going to hang themselves!)

ISISA

I don't think I've ever been this happy in my entire life. Of course except for the time I got adopted by an amazing family. But other than that, this is the greatest time in my entire life. Thalente makes me feel great, I won't lie. I feel like a teenager falling in love for the first time all over again. We just started being intimate with each other but I already know I'm hooked.

The man has a unique set of bedroom skills and I've never had a man who puts my sexual needs before his. He attended to my every need and made sure to find my erogenous zones.

Honestly, he is by far the greatest I have ever had. Growing up, I've only ever dated or hooked up with white men so being with him is definitely something else.

I decide to give him a call as I drive to my brother Tyler's workplace.

"Love.", he says as soon as he picks up.

Oh and I love how he suddenly started using the word "Love" instead of my name. I was starting to feel like his sister or friend which is totally cringe.

"Hi babe. Are you busy?", I ask.

"Yeah sure but I will always have time for you. Z'khiphani? (What's up?)", he replies.

Isn't he the sweetest, "I just wanted to ask if you're okay or not. I know how busy you get so I wanted to know if I should bring you anything to eat?"

"Oh aii ngiyabonga sthandwa sam but ngimnandi. (Oh thanks my love but I'm good.) The guys and I already bought something to eat so don't worry about me. How are you?"

"I'm good hey. Are there cars you're working on there?", I slow down as the traffic light turns red.

"Yes actually. We have two cars we are currently working on. What about you? What are you up to?"

"I'm on my way to see my brother, Tyler. I've been postponing the visit but I'm going to his workplace with lunch for him. Hopefully he won't be too busy.", The light turns green and I continue driving.

"Oh okay, that's good. Does he know about me?", well that question was unexpected.

"Yes he does and he said I should set a date where we can all hang out some time.", I say.

He chuckles, "Well I don't mind meeting your family love. Anyway, let me get back to work. I still have a lot to do before the day ends."

"Yeah no problem. I just arrived outside the building of Tyler's place of work so I'll get back to you later. Will you be able to come see me today?", I turn off the car's engine.

He breathes deeply, "I don't know love. It will depend on whether or not I'll finish working on time. If I do

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then I'll be able to come to your place for a short while. And I forgot to tell you, I found a good hospice for my mom."

"Really? Baby that's good news!!", I say excited.

"Yes love it is. I am happy that she'll finally get the help she needs but I'm sad I'll be away from her. She's the only parent I have left and I am afraid I'll lose her.", I hear his tone change from happy to sad.

"Babe, I'm so sorry. I know how hard this is for you. Tell you what, when you take mommy there, I'll be right there with you.

That is if you will have me.", I bite my nails praying he doesn't think I'm being forward.

"Isisa, you'd that for me?", he asks surprised.

"Yes of course. Only if you don't mind though.", I clarify.

"Thank you so much Isisa! You've just made me less anxious about doing this.", he says.

His words melt my heart, "Let me go before I start crying Thalente. I love you and hopefully I will see you later."

"Goodbye love.", he says before he ends the call.

Thalente neh! Is it too early for me to admit that I'm a gone girl? I get out of the car and make my way inside the building after locking the car. I greet people as I head to Tyler's office, most of them are used to seeing me here even though I don't come as often anymore. I've been so caught up with work and my personal life, that I neglected my brother.

I knock on his office door, "Come on in!", he says on the other side of the door.

I take a deep breath before opening the door and my lips stretch into a smile as soon as I see him. He sees it's me and he gets off his chair and comes around to hug me. The hug lasts for a few minutes until we pull apart. He has a huge grin on his face as he looks at my face as if observing if I have any scars.

"Hey, what is this now?", I laugh.

"I'm just trying to see if I can figure out why you've been ghosting me. Have a seat.", we sit on his couch.

"I'm sorry brother, I've just been so busy with work and just life in general. How are you?", I ask.

He chuckles, "I'm good. I've just missed you that's all."

"I missed you too. How is Maddie and the kids? Oh man, I miss those little buggers.", my nephews are troublesome but I love them so much.

"Maddie is doing good and as for the boys...well we know how they are. I think the fact that they are twins makes them think they can get away with anything.", he brushes his face in frustration.

I laugh, "Well I miss them and maybe I should give you guys a break and have them come to my place. Say next week?"

"Thank you Isisa. You are such a sweetheart. We really need some time alone. So tell me, how are things going with your boyfriend?", he wiggles his eyebrows.

Tyler has always liked gossiping. At one point, I had to lock my room when my friends from school were around. He'd always listen in on our conversations then go and spread the news to his friends. He was very different back then.

"Things are going great. I love him and he loves me. I've met his mother. So everything is going great at the moment."

"Wait, you've met his mother? How come you haven't introduced him to us? To our parents at least?", he asks shocked.

I shrug, "I don't know. I guess it's because I don't want to jinx things between us. I'll introduce him when the time is right."

He nods in understanding, "Okay then, I hear you. When last did you see your mother?"

From how he's asking the question I know he's not talking about OUR mother, but MY mother. The one who gave birth to me and didn't care or not whether I lived or died. She is a sensitive topic, he knows this but he always knows how to calm me down should I feel some type of way. I hardly ever think of her now that I'm in such an amazing relationship.

"It's been a long time now. I just don't want to see her Tyler, she does nothing but tear me down. At this moment in my life, I don't need that kind of negative energy.", I sigh and shake my head.

MAYENZIWE

"I'd really appreciate it if you could bring me some feedback at least tomorrow afternoon. I need to go through all these ideas with Isisa.", I say to the team that's leaving my office.

They all mumble their understanding of what I just said before they shut the door on their way out. I loosen up my tie and take a deep breath as I relax on my chair. It's been such a long day and I can't wait to get back home. My back hurts and my brain is fried from all that thinking and those calculations. I just need a soothing shower and hours and hours of sleep. It's either I'm working too hard or I'm getting older.

A knock comes through on my door, "Enter!", I yell while massaging my neck.

"Sir, that was the last meeting of the day.", Veronica's sweet voice catches my attention.

I quickly looked at her and she still looks as beautiful as she did this morning. As if she didn't even lift a finger to do any work today. Or maybe I'm just attracted to her as a being. Her beady brown eyes, her luscious lips and her russet brown skin tone. I swear this woman has me under a spell.

"Veronica, please come in and take a seat.", I straighten up on the chair.

She nods and closes the door and makes her way in. I am nervous. I want to know if she already has an answer for me or if she's still going to need more time. My nerves are getting the best of me and I can't stop bouncing my leg. I can already feel the beads of sweat forming on my neck.

"Mayenziwe, are you okay?", she asks with a frown.

"Yes... I'm fine, why wouldn't I...why wouldn't I be fine?", I start stammering.

"You zoned out for a minute so I was checking.", she raises her hands in surrender.

"Uhm...thanks. So, have you thought of my proposal?"

She sighs, "Yes I have." "And...what is your answer?"

She's quiet for a while and she stares into my eyes, "It's a yes. I'll marry you but-"

I don't even wait for her to finish as I get off my chair to pull her into a hug, "Thank you Ma Sibanda. Thank you and I promise, you won't regret agreeing to this."

"Mayenziwe but you haven't even heard the rest of what I have to say.", she bursts into laughter.

"I don't care. As long as you said yes, we'll figure everything out later. For now, just kiss me.", I whisper against her lips.

She smiles before I lean in and capture her lips between mine. Our bodies are pressed together heatedly as we breath heavily with our lips pressed together. Her lips are warm and soft, and I take my time to enjoy the feel of them against mine. This day wasn't so bad after all.

MAYENZIWE

Ever since I was old enough to understand what love is, I wanted it for myself. Having seen how genuine and pure my parents loved and still love each other, just made me want it more. I wanted to experience that kind of love without holding back. And on many occasions I truly thought I had found "the one", which was just me fooling myself.

I've been told so many times that I'm a fool for falling in love so quickly or that I love so deeply without holding back. That is me, and no matter how many times I was told how stupid I am for being this way, I couldn't stop myself. So I kept on falling in love and getting my heart broken. But then I met Rosette and I was so sure she was the one for me. I thought she possessed the same qualities as mine but I was wrong about her as well.

From thereon, I started doing something I've always hated doing, which is to not have a stable partner but rather have fuck buddies. I've never wanted that for myself but I did it anyway because I didn't want to make a fool of myself by falling in love once again. Right when I least expected it, Nikiwe came along and I fell for her really hard. So hard I had already pictured myself married to her.

Life has always had a way of knocking me down and that's when she told me that she was still in love with her ex. Not only that, but that she also wanted to give him a chance. I'd be lying if I said I wasn't hurt by her choice but she had already made her decision and all I did was merely support her and set her free. Even after she offered friendship, I just couldn't have her as a friend whereas my feelings for her were deep.

All that was about five to six years ago. I stayed single for so long and now I'm finally ready to put myself out there again. There is no holding back anymore because I'm not getting any younger and my feelings for this woman I've now suddenly come to love, are growing fonder everyday.

After she said yes, I was so excited I had to call my father to give him the good news first. He was not happy with how I went about it but nonetheless, he was happy for me. My mom on the other hand was angry that I didn't tell her about this first and that I still haven't told them who the woman I'm marrying is. They won't have to wait for long though because I will take her down to Estcourt as soon as we're settled.

Nobody in the office knows and I'm not planning on letting them know until we at least inform HR first. CEO or not, I need to run things by HR because if anything were to go wrong, they would need to intervene. The news of our relationship will be

the talk of the office but I don't care and I'm praying Veronica won't let that get to her or between us.

That's why I decided to have a conversation with her today to discuss our relationship. I left the office earlier so I could get to my place and cook for us. I'd like to say that this is our first date and I'm hoping it ends with her still wanting to marry me. I cooked prawns and pasta for us, as well as a sweet-spicy sauce to go with it. It tastes good to me and I can only hope it tastes the same way to her.

I hear the gate open and I know she's arrived. I told her to use the gate passcode when she gets here because she still had it from the time she took care of me when I was sick. The pots are on the stove warming up the food so I turn down the heat in case we won't be eating immediately. A knock comes through on the door and I take a deep breath before going to open it.

"Hi.", she offers me her beautiful smile.

"Hi! Come in please.", I make way for her.

She walks in and I tell her to make herself comfortable on the couch. I head to the kitchen to fetch her a glass of wine and juice for me. I need to be more than sober for today's conversation, lest I say something wrong at least I'll be able to salvage the situation. Once I have the drinks I take them to the

living room and I find her seated with her legs crossed on the couch. Well I'm glad she made herself feel at home.

"This is for you.", I say giving her the glass.

"Thank you.", she beams in joy.

I sigh and take a seat beside her, "Did you have a smooth ride from your place coming here?"

"Yes I did thanks for asking. So...shall we get started on the conversation?", she takes a swig at her drink.

"Sure we can but I was thinking that maybe I could dish up for us first. Is that okay?"

"Please! I thought you'd never ask. I'm famished, I haven't had anything to eat since morning.", she giggles.

"Coming right up!", I chuckle and head to the kitchen once again.

I dish up and take the food to her. We bless the food before digging in. The subject of marriage is not mentioned as we eat and share jokes in between our dinner. Soon dinner is done and now we are to have the talk.

"I think I should go first since I'm the one who suggested this idea in the first place. To be honest, I'm not even sure what I'm supposed to say but let me just say it. The reason I want us to get married is because I feel like I'm getting older by the day

and one day, I'd like to have a woman I love beside me even through the toughest times.", I say without any reluctance.

Honesty is the best policy and if we are to start this relationship, I don't want to hide my true feelings for her.

"Wow...I didn't think you'd admit you love me so soon.", she blows her breath.

I shrug, "I can't help it. I'm a hopeless romantic."

We both laugh before she clears her throat, "Well before we do this, I'd like us to get some things out of the way. Let's talk about living situations. Does this mean we'll have to move in together?"

"Yes of course. Not that I'm trying to belittle you or anything but, my house is bigger and therefore I was hoping you would move in with me. The kids have their own rooms here."

"I hear you and I'm okay with this arrangement because your ex wife didn't live here. Now let's talk about the kids. They will be moving in with us as well?"

"I believe so, as soon as I win custody over them. Is that a dealbreaker for you?", I'm really hoping it's not.

She shakes her head, "No it's not. I don't mind the fact that you have kids, I mean I already know them so spending more time with them won't be that hard. I hope."

"Yeah I don't think it will. My kids are good. The only person I'm worried about is their mother. She might cause problems for us and I don't know how that will affect you.", Rosette is such a pain.

"I don't really care about her. I already know what to expect when it comes to her so it's all good. The last I'm hoping we'll agree on which is...children.", she pours more wine for herself.

I frown, "What about them? I already mentioned that they-"

"No I'm not talking about Londiwe and Ndumiso. I'm talking about me having children of my own. I still want to have children of my own and I want to know if you're still up for that."

"You want children?", I ask.

She nods, "I do. I'm 25 Mayenziwe and I also want to have kids of my own. I will love Lond and Ndu as if they were mine but I can't pretend as if I'm their mother. I didn't give birth to them and I'm sure they won't like me acting like their mother."

"But you will be their mother Veronica. You might not have given birth to them but you will live with them and they will have to follow our rules. As their parents.", I say.

"Like I said Mayenziwe, I know that but I'd still like to have my own. So tell me, are you willing to have more kids?", I can already tell the wine is kicking in.

I won't lie, I really wasn't planning on having any more kids. Not only do I feel old but I actually am pretty old. I can't imagine myself changing diapers at 40 or going to pre-school meetings when I'm in my late forties. At the same time, I get where Veronica is coming from. She's still young and I'm sure her father would love for her to have children as well. I don't have a choice when it comes to this one, I'll have to compromise. This is what happens when you go for a person younger than you.

"I'm open to the idea." I finally say to her.

She smiles and puts her glass on the coffee table before leaping on my lap, "Then I guess we're getting married then."

THALENTE

I'm enjoying the last few days I have with my mother. I am trying not to get too emotional about her going some place else but it is getting to me. I've cared for her for years and now she is going to be away from me for a long time. The fact that I'll still be able to visit her as many times as I want, comforts me.

I just finished feeding her and now I'm changing her clothes, preparing her for bed. Most people would think of this as an abomination but I believe I'm doing what's right. I am her only child and if I don't take care of her, nobody else will. Once I've finished dressing her, I put her in bed and tuck her in.

"Goodnight ma oledi. I'll see you tomorrow morning.", I kiss her forehead and leave.

As I'm about to go to my room, I hear someone calling out my name from outside the gate. I check the time and it's late. The time reads, 22:07. Who could it be at this time of the night wanting to disturb my peace. People can't just take a hint that it's not the time to be visiting people. I go outside to check and I see Nokuzola drunk and in her short skirt and revealing t-shirt.

"Nokuzola, what are you doing here at this time of the night?", I ask.

I haven't seen her in weeks and now I'm seeing her at my gate all sloshed and shit. This girl has the nerve to be disturbing me so late knowing very well that I have a sick mother I care for.

"You...I am here for you Thacente.", she burps as she falls on the ground.

The gentleman in me wants to take her with me inside the house but I'm not so sure if that's a good idea. I'm in a relationship now and if Isisa were to find out I allowed a female, who's not family into the house, she'd probably be mad at me.

"Stop talking nonsense Nokuzola. Why are you here at this time? Don't you know that only witches travel at this hour?", I say.

"Oh so you're calling me a witch Thalente? Why are you doing this to me? You know I love you.", she starts shedding tears.

"What love Nokuzola? You and I were never in a relationship and I told you this. I made it very clear to you from the beginning that I wasn't looking for anything serious. Now why the drama. Really sisi, go back home before you cause a scene.", I click my tongue.

She starts crying even louder, "But you are in a relationship with that...thing!"

"Yeyi wena ntombazane, don't you dare test me. (Hey you girl...) Never again should you call my girlfriend a thing. And besides, I realised that I'm ready for a relationship now. It's just not with you. So deal with it before you start causing problems in my relationship.", I turn back and head for the house.

"Thalente!", she starts screaming.

I'm sure the neighbours are wondering what the hell is going on out here. I don't know what to do with this girl at this point and at the same time I don't want the neighbours complaining about noise. I take a deep breath and turn back to her. She's still weeping on the pavement with her body sprawled out.

"Please move away from here mfethu. People will start thinking that I did something to you. Just get away from here tuu.", I say softly.

"No...no I'm not leaving. You will learn to love me wena Thalente. Angihambi la! Uyangizwa kuthi ng'thini!? Angeke ungidle bese uyangilahla ngathi ngiyi nja nje. Ang'vumi! (I'm not leaving! Do you understand what I'm saying!? You can't just fuck me as if I'm a dog and end things like that. I won't allow it!)", she tries standing up but fails as she falls back on the ground.

"Why are you acting as if you didn't want what I was giving you? The relationship was mutual and consensual so you have to stop this. I'm tired Nokuzola, I had a long day working on people's cars so I'm going to sleep. Goodnight and I hope you will find your way home.", I say.

I only take two steps away from her when I see her head fall on the ground. I rush outside the gate to help her and she's asleep. This girl fell asleep outside my gate and now I have no choice but to take her back to the house with me. She's really putting me in an awkward position because my conscience won't allow me to leave her lying out here, vulnerable to getting abused.

So I pick her up and take her back inside with me. She's fast asleep as if she wasn't just spewing nonsense a while ago. I place her on the couch before fetching a comfortable pillow and blanket for her. Yes she annoys me but she's helped me out at moments when I needed help the most. Like other people,

she could have declined taking care of my mother regardless of a guaranteed payment but she didn't.

Instead she took really good care of her and for that reason, I'm willing to care for her. But only for tonight. I go back outside to lock the gate before coming back inside the house and locking all the doors. I place a bucket next to Nokuzola in case she wants to vomit when she wakes up in the night. As well as a water bottle so she can drink and stay hydrated. After that, I switch off the house lights and head to my room.

A call from Isisa comes through just as I settle on the bed, "Hi love."

"Hey babe! Are you sleeping already?", she yawns.

"No, not yet but I'm about to. What's up?", I ask getting under the bed covers.

"Nothing is up, I just wanted to say goodbye before I fall asleep. I'm surprised you're still up because you're usually asleep by this time.", she chuckles.

Now I don't know if I should tell her about the woman sleeping in my living room. Yes nothing happened between us but I'm not sure how she'll feel about that. I don't want to make her worry in any way so maybe if I keep this to myself, there won't be a need for her to know at all. Besides, what harm could withholding this useless information do to us.

"Well... I was busy ne oledi as you know and after that, I decided to take a bath love. That's why I'm still up but I'm planning on sleeping now.", I chuckle nervously.

"Oh well, I'm sure you're exhausted. Let me let you sleep ke babe.", she yawns once again.

"Thank you for caring love. Yeah let me rest and thanks for calling. You know I enjoy listening to your voice."

She laughs, "You always say that and I'm starting to wonder if it's because you want to get into my pants, Mr."

I laugh as well, "That is also one of the reasons love. Anyway-"

"Thalente where are you!?", I hear Nokuzola yell.

There's silence on the other end of the line and I know she heard that voice. My room is not far from the living room and my door is open. I always leave it open in case I need to rush to my mother's room. But today I regret doing that because I'm sure I just became single.

"Baby, it's not what you think.", I quickly say.

"Save it Thalente, I'm too tired for whatever you want to say. Goodnight.", Isisa says.

"Love I-", the call is disconnected before I can further explain.

ISISA

I have kept my word and I am here to see uMa Ndlanzi off. My mind and soul are still very much into doing this regardless of the awkward situation between Thalente and I. It's been days since I heard a female's voice over the phone call and we still haven't talked about it. I wanted him to enjoy his time with his mother before she moves. So things between us are still very awkward.

"Did you pack everything she's going to need?", I ask Thalente as I grab the bags full of his mother's stuff.

"Yes I did. But can we talk about-", I don't let him finish the question.

"Now is not the time Thalente. We'll talk on our way back.", I say and head to the car.

He nods, "Let me go and get her then so we can hit the road."

"Sure.", I put the bags in the boot of the car.

Minutes later he comes out of the house pushing his mother on her wheelchair and he locks the security gate before heading my way. We help each other by putting her in the car and strapping her in. Once we're sure she's comfortable, he goes to lock the gate and he comes back to the car. We are using my

car since it's bigger and convenient for the situation. I am letting him drive because I will be sitting with his mother in the back seat.

"Should I put on some music?", he asks as the engine roars to life.

"Yeah I think some music would be good.", I say.

"What song do you have in mind?", he drives off.

I think for a while before it hits me, "Nomvula by Freshlyground."

He chuckles before looking at me through the rearview mirror, "Really? I just didn't take you for the type to listen to that kind of music?"

"Thalente! So you judged a book by its cover? You are so wrong for that.", I roll my eyes and feign hurt.

He laughs, "Aii phela mangik'bhekile mina ufana nalabantu abathanda umculo wama rapper. (Hey when I look at you I see one of those people that listen to rap songs.)"

I join him in laughter, "Wow! You definitely read me wrong. And if you must know, I'm not a fan of hip hop even though I like it. Besides, the only rap I truly enjoy is Kasi rap."

"Unamanga mfethu! (You're lying dude!)", he looks really shocked.

I smile, "I'm telling you hawu. Phela I wasn't born in the suburbs you know. I only went there at a later stage in my life."

"Wow! I'm shocked to be honest. I guess it's because we never talk much about your past. We really need to start talking about our childhoods from now on.", he says.

He's not lying. I always avoid talking about the past because of the trauma I went through. Before being adopted, my life was a mess and I can still remember all the terrible things I went through. That's why when I moved away from Orange Farm, I didn't look back. I left all the bad memories and experiences there but Tholente needs to know more about me if we're going to get any more serious in this relationship.

I sigh, "Yeah I guess we do. Now can you focus on driving please. Edenvale is quite far."

"Of course but it's not that far really.", he shrugs.

"Whatever Tholente. Just drive.", I chuckle.

I glanced at his mother and I could have sworn I saw a small smile pulling at the corners of her lips. It must have been my imagination though because I don't think that's possible. Or is it? I fix the fleece I've put on her thighs to cover her up even though it's not cold. The wind getting through the open windows can be harsh and I am just trying to make sure she's comfortable.

"Isisa?", Thalente calls out.

I turn to look at him and frown, "Yes?"

His facial expression is blank and I can only hope he's not about to start talking about our matters in front of his mother. This man of mine can be clueless sometimes and I know for sure he can do exactly what I'm thinking.

"So...between Siya Shezi and MaSeven, uthanda bani? (...who do you like?)", he asks before bursting into laughter.

My God! What in the world did I do to deserve such a man? Honestly, I'm starting to think he has a few loose screws. I sigh and look away from him as he continues to laugh. I shouldn't have told him I prefer Kasi rap because now he might make it a thing just to terrorise me. Lord help me!

VERONICA

"What did you just say Veronica?", my father asks with a confused facial expression.

"I said I'm getting married baba. Aren't you happy for me?", I am nervous like shit right now as I say this.

"Oh sisi! I am so happy for you.", Azi gets off her seat and comes to hug me.

Well at least someone is happy for me. As for the two members sitting in front of me, I can't say the same for them. My aunt is biting her tongue not to lash out at me right now because my father is present. But I know once he disappears, I'll never hear the end of it. I can literally tell that she's breathing fire by how red her skin has turned.

"Handisati ndakunzwisisa. (I still don't understand you.) What do you mean you are getting married? Since when and with whom?", he asks calmly.

Oh Lord! My father understands what I'm saying but this is the African way to say, "I'm giving you a chance to correct your statement." It's too bad I won't be doing that because I've already decided. Mayenziwe and I will tie the knot and we both agreed to have a simple court wedding. This is until I'm sure that we are in this for the long run and only then will we have a white wedding.

I cleared my throat, "Since this week baba. The person I'm getting married to is someone I deeply care for and love."

Even though I haven't exactly told Mayenziwe that I love him, I'd like to believe that my actions speak for themselves. I wouldn't agree with this crazy idea if I wasn't. I hope he sees and knows this.

"Veronica you know exactly what your father means. Ngubani lomuntfu lenifuna kushada naye futsi kungani niphutfumisa tintfo? (Who is this person you want to get married to and why are you guys rushing things?)", she crosses her arms across her chest.

This...this is an indication that the volcano is about to erupt, "Like I said aunty, it's someone I love. And it's not that we are rushing things but we decided life is too short to delay things. So we are ready to make it official."

"Kufanele usitjele kutsi ukhulelwe futsi uyekele nekucala emanga! (You must just tell us if you are pregnant and stop lying!) And how well do you know this man?", she clicks her tongue.

This woman is such a blabbermouth. She really never shuts up and now she has scared my father. His eyes are wide open, and so is his mouth, and I can tell he's going to faint if I say I am. Honestly, Nosibusiso has to go back to Swaziland now. She's overstayed her welcome. If it means I have to pay for her flight ticket, I will do so. I'll be married to a wealthy man so money won't be a problem.

I avert my gaze from her to my father, "Baba, are you giving me your blessing to go through with the marriage?"

"Hehehe! Veronica nguwe mbamba yini lona? (Veronica is this really you?) Yeah things do change!", she chuckles bitterly as she claps her hands.

"Veronica you better answer your aunt. Who is this man and are you really pregnant?", he is starting to sweat.

Man! My poor father looks really stressed and I can only imagine how he will react when I tell him it's my boss. He will probably have a heart attack on the spot and I am Really hoping that's not the case with him. I'd never forgive myself should anything happen to him and it all be my fault.

I sigh and shake my head, "I'm not pregnant at all. I am sure, I promise. Anyway baba

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we'll be going to sign at Home Affairs this coming Tuesday. A few of his family members will be there and I was hoping you guys would come as well to support me."

"You already know you have my support sisi. I am so happy and even better, I get to skip school for the day.", Azi squeals in excitement.

"Azi stop this nonsense. You are happy while your sister refuses to give us this man's details. Surely there is something wrong with him.", Nosibusiso says.

"Nothing is wrong with him aunt, I just wanted to surprise you all. Well the person I'm marrying is Mayenziwe Bhembe.", there I said it and now I'm waiting to catch fire.

"Which one? Your boss?", Azi asks and only then do the adults get it.

"Yes, him.", I nod and cast my eyes to the floor.

Somehow, when the question is asked this way I feel like I'm committing a sin. But there's no going back now because I have said it and my family is already looking at me as if I've grown a third eye. I didn't come here to ask for their permission and I'm hoping they will honour my wish by coming with me to Home Affairs.

THALENTE

We are at Edenvale Care Centre and my mom has just been allocated a room. The hospice looks nice and cosy. And not to mention how clean it is. That was the one thing that worried me, finding her a place unhygienic. But I am pleased with what I see and I can only hope she'll be treated well. I've already decided that I'll come to see her at least once or twice a week just to make sure she's settling in okay.

"Okay ma oledi, we are here now. The staff here looks accommodating and I can only hope they treat you well.", I say to her as soon as one of the staff leaves.

"Should I give you some space?", Isisa asks.

"No. Please stay.", I say and she nods sitting on the only available chair in the room.

I take a deep breath before turning to my mother again and sit on the bed next to her, "I'm going now ma oledi but I promise to come and visit you every week. This place looks good and they even have a garden. I know how much you love flowers so I hope you enjoy it when they take you out for fresh air."

This is turning out to be harder than I expected. My mother is my world, her and my daughter. Now I have to trust strangers to take better care of her than I did but it's proving to be very hard. I feel tears roll down my cheeks and I try my best to wipe them. It's a futile process but I don't stop trying.

I clear my throat, "I'm going to miss having you around at home. Even though you were never able to reply to the nonsense I used to say, I enjoyed telling you my stories either way. You are an amazing mother ma oledi, and I hope you never doubt that. It was an honour taking care of you and if I could, I would do it all over again. Bye for now oledi lami. (...my mother.)"

I kiss her on the cheek before wiping my tears and getting on my feet. My eyes land on Isisa and she has tear stains on her cheeks as well. I guess she didn't lie when she said she's an emotional person. I chuckle a bit and walk over to her and pull her into my arms. A quick hug and a brush on the back has her feeling all better, she then says goodbye to my mother before we leave.

Before leaving, I'm required to fill out a form stating how I'll be paying for her stay here. Once that's done, Isisa and I walk to the car and I'm still behind the wheel. I drive off and only then does it come back to me that we haven't talked about Nokuzola. I just want to get this conversation over and done with so that I can apologise if need be.

"Can we talk about the person's voice you heard?", I ask as I drive on the busy road.

She blows her breath, "Yes we can."

I sigh, "Look, I know it was wrong of me to have a woman in my home without informing you but I swear, we didn't do anything. The person's voice you heard belongs to Nokuzola and I helped her out since she had passed out on the pavement from being drunk."

Oh how I wish that were true. She had faked passing out when we were outside. I only found out when the call between Isisa

and I ended that she was faking. When I got to the living room, she was wide and there was no indication of her ever being asleep. I didn't care what time it was or how dark it already was, I kicked her out and I haven't seen her ever since.

"To be honest, I don't care that you let someone inside your own home. You don't need my permission to help people. What I do care about though is the fact that you didn't trust me enough to handle the truth. You chose to lie about what you were doing and honestly, I don't understand why you did that.", she huffs and folds her arms across her chest.

"I know, and I'm sorry I did that. I don't know why I did that but I guess my fear of you leaving me got the best of me.", I say.

"You think I'd attempt to leave you at every inconvenience?", she asks now looking sad.

I shrug, "I don't know...maybe. I just didn't want to risk it. You and I are so different and no matter how hard I try, I'm scared you'll see that you deserve better than me."

"Thalente I don't even know what to say to you. Not once did I think you'd feel that way because I thought you and I were on the same page. I love you and I always show you that I do, there is no need for you to be insecure."

"Yeah I know but sometimes I can't help it. I'm really sorry Isisa, I promise this won't happen again.", I stop at the nearest shopping centre.

She sighs, "I hope so Thamente. I really hope you trust me enough next time to choose how I feel about things. I despise lies and secrets, so never again should we visit a conversation like this."

I nod, "I assure you, we won't have to. Come, let's go get something to eat."

"Thanks. And who is this Nokuzola again?", she asks as we hop out of the car.

I take her hand into mine as we walk to a restaurant, "The girl you saw at the hospital when my mom was admitted."

"Oh her! I knew she was sketchy when I saw her. I don't like her and besides, I'd kill you if you cheated on me.", she shrugs.

I burst into laughter, "You'd kill me?"

"Yes I would. Now let's go and eat while you tell me how today made you feel.", she pulls me into the restaurant.

The seriousness on her face tells me that she's not joking. I mean... is she being for real or what? Whatever the case may be, I don't want to find out.

NARRATED

Rosette is breathing fire as she paces up and down her bedroom. She only found out today that her bastard ex husband is getting married. How could he move on before she does? Imagine how embarrassing all this was for her to hear all this new information from the kids. This just goes to show that he doesn't care for her as the mother of his kids.

The anger she feels right now is beyond measure and she feels like doing something big to get rid of it. But the only problem with that idea is that she might get arrested after she does it so she settles for another plausible option. She decides to give her father a call. If there's anyone who will give her sound advice, it will be him. "Liefie? (Love?)", her father says as soon as he answers.

"Pa, hoe gaan dit? (Dad, how are you?)", she asks.

"I'm good my baby and how are you? How are the kids?", he asks. She takes a deep breath, "I'm okay pa and the kids are okay too. They aren't here though."

"Oh, they are with their father. When will they come back?"

"I'm not sure pa and their father is the reason why I called. The kids told me that he's getting married today and since it's his week of having the kids over, I can't do anything.", she sprawls

on the bed. "What do you mean he's getting married? He's getting married with someone else, did he at least tell you about it?", he asks concerned about his daughter.

He knows how short-tempered she can get and that even the most irrelevant things trigger her anger.

"He's getting married to a black girl this time around pa and to make matters worse, she works for him. I mean...you would think I would be the first to know since this person will be around our kids all the time.", she huffs.

"Oh my liefie, I'm so sorry this is happening to you. He at least owed you a heads up about this but it's okay. He will get what is coming to him. So what is your plan now?", her father asks all worried.

"I don't know dad, I really don't know. If the court finds out he is married, he will use it to his benefit. The judge will deem him as the better parent to take care of our children since he'll have a spouse to help him with all the duties. I'm starting to lose my mind here."

"Oh yes! We have to do something Rosette or else you will never see those kids. I underestimated that lawyer Mayenziwe has, she knows her stuff. So far she is keeping Jakob on his toes and this has never happened before. We need to help Jakob win this case by any means necessary.", he sighs.

Her body temperature starts rising as the thought of living without her children makes her heart beat faster. Michaela and Shaun are all she has at this point, and it would be a day in hell before she willingly gives away her children. The names Londiwe and Ndumiso are used by their father and his family, she uses their second names. She sits up on the bed and starts unbuttoning her blouse.

"Nee pa, dit kan nie gebeur nie. (No dad, that can't happen.) I have to find another way to win this case. I just have to. My kids belong with me, I'm their mother.", she says panicking.

"If that's what you really want then you are going to have to make a tough decision.", he says.

"What tough decision is that?", she asks.

"Mayenziwe will have to go. We will have to get rid of him...for good.", he says in a whisper.

"What? Do you mean we'll have to-", the shock in her voice cannot be missed.

"Yes. Now the decision of what we do next, lies with you.", her father says with a voice void of any emotion.

MAYENZIWE

I can't believe we are really going through with this entire thing of getting married. My mother and father couldn't make it so I

asked Isisa and Thalente to come as my witnesses, as well as my children. Since we cannot have more than six guests inside the ceremony room, Veronica will have her father and sister present.

From there we will move to a different venue for a champagne brunch with Veronica's aunt present as well as my other friends, Zakhele and Mangaliso. I've done this before so I don't really feel any nerves. But I can tell that my soon-to-be wife is feeling quite the opposite. She keeps on biting on her nails which is something she does only when she's nervous.

We are all already at Home Affairs and we are finishing up with our witnesses signing with their identity documents in hand. Since I am divorcée, I also had to come in earlier with the final decree of my divorce. It's a standard procedure so I had no problems with doing that because I am in a rush to get married. Once we finish with the paperwork, the official escorts us to a private ceremony room.

The room isn't as big as I imagined it to be but we are sat down and the official goes through all the legalities. From there he takes our signatures and fingerprints, and once that's done we are given a chance to exchange vows.

She decides to go first, "Today, I take my place as your wife. I have no idea what the future holds but I can only hope that our love will help us overcome every obstacle in our way. May our

days together be long, and may they be seasoned with faith, love, understanding and respect forever and ever. Today is the beginning of the rest of our lives. I choose to spend today, and all of my tomorrows, with you."

The lump on my throat has me struggling to swallow. Our family and friends are looking at us and I'm not about to start crying in front of them. Veronica's father is already displeased by all this so I don't want to give him any more reason to be.

I clear my throat and stare into her beautiful, beady brown eyes, "Veronica, I love you. You have brought such joy to my life and I want to thank you for taking me in your heart. I promise to walk by your side forever and encourage you in all that you do. I will take the time to talk to you, as well as listen to you and to care for you. Through all the changes of our lives, I will always be there for you as whatever you need me to be. Everything I am and everything I have, is yours now and forever more."

We exchange rings and we're pronounced husband and wife before we share a kiss. Our guests start clapping as we seal it with a kiss and I feel relieved. We did it and nobody in this room objected to our relationship. This has to be one of the best days of my life. We pull apart and we hold hands before we leave the room with our people. Her father is smiling now so I guess it's not all bad.

I know I still have to make things right by paying dowry but I will do that after a year, per Veronica's requests. She said if we survive a year together then it means it's meant to be. I agreed to her wants because I understand the logic behind her reasons.

"Where to from here?", Thamente asks once we're outside.

I look at my wife with a quizzical expression, "Yeah wife, where to from here?"

She giggles, "Proud Mary in Rosebank. I already made a table reservation for 11 people. You can text Mangaliso and Zakhele to meet us there. My aunt is already there waiting for us."

"Okay. Thamente please tell them and we can just all drive there."

I say.

They all congratulate us before Thamente and Isisa head to his car and drive off. Mr Sibanda and Azi, head to his car and they follow. I'm now left with the kids as well as my wife. The kids are happy to have Veronica as their stepmother, I guess it's because they've always liked her as a person.

I tell the kids to wait for us in the car and they go to it without any questions. I turn to look at my wife and I am in awe of her beauty. We are a few centimetres away from each other so I pull her close to me and I give her a deep, lustful kiss.

"What was that for?", she smiles as she pulls away.

My arms are around her waist, "That was for me. I love you and I wanted to show you just how much."

She laughs, "I love you too silly. Oh man...I wonder how things are going to be at the office from now on."

"Don't worry about that for now. We still have to tell HR about the new developments in our relationship and then we'll focus on our work situation. What people say is totally irrelevant when it comes to us. Okay?", I smile at her.

"Okay. Let's go to the kids now.", she reciprocates the gesture.

"Alright. One last kiss before we go?", I try my luck.

She doesn't deny me a kiss and just as we walk to the car, my phone rings. I look at the screen and it's Rosette so I tell Veronica to go ahead, I'll find her inside. Once she's in the car, I take a deep breath and pick up the call.

"Mayenziwe so you are getting married and you didn't even tell me?", she says as soon as I answer.

I sigh, "I was going to tell you after Rosette. I am not obligated to tell you anything I don't want to share about my life you know?"

"Oh fuck you Mayenziwe! That bitch you are marrying is going to be around my children, the least you could have done was

tell me so I wouldn't be surprised. Honestly, you are pushing me to take those kids away from you for good.", she yells in frustration.

"First of all, do not refer to my wife as a bitch. She never speaks ill of you so I suggest you do the same. Second of all, nobody is pushing you to do anything. You are being foolish and selfish and dramatic. So for that, I will get the full custody of MY children. Mark my words Rosette. You started this, and I'm going to end it.", I click my tongue.

"Oh is that so? Well I guess my next move won't be so bad now will it. Anyway, enjoy that sham of a marriage because you will regret ever messing with me. You better watch your back Mayenziwe, your bitch too.", a sinister laugh escapes through her lips.

"Go to hell Rosette!", I disconnect the call and take a deep breath before walking to the car.

"Hey, is everything okay?", Veronica's warm hand clutches mine.

I look at her and smile before squeezing her hand softly, "Everything will be. We are already behind, let's get to the restaurant."

She doesn't look convinced but she nods anyway, "Okay but this conversation is not over Mayenziwe."

"I know.", I laugh as I drive off.

NARRATED

What was supposed to be a brunch turned out to be a day's worth, event. From the restaurant, the entire family left and went to Mayenziwe's house where they sat and mingled with each other. Bab' Sibanda even got to know his son in law better and let's just say, they had a good time together. As per any gathering tradition, they decided to braai some meat and have it with rolls and salads.

Needless to say, they had fun and now the couple was finally alone. Thalente and Isisa took the kids so that the couple could enjoy their wedding day with no disturbance. As every other couple on their wedding night, they are ready to end the day with some passionate love making with no restraints. Veronica just came out of the shower and she has a towel wrapped around her body while Mayenziwe is finishing up a call with his children.

He already took a shower earlier and now they can finally relax together. He ends the call just as she walks towards the bed. She looks a little moisturised as she takes off the towel and gets into bed in all her naked glory. A soft gasp leaves his lips as he admires this masterpiece in front of him. His cock is already hard just from looking at her.

"Baby..", Veronica says as she straddles him.

"Hi...", his voice comes out low and inaudible as he takes in her beauty.

His hands made their way to her breasts as he felt the warm, rounded shape of them and their soft nipples. He felt her nipples harden slightly under his touch.

"One would swear it's Saturday today.", Veronica said softly.

"Yeah I know right. And it's only Tuesday.", he chuckled as his fingers worked on her nipples.

Veronica chuckled and leaned forward and gave him a kiss. Mayenziwe changes positions and he's now on top while she is laying on the bed. He kisses almost every inch of her body until he is facing her slightly trimmed pussy. He moves his mouth to her pussy and runs his mouth and tongue gently down her left inner lip. Excitement floods his body as his tongue flicks on her clit. She flinches a bit as he moves to focus on the other pussy lip.

He moves his mouth to the opening of her vagina and gently pushes his tongue right inside her most intimate part. The body spasms she has as he gives her pussy attention has him feeling a whole lot confident. He dips his head in once again pleasuring her, as his lips and tongue focus on her inner pussy lips and right back up to her clit.

"Oo-oo!", she moans as her hips buck.

He puts his hands around her thighs holding her in place. He continues to work his mouth gently back and forth on her clit, with a little suction from his mouth and she starts moaning and gyrating her pelvis in his face. She squeezed her thighs against his head.

"Ohhh...ughh!", she moaned, "Yenziwe! You're going to make me cum! Oohhh...", she says with a strain in her voice.

Soon her body quakes and her hand clenches on his head as she rides out her wave of an orgasm. Her body twitches a little as Mayenziwe comes up to her face and kisses her forehead. She's still breathing heavily as she commands him to make love to her. So he obeys her command and does as told.

He moves toward her and guides his cock into the opening of her pussy. It was incredibly wet so he slipped in halfway, before he drew back to see his cock coated with her juices. He begins to move in and out of her as the walls of her pussy embrace his cock lovingly.

"Oohhh that's amazing Zenziwe. Do it just like that!", she moans.

The fact that she was communicating this entire time, fuels his libido. As he continues with his full length strokes, he can't stop looking at his member going in and out of her. He is amazed at

how deep inside she can take his cock and how her inner walls seem to stick to it. It was as though her pussy was reluctant to let go of him. Now and again he would adjust his position so that the sensitive parts of his cock push harder against the walls of her pussy. His groans and incoherent speaking turns her on even more.

"Yesss...oh fffuck...yess!", her body arches.

A few more strokes have her releasing a shriek of pleasure as immense pleasure spreads throughout her entire body. Her toes and fingers curl as she reaches a state of pure bliss and her eyes roll to the back of her head. Mayenziwe starts thrusting harder as Veronica clenches her fists on the sheets as her third orgasm hits her. The feeling of pleasure exploded from the base of his cock and into his wife's exquisite pussy.

"That was amazing.", Mayenziwe says as he breathes heavily.

"It was.", Veronica chuckles as she tries catching her breath as well.

VERONICA

Balancing work and being a new wife has proven to be quite a challenge. Not that I'm complaining because I'm loving every bit of it, but I'm still trying to get the hang of things. I've been enjoying every single moment spent with Mayenziwe and now I get to spend even more time with his children. They have been with us for two days now and I can't even explain how wonderful it has been.

Of course I'm yet to get used to how they do certain things but so far, everything is good. I must admit that it was a bit emotional seeing them say goodbye to their mother who has left and gone to America. She promised to fetch them during school holidays and I guess that gave them some comfort. I could tell that she wanted to strangle me to death but she couldn't because of obvious reasons.

In a matter of months, I have become a mother and a stepmother and in all of this, I have to remind myself not to forget my family. That's why today I've made a decision to go and visit my father and sister. My aunt is still around and I doubt she'll ever leave, she seems comfortable here in Johannesburg. As much as she talks a lot, but her being here puts me at ease.

I don't have to worry much about my father and sister doing things for themselves. She cooks and cleans when Azi has gone to school, and she also does the laundry. Honestly she has done so much and I appreciate her so much for all these things she does, all free of charge. That's why I decided to buy her a few dresses, headwraps and a food basket full of sweet treats. She has a sweet tooth so I know she'll appreciate this little act of kindness.

I drive into the yard with ease since the gate was open and I don't see my father's car. He must be out running errands or just doing whatever he wants. Once I'm parked, I take the plastics of clothes and the basket of goodies before making my way to the house. I knock twice before the door is opened by my sister and I can tell she's happy to see me. It's been a while so I get it.

"Sesi, it's so good to see you!", she helps me with the plastics and hugs me.

I smile at her, "It's good seeing you too Azi. How have you been?"

"I've been okay. I just missed you.", she shrugs.

"I know, I missed you too. I've just been so busy but I promise, it won't happen again. I'll come and visit at least once a week.", we walk to the living room.

"Okay then. And you look so beautiful Vee, you're really glowing.", she says.

I blush at her remark, "Thank you. Where's dad and aunt?"

"Dad went to buy some doughnuts for me since I've been craving them. Aunt then gave him a list of a few items that she needs for the meal she's cooking for tonight. So you bought all these things for me?", she beams in joy looking at the plastics in front of her.

I laugh, "These aren't for you sesi. I actually bought these for aunt, where is she?"

"She's in the kitchen. Let me call her for you. I know she'll go crazy over these.", she chuckles and heads to the kitchen.

While I wait for her I take off my shoes. It's been such a long day and work was hectic with all the travelling Isisa and I were doing. She spends most of her time out of the office, that much I've noticed and I spend more time at the office than her. I guess she enjoys connecting with all the farmers and workers at the factories. On some days she asks me to accompany her and today was no exception. I'm just glad I can now relax.

A few minutes later, my aunt and sister make their way back to the living room and I can already tell she wants to reprimand me for something. The apron she's wearing confirms that she was busy cooking up a storm in the kitchen so maybe that's

why she looks so grumpy. But she always looks grumpy so I don't know why I am acting surprised. I smile at her as she takes a seat across me and she squints her eyes at me.

"Ma Auntiza, how are you?", I ask her joyfully.

"I am okay Veronica and how are you? Why are you here?", her eyes are still squinted.

Must she always be this suspicious of everything? She really needs to learn how to calm down because if not, she is going to get herself sick. It's not healthy.

"I'm good aunt and I am here because I wanted to see you guys. Aren't you happy to see me?", I ask trying to put her mind at ease.

"I am happy to see you Veronica, you are my sister's child. I am just shocked to always see you coming over here. You are a married woman now and if you were happy, you'd always be with your husband.", she sighs.

I chuckle, "I am happy aunt, I just missed you. That's all."

She shrugs, "Okay then, if you say so. Nangabe lendvodza lendzala ikuphatsa kabi, you must come back home.(But if that grandpa of yours is treating you badly,) You wouldn't be the first woman to return home from an unhappy marriage. Look at me, I came back home and I'm doing great."

Oh so that's what this is about. If only she knew just how much of a happy woman I am, she wouldn't be saying this. Honestly, Mayenziwe has been nothing but amazing to me and I can only hope that even when we're going through hard times, I will remember the good moments together. Nobody is perfect and he isn't either, that's why we have already had arguments. It was about meaningless things but still, we were able to solve them by just talking about it.

"You don't have to worry about that aunt. He is a good man, that I can tell you and he has been treating me like a queen.", I smile at the thought of him.

She chortles, "I can tell. Uyakhanya. Ngiyatibuta kutsi lendvodza lendzala ikupha ini kudla? (You are glowing. I wonder what that old man is feeding you?)"

"Hayi aunty, I didn't come here for you to judge my husband. I actually brought you these things. This is just a little token of appreciation from me to you, for all the things you do for us. We didn't ask for your help but you help anyway, and we can't thank you enough.", I say handing over the plastics and basket.

There's a slight frown of confusion as she takes the things into her hands and I can tell she wasn't expecting anything like this. She starts opening up the plastics and looks at the dresses I bought for her and then the headwraps. I see tears form in her eyes and I know this means a lot to her.

"Veronica you bought all these things for me?", she looks up at me.

I nod with a wide smile, "Yes, these are for you."

She places them down and stands up to pull me into a hug, "Thank you so much mntana ka sesi. These are so beautiful and I already can't wait to wear them. I know where I'll wear them, at this church I just found."

Her smile tells me that this means a lot to her. I ask her about the church she just found and she says she started two weeks back but it's amazing. She also tells me that there's a lot of drama happening there and I can't help but laugh. Her stories sound so made up and exaggerated but Azi and I laugh as she tells us all about it. For the first time since she got here, she is free and she's telling jokes.

Time flies when you're having fun and soon my father is back with all the things he went to purchase. He is happy to see me and the feeling is mutual for me. We hug after he's placed the things in the kitchen. We start chatting as my aunt goes back to the kitchen with Azi to finish up cooking. My father and I catch up on different things and I tell him that I brought aunt Nosibusiso some things to thank her.

He tells me that he's proud of what I did and of course

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I thank him. We continue talking until my aunt calls us to come to the dining room to eat. She went all out today with samp being on the menu as well as beef oxtail. Coleslaw and beetroot are also on the menu and I'm mind blown because I'd only ever cook like this on weekends. It smells good and my taste buds are already dancing. My mouth waters just at the sight of the food.

We say prayer before digging in and the first spoon is already in my mouth after "Amen". I just couldn't wait any longer and I've barely had anything to eat today.

"So how is your husband?", my father asks mid-supper.

"He's good baba, thanks for asking.", I say focusing on my plate.

"Why didn't he come along with you?", Axit asks.

"He is spending more time with the kids, I suggested. I actually came here to also invite you to his birthday. It's a surprise so of course, he can't know anything about it.", this beef oxtail is amazing really.

"Slow down on the eating Veronica, or you will choke.", my aunt says clearly disgusted by my eating.

I chuckle nervously, "Sorry. I just haven't had anything to eat all day, I've been busy. Anyway, I was hoping you guys would be able to make it to the party. It's at the end of the month."

"Oh okay, of course we'll be there baby.", my father smiles at me.

"This is so cool! I have to get a new dress... it's going to be a formal party right?", Azi asks excited by the idea of a party.

I shrug, "I think so but I'll let you know."

"Will there be serious alcohol at this party?", she tries whispering but it goes south when our father hears her.

"Hlengiwe uyahlanya yini wena!?", my aunt's voice is loud as she looks at my sister in disbelief.

MAYENZIWE

The kids and I just left the cinema and we're on our way to get something for us to eat and probably buy something for Veronica as well. They wanted to watch movies and so I thought why not bring them here to watch something new, something they haven't seen before. I don't even remember the name of the movie they chose but I must say it wasn't as bad as I expected it to be.

"So where do you guys want to eat?", I ask as we throw away the empty packets of junk food we ate.

"Uhm...how about Steers?", Ndu suggests.

"That's lame, how about Ocean Basket? Baba you know I enjoy seafood.", my daughter sulks.

I sigh, "Since both of you want to eat things that are totally different, how about we go to a store that serves both types of food you want? I think Spur is the better option since they serve both seafood and beef or chicken. All sorts of food really."

"Okay, that sounds like a good idea.", my son says.

Londi shrugs, "It's okay I guess. We can just go now."

We then head to Spur after making a stop at the nearest restrooms. The entire way to the restaurant, Ndu can't stop talking about how awesome the movie was and that he wouldn't mind seeing it again. Both Londi and I listen to him go on and on about the stunts that were pulled there and how awesome it was to see a little blood being spilled. When we get to Spur, we are taken to an empty table that can accommodate us and only then does my son's talking decrease.

A waiter soon attends to us and we make our order with my son ordering a beef burger for himself, Londi a seafood platter and, just ribs and chicken for myself. Our drinks arrive first and we enjoy them as we wait for our food. I use this opportunity to ask them how they really feel about my relationship with Veronica. I'm hoping they will be honest with me.

"So tell me, how are you finding my marriage to Veronica? Do you guys like her?", I ask as I put my phone away.

Ndu shrugs, "I think it's okay. I like aunt Veronica and she treats me well so I don't have anything to say about her."

I nod and turn to my daughter, "And what about you Londi?"

"When you got married to her I was shocked because I didn't expect it but since I know her, I think it makes things less awkward. And I'm okay with your marriage to each other, she's funny and she likes giving us what we want.", this daughter of mine chuckles.

"Hey! Don't be manipulating her into giving you things. That's not nice.", I say to her.

She rolls her, "Okay dad...can we talk about something else now?"

I nod and we start talking about all the curricular activities they do at school. Ndu says he's enjoying playing soccer and that he hopes he can one day become a professional soccer player.

Londi tells me that her liking to acting has grown a lot and that she enjoys doing it. We continue talking until our food arrives, and we say a brief prayer before eating.

I'm almost finished with my meal when my eyes land on an all too familiar face, Sizakele. It's been a while since I've seen her and I must say she looks a lot different than the last time I saw.

Good different. It seems she has also spotted me because she makes her way to my table with her lips stretched into a wide smile. I can tell she's picked up some weight in all the right places as well.

"Mayenziwe, how are you?", her smile is too broad for my liking.

I get on my feet so I can hug her, "Sizakele, I'm good and how are you?"

"I'm great thanks for asking. And who are these two?", she gestures to my two rascals.

"These are my children, Ndumiso and Londiwe. Wow! You look... different.", I can't help but point it out.

She chuckles, "Well I'll take that as a compliment but yes, I am different. Thanks for noticing. Actually, I've been meaning to reach out to you."

I frown, "Oh, is everything okay?"

She bites on her lower lip, "I don't know actually. Would you mind if we could have a chat over there?"

I agree as she walks over to the table not far from the one I was sitting at with the kids. I tell the kids that I'll be right back and that they can order dessert if the waiter comes back and I

follow her. I sit on the empty chair and wait for her to start talking.

"I'll jump straight to the point because I'm sure you don't have a lot of time.", she places her bag on the table.

"What is it Siza? You're making me nervous.", I chuckle.

She smiles a little and nods in understanding, "Well the reason I wanted to talk to you was because... I'm pregnant. And it's your baby."

"What?", I feel my entire world stop spinning.

ISISA

I'm supposed to be finishing off paperwork that needs my signature for certain materials to get approved. I have been meaning to get it done but being with Thacente makes me lose focus on what's important or what's real. I lose my sanity whenever he's around. I don't think it's healthy but then again, I can't help myself.

"What's on your mind?", he asks brushing my thigh.

I turn to him with a smile, "Nothing. Why are you asking?"

He chuckles, "You've been so quiet and I know that you are never this quiet unless something is bothering you."

"I'm just thinking about work and all the things I need to get done before month end.", I say.

"Oh okay and what would you like me to do? Give you space so you can get some work done?", he wiggles his eyebrows.

"No silly. Can we just get back to watching the movie now? You're distracting me with that dimple smile of yours.", I give him a quick kiss before turning back to the movie on the screen.

We continue watching the movie with his hand on my thigh while we're cuddled up in bed. Since I don't have a TV in my room we're using my laptop to watch his favourite movie, The

Equalizer. I still don't understand why he finds this movie interesting because a lot of blood is being shed but then again, he enjoys it. My mind trails off to work again.

Having Veronica as my assistant is quite nice, she doesn't talk as much as Kamo does but I enjoy her work ethic nonetheless. In a way, her and I have become friends because we have grabbed a few drinks together, after work hours. She is really a delight and I like the fact that even though she's got a soft exterior, she's very tough on the inside.

I got to know her on a more personal level and what made me admire her strength is how she handled the loss of her mother. She told me that it was hard having to move on from it, especially with her younger sister and father being most affected since they lived with her. It was emotionally draining, is what I've gathered and I'm glad to see that she's moving past it.

"Isisa, your phone is ringing.", I feel Tholente shake me lightly.

"What?", I look up at him puzzled.

"Your cellphone is ringing.", he frowns and repeats himself.

I look beside me and my phone really is ringing, so I pick it up and stare at the screen for a few seconds. I don't know the numbers displayed on it and it soon stops. I'm about to call

back when the person calls back again and I answer it on the first ring.

"Isisa's phone, hello."

"Isisa hi, you're speaking to Rethabile here and I am calling regarding your mother, Penelope.", the soft voice on the other end replies.

What she said immediately makes me feel anxious because it has been a long time since I last heard that name. I try not to think about her a lot because every time I do, I start feeling sad or depressed. There's a lot that has happened between us, and my father as well. I don't know if I'm ready to hear from her right now.

"I don't want anything that will involve me with that woman and I'd like to know how you even got my contact details.", I say sitting up straight.

At the corner of my eye, I can see that Thalente is already curious as to who I'm talking to. It must be the fact that I have an attitude right now, which is something I totally avoid no matter the situation. But when it comes to my mother or father, I can't help but feel the need to protect myself.

"Sisi please, just give me a moment of your time. This is important.", she begs.

I sigh, "Okay sure, what is it?"

"Thank you. Well, your mother was hospitalised for nearly a week but she's back home now. The only problem left is that she needs someone to take care of her while she recovers but your father is always busy roaming the streets. So she said I should give you a call instead.", Rethabile says.

"She said you should call me?", I huff in disbelief.

"Yes that's what she said. Since there's nobody here to look after her, I was wondering if you could come and look after her. I can't always be here because I have work to get to.", she says.

I take a deep breath, "Alright thanks for letting me know and I will be there on Saturday."

We wrap up the call with her telling me her whereabouts and at exactly what time she'll be available on Saturday. It's been years since I last spoke to my mother, I don't even know how I'll react when I see her. Even after being adopted by the Jacksons, I just couldn't cut her out of my life completely. She didn't deserve this second chance but I gave it to her anyway and she ruined it.

"Who was it?", I completely forgot about Thalente.

"It was some lady who was informing me about my mother."

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I say.

"Your real mother?", I can tell he's taken aback.

I nod and tell him what the lady actually told me. He offers to go to Orange Farm with me just to be my emotional support and I thank him. I'm not sure if I want him to come with me because every time I go down there, I become a different person. And definitely not in a good way. I can only hope that it doesn't go as bad as I think it will, especially with my father's extreme drinking and all.

"Please promise to be there with me every step of the way babe.", I say looking into his eyes.

He smiles and kisses me, "I promise you my love."

VERONICA

The house lights are still on as I drive inside the yard and I already know that my husband is still up. His car is in the garage so I know he is back from the mall. It's 19:45 and I really didn't think they would be back so soon. I expected them to get back way later but I guess they had already finished watching the movies. I park the car in the garage and make my way to the house.

I can hear talking coming from the living room and I know that the TV is still on. I make my way there and only Mayenziwe is seated watching it, well...more like staring at it. He seems to be

out of it as I walk in and still he doesn't turn to look at who it is that's walking in.

"Babe?", I call out to him taking a seat next to him.

"Huh?", he turns to me startled, "Oh my love, it's you. How are you?"

"I should be asking you that. I'm okay but what about you? You don't look too good, is everything okay?", I brush his shoulder.

He sighs, "Yeah I'm good. The kids are already in their rooms, busy with their cellphones I'm sure. We already had something to eat so don't worry about cooking."

"Oh really? Well that's good."

"Yes it is and your food is in the microwave. I bought your favourite.", he grins.

"Hawaiian pizza?", I smile already feeling my stomach grumble.

He chuckles, "Hawaiian pizza, yes. I still don't understand why you love that pizza so much. Pineapple doesn't belong on pizza."

I hit him on his shoulder jokingly, "Hey now, I thought you had made peace with the fact that I enjoy it. Are you judging me now?"

"No I'm not my love. Should I warm it up for you?", he asks already getting up.

"Oh please do babe and please pour me a glass of juice as well.", I relax on the couch and take off my shoes.

He nods and heads to the kitchen for a while. I change channels as I wait for him to come back and when he walks in, I settle on a music channel. It's not like we will watch anything on it anyway so why bother finding a movie.

"Thank you babe!", we share a kiss as he hands me the plate of food.

He then places the glass of juice on the coffee table, "You're welcome."

I say a short prayer before taking a bite of the first slice and a moan of pleasure escapes my lips, "This is really good babe. I swear one would think I haven't had anything to eat and I already had dinner at home."

"Oh is it now? That means you have an appetite.", he chuckles, "Speaking of home, how is your family doing?"

I shrug, "They are doing good. Azi asked if she could come visit us soon and I told her I'd speak to you about it first. I didn't want to make a decision without talking to you about it first."

A crease on his eyebrows tells me he's not happy with me, "Well yes that makes sense but not when it comes to family. This house is as much yours as it is mine. Your sister can come and visit whenever she likes."

"I just wanted to know if it would be okay with you. I'll tell her then.", I put the plate on the table after my second slice and take the juice.

"Good.", he turns back to the TV.

I swear, he looks disoriented and I can't put my finger on it. His responses are very direct and I can tell that his mind is not present. I don't think I've ever seen him in this kind of mood before and I am not sure how to approach him. The plan is to not annoy him so I'll try one last time because it might all be work related.

"What's wrong Mayenziwe? You really don't look like your normal self. Be honest, is everything okay or did the kids not enjoy themselves at the movies?", I move closer to him.

The last question makes him snap his head towards my direction, "No...uh...nothing is wrong. Why, did someone say something?"

I frown, "Uh no...nobody said anything. You're scaring me now."

He shakes his head, "Sorry about that, I'm just stressed about work. There's a lot I still need to do and after the court case, I haven't focused on anything. I'm sorry love. Let's just go to sleep, okay."

I nod and get off the couch, "Okay."

THALENTE

I don't think I've ever seen Isisa this anxious, well at least not in the time since we started dating. She keeps on biting her nails and repeatedly tapping her foot. I have tried talking to her hoping that she'll calm down but nothing seems to be working. We're on our way to her birth mother's home in Orange Farm and I can tell that this place brings back memories, some of which she doesn't like.

The night when she told me that her mother wanted to see her, I was quite shocked. We've never really talked about her family besides the Jacksons so when she told me about the trip to see her, I didn't want to miss an opportunity to support her. She has been there for me through and through, and I'm happy that I also get the chance to show her just how much I love her.

"Which house is it baby?", I turn to her as I get on the gravel street.

That seems to pull her out of her thoughts, "Uhm... it's the house on the corner. The one painted in green."

"Okay then. Relax baby, everything will happen as it should. Take a deep breath.", I pull her free hand into mine.

She takes a deep breath before she stops biting on her nails, "Thank you."

"Green is such an odd colour for a house, don't you think?", I say jokingly.

A quick look at me and she bursts into a fit of laughter, "It is but I didn't think you'd point it out."

I laugh with her, "I'm glad I made you laugh."

"And thank you for that.", a genuine smile is plastered on her face.

"Now come on, you can do this.", I say as I park the car at the gate.

The house is in good shape, I can tell that it has been renovated over the years. I judged the green colour too soon because it compliments it so well. I get out of the car and walk over to the passenger side to open the door for her. I'm glad she didn't mind us coming over here in my car, even though it's small and probably uncomfortable for her. She has proven that she doesn't care about status.

"Thank you.", she says as I close the door after she makes her way out.

"You're welcome love. Now remember, I am here for you if you ever feel overwhelmed. Okay?", my hands are around her waist and we're looking into each other's eyes.

I can tell she's blushing as she nods her head, "Okay and thank you so much babe."

We have a brief kiss before making our way to the house. The yard isn't clean, there are bottles of beer stacked up in a pile at the far end of the yard and not to mention the papers everywhere. Isisa looks around with a displeased look on her face. She isn't happy with what she sees and I can tell that a part of her is already pissed off. I give her hand a gentle squeeze which has her looking at me.

"Take it easy.", I say.

She sighs, "Alright."

We get to the door and she knocks for a while before we hear a voice answering from the inside. A few seconds later, a chubby lady opens the door and her lips are stretched into a smile as her eyes land on Isisa first, then me.

"Hi, can I help you?", she asks.

Isisa clears her throat, "Uhm... I'm Isisa. You called me about my mother?"

"Oh yes, Isisa. I am Rethabile and I've been waiting for you since morning. Come on in.", she says after the confusion clears.

My girlfriend looks at me first as if seeking permission so I nod and she walks in first, then I follow. We are directed to the living room while she heads to the kitchen to fetch us refreshments. Even after telling her that it's not necessary, she insisted on it so we do as she says and take a seat on the couches. I look around the house and I must say that it looks even better on the inside than it does on the outside.

"Your home is beautiful.", I whisper to my girlfriend's ear.

"Thank you.", she responds with her attention to the entrance waiting for the lady.

"Relax love.", I brush her thigh.

She doesn't get to respond as the lady walks back in with the tray of refreshments. We thank her as she gives us the glasses of juice and a side plate full of biscuits. Well this is more than what we expected but we try not to disappoint her as we take one each. She smiles at us once more as she takes a seat on the opposite couch.

"I'm glad you could make it, Penelope wasn't sure you would. I told her though that no child would abandon their parents in need.", Rethabile says all at once.

I think she's the type that has no filter and she speaks without thinking first. But she seems like a good woman nonetheless. Isisa asks her where her mother is and the lady responds saying

that she's asleep. Which is expected when someone is drinking medication. The big question about what happened to her leaves my girlfriend's mouth and I can tell that it makes Rethabile uncomfortable. She keeps on shuffling in her seat.

She clears her throat, "Well as you know, your parents suffer from alcohol addiction. So one night, both your parents were coming from the tarven and they got mugged by a few guys. Apparently your father managed to run and left your mother helpless and in pain. Unfortunately the guys also took advantage of your mother and raped her, leaving her with bruises all over her body after beating her up."

I can feel Isisa clench on my hand and I give her a reassuring squeeze. This has to be the hardest thing to hear, even though her parents didn't raise, I'm sure she feels pain. Nobody deserves such treatment and her mother is the one who experienced this, I'm sure she's having a hard time processing all this.

"What about my father? Where is he now?", her voice trembles.

Rethabile's are filled with sympathy as she stares at Isisa, "Your father hasn't returned ever since then. Nobody has seen him since that day."

Well that's a lot to take in. I'm not sure how to help right now so I just pull her closer to me. She starts crying and I see the kind lady stand up and leave the room. She comes back with a glass of sugar water and gives us privacy to let Isisa deal with what she just heard. I rub her back as soft sobs leave her mouth.

"How do I help her deal with this Thalente? I barely even know my own mother.", her face is covered in tears.

"Shhh... don't worry about that now. You'll deal with things as they come. For now, let it out so you can be strong for her. I'm sure she needs you.", I brush her back in circles.

She nods and doesn't say anything more. It's kind of a deja vu moment for me. The last time she was helping me with my mother and now I'm doing the same, helping her with her mother. Life really is full of surprises.

MAYENZIWE

"Why are you hiding this from her Mayenziwe? You didn't cheat on her so I doubt she'll feel betrayed.", my father says on the other end of the line.

I sigh, "I'm not sure baba. I think I should wait until Sizakele gives birth so I can do a DNA test first. I mean we always used

protection so I need to be sure if this is my child or not before ruining my marriage for nothing."

"Mayenziwe?", my father says.

"Yebo baba?", I reply.

"You are acting like a fool now. This is not how a man behaves. Every time you had sex with that poor girl you knew that there was a possibility she could get pregnant. I'm not saying you shouldn't do the test, but you shouldn't hide it from your wife. She deserves to know. If you are not honest with her

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she will leave you.", he says.

I take a moment to take in what he just said. Everything he said was a fact, I know that but a part of me is scared of Veronica leaving me. Our union is still so fresh, and already I'm coming with baggage. There's only so much a person can handle and I am scared that she won't be able to handle this much from me.

"I've thought about that baba but I need to be sure first. My mind is already at war with my heart and I'm slowly losing it. Of the baby is mine then yes, I will take responsibility. No child of mine will grow up without me being a present father. But if the child isn't mine then I would have caused unnecessary drama in my marriage.", I sigh and brush my head roughly.

All this is just confusing and stressful. I want to do the right thing, I really do. But a big part of me is choosing to be selfish and doing what I think is best for me right now. I can only hope I'll be able to hide this from her for as long as I can, at least until Sizakele has given birth.

"I have said my piece son, the ball is in your court. I can only pray that this works out in your favour because if not, you have lost at love yet again.", he says.

"Thanks baba and I will contact you should there be a change. And please don't tell mama yet. You know how she is.", I say hurriedly.

He laughs, "Alright, I will keep this to myself for now but if she persists, I will be forced to tell her. Phela I don't lie to my wife mina."

"Aii baba, goodbye!", I cut the call with him still laughing.

I'm really caught between a rock and a hard place. This entire thing is going to be life changing and I hate that Veronica isn't the one carrying my child. She's been wanting a child so badly but still, the pregnancy tests result in negative. I think that's why I'm so afraid to tell her about this, it will crush her. I wish I could get a sign on how to go about this entire thing.

ISISA

Rethabile just left, she said her shift at work is starting soon but she did leave her contact details for me to reach out. She is such a kind woman, I need to compensate her for the time she's put in taking for my mother. Not a lot of people would do that for strangers so I really appreciate what she's done for her. She said she'll come around after her shift to check on her before heading home.

Thalente is in the car listening to music, he said he needed some fresh air and that it didn't feel right sitting at my family home. Apparently it's an act of disrespect, which I think is dramatic but then that's what he believes so I let him be. I finished cooking pap' and livers so I dish up for my man and take it to him with a cloth to wipe his hands with. Yes, I am wife material.

"Thank you love.", he smiles.

"You're welcome.", I return the gesture.

"Have you dished up for your mom yet?", he takes the plate after wiping his hands.

I nod my head, "Yes I did. Let me go check on her now. Enjoy."

I leave him and head back to the kitchen to dish up for her. I lied to Thalente because I know he would have made a big deal of this. I don't blame myself because the last time I checked, she was still asleep. I dish up for her and take the tray to her

room. As I walk down the passage, all the memories of my childhood here come back rushing. The fights my parents used to have, my father's harshness towards me and my mother not standing up for me.

I take a deep breath before opening the door. It creaks open and I find the sound rather annoying. Maybe the fact that I'm privileged now makes me forget about the situation I used to live in and just how poor I was growing up. That's why I renovated the entire house when I started making enough. As much as I didn't enjoy growing up here, it is still home and my ancestors would have been mad at me for not honouring them the right way.

She's up, my mother that is. She's sitting up on the bed with her back against the headboard. I would compliment how beautiful she is but the bruises on her face hide her beauty. She is thin, not healthy thin, but to the point of being anorexic. Her collar bone is way too visible and not to mention how boney her arms look. I'm afraid that if she were to stand up right now, she'd break.

I clear my throat, "Molo mama. (Hello mom.)"

"Oh mntanami. Molo, unjani? (Oh my child. Hello, how are you?)" , her voice is raspy, nothing like I remember it to be.

"I'm well mama and how are you? Are you feeling any better?", I place the tray on the bedside table.

"Ndiziva ndingcono emva kokubona ubuso bakho. Yhini nkosi yam, umhle sana lwam. (I feel better after seeing your face. Oh my God, you are so beautiful baby.)", she cracks a smile.

"Thank you mama. I brought you food, you need the strength so you can get better soon.", I open the curtains so light can get through as well as the window for fresh air.

She looks at the tray then back at me, "Ah...thank you Isisa wami. I have missed you so much. Please come sit here next to me."

I take a deep breath before making my way to her bed. Once I'm seated she places her hands on my face and cradles it in her palms. She's looking at me as if I'm the most precious thing in the world. If only she looked at me like this back when I needed her the most and she let her husband treat me like trash. I don't know if I'll ever be able to forgive her for her neglect.

"You look so much like me when I was younger.", she chuckles and her eyes fill with tears.

This...whatever it is she's doing now... I've seen it before. More than once and this time I'm not falling for her act. I wish I could say she's been a good mother but she hasn't and I can't exactly judge her. I don't know what she's going through, but I also

can't act as if I'm cool with her now. What happened to her doesn't erase the years of pain I felt, caused by her and my father.

"Eat your food mama.", I remove her hands from my cheeks and grab the plate.

A frown is plastered on her face and I know what I just did hurt her. But I can't say that I care. I'm here to take care of her, not to go over what happened in the past. I've taken all those feelings and shoved them down to a place where I can't access them. If it weren't for my conscience, I wouldn't have come here at all.

"Isisa can we talk tuu mntanami?", her begging eyes make me want to give in but I toughen up.

"Now is not the time mama, you have to heal.", I pat her knee and get up from the bed, "Let me go check on the pots, I'll be back."

I leave the room and don't look back. My emotions are playing with me and I don't know how to feel right now. The fragile state she's in makes me want to erase everything and start on a clean slate but my mind reminds me that that is temporary. I need Thamente right now so I head to his car instead of the kitchen. Hopefully I'll feel better after talking to him.

VERONICA

Londiwe and Ndumiso asked that we go out shopping today to spend their father's money. Of course I couldn't deny the kids the one thing they've asked of me since they got here. So they are still in their rooms preparing and I'm having cereal, cornflakes to be exact. Not too much but just enough to fill me up as we drive there. The kids told me straight up that they wanted to have breakfast at McDonalds so I'm going to honour their request.

"Aunt Veronica, we're done now.", Londiwe's voice startles me and I end up choking a little.

"Sorry.", Ndumiso says rubbing my back.

It takes me a few seconds to gather my bearings and I drink a glass of water before turning to the kids. They look worried about me.

"Uhm sorry... I'm good.", I clear my throat.

I finish eating and we take our stuff heading to the car. Londi takes the front seat while Ndu takes the back. I drive out of the yard with no disturbance and I'm soon on the freeway. None of us are saying a word and both children are busy on their cellphones. I turn up the volume of the radio as one of my favourite songs plays. 'Ndenzel Uncedo' by Joyous Celebration.

"Okay guys, we're here.", I say turning off the car's engine.

"Wow, I didn't think we'd get here this fast.", Londiwe says looking up from the device in her hands.

"Yeah well, you guys were so focused on your phones you didn't even see time pass you by. Let's go.", I say as I open the door.

We get to the restaurant and Ndu tells me what he'd like to eat, and so does Londiwe. A waitress soon comes to take our orders and we start talking about how they are adjusting to the new living arrangements. Londiwe tells me that it's pretty hard getting the hang of things since she is used to her mother being around her almost every hour of the day. But she says that slowly but surely, she's getting the hang of things.

"What about you Ndu? Do you miss your mom as well?", I brush his head.

He shakes his head and plays with his hands, "Not really."

"Why?", I glance at his sister then back at him.

He shrugs, "I don't know...I guess it's because she loses her cool sometimes and she can get a bit rough when she is."

"Ndu stop.", Londiwe gives him a reprimanding look.

"No, don't tell him to stop Londiwe. What does he mean she can get rough? Does she hit you guys?", I turn my attention to her.

She looks terrified for some reason, as if she is scared of saying the wrong. Ndu is not any better as he keeps his eyesight to his hands. I can only wonder what they are keeping from me and as I'm about to badger them with more questions, the waitress comes back with our orders. The kids say a short prayer before digging in and soon the conversation about their mother is long forgotten.

"Aunt Veronica, there's that lady that dad was talking to the other day.", Ndumiso stops eating and points at a pregnant Sizakele.

"Oh no stop that baby, we don't point at people.", I say lowering his hand.

"Okay, sorry.", he shrugs and goes back to eating his food.

I find myself focusing on Sizakele once again, I can tell that she's heavily pregnant and that she's due any minute now. She looks beautiful regardless of her putting on a few kilograms. Her skin is radiant and smooth, more than it was before. It must be the benefit of being pregnant. I've known her for quite a while, mostly as Yenziwe's friend with benefits.

She's a nice woman, I must admit that and the fact that she's pregnant puts me at ease because I'm sure they stopped talking for good. Now I know that she is out of our lives for good and I won't have to worry about the two ex love birds sneaking around behind my back. As much as I don't have any self esteem issues, she really does make me feel self conscious.

I see her make her way to where we are seated and I avert my gaze to the two people seated with me. They are almost done with their plates and I'm only half-way done with my food. I try making meaningless conversation with the kids but they are too distracted to give me their time and now I know I've been caught staring. I wonder if she's going to comment on my creepiness, but it's not entirely my fault. Ndu did.

"Veronica, hi! How are you?", she smiles as she gets to our table.

Her big belly can be seen from a hundred miles away

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"Sizakele, I'm good and how are you? You look good."

She giggles and gives me a hug, "Thank you and as you can see, I'm doing great. I have a baby on the way."

"Yes I can see that, congratulations by the way. I can tell that you are more than happy about your baby.", I return the smile.

She looks behind me and her eyebrows crease as she looks at the kids, "These are Mayenziwe's children. Is he here with you guys?"

She looks around the restaurant and I just want to give a small slap on the cheek to make her lose that hopeful smile of hers. Mayenziwe is my husband now and I would have expected him to have told his previous lovers that he is now a married man. But Sizakele doesn't look like she knows of his status and I can only hope she's not looking for any action with him. Not when she's carrying another man's child.

My fake smile comes out to play, "No he's not actually and we were about to leave."

"Oh...well I hope I'll see you another time then. Please do tell him to call me when you see him, and tell him I said he should stop overwhelming you with work. You shouldn't be working even on weekends.", she laughs.

And no... it's not one of those fake laughs with a hidden agenda. It's a genuine laugh and I can't help but laugh with her. She's sincere and that's why I can't find it in me to get mad at her. The only person I should be mad at is my husband for not telling her that I'm no longer his PA but his wife. I'll give him a piece of my mind when we get home.

"Well it was nice seeing you again Sizakele. We will take our leave now.", I say after sharing one last hug.

She's really big on physical touch, "You too. You guys travel safe now."

"You too. Let's go kids.", I say turning back to the children and packing my stuff away.

I call the waitress and ask for the bill and we wait for a few minutes before I can pay then leave. Londi tells me that there's a few things she needs for school so we head to PNA to buy them. Ndu also asks for a diary and pens so I buy it for him as well. It is their father's money we are spending after all so I don't mind. As the kids are doing their shopping, my mind is still on Mayenziwe.

How could he have not told Sizakele about us? Ndu said she was talking to him two weeks ago, and since we were already married by then, what could he have been waiting for? Unless he still wants to get back together with her. I honestly don't understand him lately, he's been acting strange. Maybe he regrets marrying me, but the least he could do is tell me about it. Sigh! Honestly this is not the marriage I ordered.

"Aunt Veronica?", I feel Londi tap my shoulder.

"Yes?", I ask her with my eyebrows raised.

"We are done now, we can go pay.", she says softly.

"Oh okay. Sorry.", I say to her.

I look at Ndu and he also has a small basket with his stuff in it, so we go to the counter to pay. When we get to the car, the kids decide to start a conversation to make our ride home exciting. It's too bad I'm not fully invested in the conversation because my mind is on their father. I try acting my best but I think they noticed as well that I'm just not okay so they kept quiet.

I really hate how I feel right now.

MAYENZIWE

I'm in my home office and I decided to get some work done since the kids are out with my wife. They've been gone for a few hours now and I'm expecting them to be back any minute from now. I'm very happy that they decided to bond without me being present. The kids like her, a lot, and I would even go to the extent of saying that they love her. She sure proves to me every single day that I made the right choice getting married to her.

The time reads 12:39 and I'm convinced they are near so I switch off my laptop and head to the kitchen to get started on dinner. Whenever I cook, I prefer doing it earlier so that we get to rest later on and only warm up the food if we need to. So I

take out a few pieces of chicken from the packet and defrost it. Then I get started on the rice by putting water that covers it inside the pot and place it on the stove.

As it boils, I start chopping the vegetables so I can start cooking the chicken. I thought of frying it but I think it's best if I made it stew-like so that I don't have the stress of making gravy as well. I get so lost in the cooking that I only hear the sound of the gate closing. I can hear the kids arguing about something even though the conversation isn't clear enough for me to understand.

I wipe my hands and head to the door to welcome them in and of course I hug the young ones first. My wife follows and we share a brief kiss before pulling away from each other.

"Did you and the kids enjoy the outing?", I ask with my hands around her waist.

She nods, "Yes, I believe they did. We had fun and we even met Sizakele."

Her tone and body posture changes as she says her name and I feel my body turn cold. She looks pissed for some reason and the only thing that comes to mind is that Siza told her about the pregnancy. I immediately let go of her and turn back to the kitchen.

"Oh...what did she say?", I return to the kitchen and continue from where I left off.

"She said I should greet you and that you shouldn't make me work during the weekend. You know, I can't believe you didn't tell me you met her the last time you went with the kids.", she puts her hands on her waist.

"I'm sorry babe, I forgot. Truly.", I can feel my armpits sweating.

"You say that now but I'm still angry at you for not telling me about her. I had to see for myself that she's pregnant. She didn't even know that you and I are married. How could you embarrass me like that Mayenziwe? With your booty call for that matter?"

"I'm really sorry babe. I wanted to tell you that she's carrying my child. I was afraid that you'd leave me as soon as you heard but now I-"

"Wait... what? She's carrying your baby?", her eyebrows scrunch together and her nose flares.

Oh fucking hell! She didn't know and here I am already blabbing it out like this. This isn't how I pictured this going.

MAYENZIWE

Her left eye is twitching and her hands are still on her hips. I can tell that she's furious but she's trying to keep calm with how heavy she's breathing. I'm sure if it weren't for the kids being here, she would have totally given me hell. I decide to gather up enough courage and move closer to where she's standing and a quick finger pointing in my direction, has me stopping on my track.

"Baby I can explain.", I take a few more steps towards her.

"Stop right there Mayenziwe or I will shout and cause a scene. You are going to tell me what you mean by that but I don't want you near me because I fear I might do something terrible to you.", she speaks calmly.

At this moment, I would be happy if she were angry at me and cussing, but since she's calm, I feel a lot more terrified. A person who is angry yet acting calm, is very unpredictable. I have no idea what her next move might be and she might just go crazy on me for real. I decide to do as she said and give her the space between us that she wants, I go back to the stove to switch it off.

I take a deep breath, "Sizakele approached me a couple of weeks back when I was with the kids and she told me that she's

carrying my child. At first I didn't want to believe it but then the thought that she didn't have anything to gain by lying to me had me thinking otherwise. That's why I asked her if I could do a DNA test once the child is born just so I can be sure. She agreed to it and I was just waiting for a good moment to tell you all this."

"Oh so you were going to wait until last minute to tell me that you are expecting a baby? You should be ashamed of yourself for stepping back during her pregnancy. Surely the possibility that she might get pregnant every time you guys had sex always visited you. Now you are questioning if it is yours?", she is beyond pissed at this point.

"I knew that there was baby but I just have to be sure. I'm not trying to disrespect her in any way. I just didn't want to cause trouble between us for something that might not even be true.", I say hoping the sincerity in my voice convinces her.

Her body posture hasn't changed but her facial features have relaxed just a little bit, "And does all that sound good to you? I mean, are you even listening to yourself? You decided that it would be best to tell me, your wife, last about your pregnant ex?"

"No, that's not what I'm saying at all baby but I-", I don't even get to finish my sentence as she walks towards me.

"But nothing, it's exactly what you're saying. You have no respect for me Mayenziwe. Not as your wife or your equal. I am beyond the word angry right now so to avoid saying things I might regret later on, I'll tell you only this. You have disappointed me in more ways than one, so you will be sleeping in the spare bedroom until I am in the right state of mind to speak to you.", she attempts to leave the kitchen but I pull her back with her arm.

I stare into her eyes and all I see is sadness, she's on the verge of tears and it hurts me to the core knowing that I'm the cause of her tears. Getting into this marriage, the promise I had made to myself was to never be the cause of her sadness and now I've broken that one promise I made to myself. More than anything, I feel like a jerk. I mean, I am one seeing how I've been treating a woman who has loved me and my children from the moment she agreed to marry me.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to hurt you and I know nothing I say right now will make you believe that, but I mean it. My intention was never to hurt you and I'm sorry I went about this the wrong way.", I cup her cheeks into my palms.

"Did this happen before or after we got married?", her voice quavers.

The fact that she even has to ask that has me feeling like shit, "Before. Way before you and I started our thing. I will never cheat on you."

"But you're able to hide things from me right? You know what, don't even answer that. I don't want to talk you right now so let me go.", tears finally fall down her cheeks.

"Veronica baby, I'm so sorry.", at this point I can only pray that she doesn't divorce me straight away.

She wipes her tears, "The kids shouldn't see that you and are fighting. You have to make sure that you don't start acting weird in front of them. They are already going through a lot with adjusting to living without their mom being around, they don't need more tension at home.", and with that she leaves me standing there as she walks out of the kitchen.

Suddenly even the food I cooked doesn't seem appetising at all. I turn off all the kitchen appliances and head to the living room where the kids are watching an animated movie. I decide to join them and just keep quiet as they are focused on what they are watching. Of which I am happy about because I am not in the mood to talk at the moment.

ISISA

Today I decided to visit my mother alone without Tholente being present. I told him I'd be coming here and even though he offered to come with me, I decided that it's better if I came here alone. There's a lot I need to get off my chest and if he's here, I'll just run to him every time I encounter a problem with her. He wished me luck and of course, a great session in the bedroom to help ease any tension I had. I must admit that I do feel slightly better.

After we left here that day we came to see her, I decided to get someone who will stay with her just until she feels better. Since money was on the table

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many people wanted to take the position but I only needed one person to look after. One of her neighbours, one who lives closest to her, got the job because she looked decent and trustworthy.

I sent money every week for the past two weeks just to make sure that they were both comfortable during their stay together. Since it's them both, I allowed the neighbour to do the shopping because I had no idea what they like to eat or not. I was happy to learn this morning that she is now feeling better and that she doesn't need to be looked after anymore. That's why I decided to drag myself down here today.

The yard looks clean now, not a single paper in sight. The girl who was looking after her must have been cleaning around as well, which was expected but the sweeping? It was totally unexpected and I make a mental note to myself to give her a few more rands for taking such great care of the place. I park at the far end of the yard and switch off the car's engine. I lock it after taking my bag and the fruit basket I bought.

"Hello?", I knock twice on the door before opening it.

"Ngena! (Enter!)", my mother replies from the living room.

I make my way to the living room and I find her laying on the couch with a cup next to her. I don't know what is in that cup but I can think of something...beer. My mother is an alcoholic and I really thought that after this incident, she would have changed at least.

"Ngubani ixesha ngoku sele usela? (What time is it now that you are already drinking?)", I place the basket on the table.

"Andiseli tywala Isisa, ndisela ikofu. Kutheni ingathi awundithembi? (I'm not drinking alcohol Isisa, I'm drinking coffee. Why does it seem like you don't trust me?)", she sits up on the couch.

I sigh as I sit on the opposite couch, "It's not that I don't trust you mama but do you blame me for assuming that you're

drinking alcohol? You know that's the reason you're in this position in the first place."

"I know mntanam but I have learned from my mistakes and from now on, I promise not to go back to drinking. I will do this for you mntanam.", she says looking straight into my eyes.

I don't want to start crying but I can't help it. We've been down this road before, my mom and dad promised they'd stop drinking but after countless times of begging them to do it and them not doing it, I was taken by social services. And the rest is history with me being taken by the Jacksons. I know she's lying to me right now so I'm going to put a stop to this little act of hers.

"Mama ndiyayazi awuzuyenza lento uthi uzoyenza. (Mom I know you're not going to do what you are saying you'll do.) You've said this before, promised even, and still you failed to do that for me. Back when I needed you the most.", this is the first time I've expressed myself to her like this.

"I know my baby but you must understand that I also didn't like how things were back then. Losing your sister is what made us turn into alcoholics.", she starts crying.

Oh yes and there's that, "You did but not once did you take a moment to think what kind of impact what you guys were doing would have on me? I was just a child mama and I got

blamed for the death of my older sister. Njani mama? (How mom?)"

"Andazi nokuba ndithini mntanam. Wonke lo ngumsebenzi kaSathana. (I don't even know what to say my child. This is all Satan's work.)"

"Akukho sathana apha, kukwenza kwakho konke oku. Wena notata. (There is no satan here, this is all your doing. You and dad.) You let dad take out his anger on me for things I didn't even know about. When he used to beat me, you watched him do it and you said nothing. Nothing mama! Now I'm forced to be here to take care of you when you need me. Where is your beloved husband when you need him? Or where was he when those men did vile things to you? Nowhere!", it feels good getting all this off of my chest.

"Oh Nkosi yam ndenze ntoni!?! (Oh my God, what have I done!?!)", she starts wailing with her hands on her head.

A bit too dramatic if you ask me. It's starting to feel a little like a Nollywood film if you ask me. She needs to turn the dramatics down a notch.

"Kwafuneka ndikhulele emzini womntu endingamaziyo kodwa wawusaphila. (I had to grow up in a stranger's house but you were still alive.) It hurt mama, a lot but then I guess you didn't care. As long as you had your next fix, you were good. I don't

really care much for tata but wena mama? You failed me.", I wipe my river of tears.

"Oh sana lwam, ndiyazi ngcono ngoku. Ndicela undinike ithuba ndilungise iimpazamo zam. (Oh my baby, I know better now. Please give me another chance to fix my mistakes.) I love you so much my baby. So so much and I'm sorry I didn't get to show you just how much when you were younger and needed me the most.", her wails turn to soft sobs.

"It's okay mama, I am willing to forgive you and make peace between us. Just as long as you can prove to me that you are willing to do better.", I take a breath before smiling at her.

"I promise mntanam, I will do better. Let me hug you baby.", she wipes her tears and mucus.

Next thing I know, she's crawling towards me. Benditshilo ngaphambili kwaye ndiza kuphinda ndiyithethe, ungomnye wefilimu zaseNollywood. iDrama ka MamRhoyi! (I said it before and I'll say it again, she belongs in one of the Nollywood films. The drama MamRhoyi has!) Clap once!

VERONICA

"So how is your husband doing?", my aunt asks as she places the tray of snacks on the table.

"He's good MaAuntiza, just really busy with work.", I take deep breath.

She gives me a concerned look and I know another question is about to follow, "Awu, angati kutsi ufuna kudukisa bani ngobe ngiyati kutsi uyacala emanga. (Wow I really don't know who you're trying to fool because I can tell that you're lying.) Tell me, what is happening with him? Is he okay or has old age finally caught up with him and he can't perform in the bedroom?"

Okay now this I didn't expect so I burst into a fit of laughter. That is just

"Angicabangi kutsi kufanele ungibute imibuto lenjengaleyo ya-anti. (I don't think you should be asking me questions like that aunt.) It's very inappropriate to say the least and I asked that you refrain from calling him nge khehla. He's not that old.", I say after catching my breath.

"Of course that's what you'll say since he is your man and of course I know what I'm saying is wrong. I was just joking.", she chortles.

"Well then that's good and really aunty, there's nothing wrong with my husband. Everything is going well even though there are a few bumps on the road.", I sigh.

Every time I talk about Mayenziwe, my mind automatically thinks about his pregnant ex? I am not even sure if I should refer to Sizakele as his ex seeing that they were never a thing but I think it's better if I do. If truly the child she's carrying is Mayenziwe's, then she'll be a part of our lives forever and I have to establish some kind of relationship with her since a child will now be involved.

"Even if there are things going on between you two, it's best you don't share it with the world. Not if it's something that can still be fixed between you both. Only you know how bad or good the situation is, so it's best you don't involve anyone.", she takes her glass of juice and sips on it.

I've made peace with the fact that she might never leave and I guess it's okay having her here. Regardless of her shadiness, she is wise on some things and sheds light on things I don't know about. Oh and she keeps my sister in line, not that she's troublesome anymore. So having her here isn't all that bad.

"Thank you for the advice aunty.", I shy away from her stare.

"It's not a problem wena Veronica but if ever you feel like the marriage isn't working out, you must come back home. Angeke

ngikutjele kutsi ube nesineke ngisho nobe tintfo tingahambi kahle. Leseluleko singakubulala. (I won't tell you to be patient even when things aren't working out. That advice is the one that can cause your death.)", she takes one scone from the tray she brought in from the kitchen.

"Ngiyakwati konkhe loku MaAuntiza, uhlale uphindza infto yinye. (I know all this MaAuntiza, you always repeat the same thing.)", I laugh once again just to ease her mind.

"How are the kids towards you? Are they giving you a hard time?", she asks.

I shake my head, "No they are not, surprisingly. I would have thought they'd have something against me as a stepmother but they are very good. They are the ones that asked me to bring them here today to see you guys."

"Nyalo babe wakho akafuni kusiniketa litfuba lekwakha buhlobo nabo. (Now your father doesn't want to give us a chance to bond with them.)", she chuckles.

If I wasn't looking at her I'm sure I wouldn't have seen how she blushed at the mention of my mother. She better not be thinking what I think she's thinking. I don't know how I'd feel if my father and her were to start being a "thing". It would be very... weird to say the least.

I clear my throat to snap her out of her thoughts, "Ah you know how he is around kids. He's probably spoiling them as we speak."

"Yeah I'm sure he is.", she giggles shyly.

Eh...what is this now!? I should exit this living room while I still have the chance. I place my glass on the table and turn to her.

"I should go and see how Azi is doing, we haven't spoken since I got here."

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I say getting up.

"Oh okay. Well hurry up so we can wait for your father and the children to get back from wherever they went to.", she says loud enough for me to hear her as I leave.

THALENTE

Mayenziwe asked if we could go out for drinks tonight, and since my girlfriend is busy doing her own thing, I decided why not. So we're meeting a club tonight so we can have a few drinks while at it. It's still a bit early so I'm at work for now trying to finish fixing up the last car for the day. I work with two other people called Sticks and Jeffrey. They are good with cars

and that's the only reason why they are still working with me to this day.

"Ntwana, mina no Sticks sesiyavaya nou neh. Sotholana more. (Dude, Sticks and I are leaving now okay. We'll meet again tomorrow.)", Jeffrey says as he stands beside the car I'm working on.

"Sho bade, ngizonibona more. (Sure man, we'll meet tomorrow.)", I reply before he leaves.

Now that I'm left alone, I get to focus on the car and hope to get it done in time. I'm almost done fixing this car and after that I will head to meet up with Mayenziwe. The only problem with this car is that the emission system needs some fixing. It gives off excessive emissions so I'm going to make sure that the system goes back to keeping pollution at a minimum.

Later on I'm done and I've already cleaned up well, so I make my way inside the bar. It's not hard to spot him because of how he looks. His head is bent and I'm sure even a stranger could tell me that this man is going through the most. I make my way to his table and only when he feels my presence does he lift his head up to me.

"Ah Thalente, you are here!", he chuckles and burps.

"Yes I am man, you know I always honour an invitation. What's up? You look horrible.", I laugh.

"Yeah thanks for the compliment. It's just that... I'm having issues with my marriage, man.", he says feeling frustrated.

"What do you mean issues?", I ask feeling confused.

He starts narrating what's going on in his life at the moment and by the time he's done, I feel the strong urge to have a cold bottle of beer. I do exactly that and buy myself a six pack of Heineken just to take the edge off. I take my seat back as I return to our table and only after I've taken a sip, do I turn my attention back to him.

"Aii ntwana, this is bad. So what are you going to do now? I mean, you look terrible and the baby isn't even here yet.", I chuckle.

"Yeah man I know and what I'm going to do for now is to try and win back my wife. She means the world to me and I can't afford to lose her. She is everything I could have imagined or hoped for in a wife. I really can't afford to lose her.", he sighs heavily.

"As a non-married friend, I can't exactly tell you how to go about this entire thing. But as a friend? I suggest you fight for what you have. Finding someone that loves you for you these days is hard. That's why you have to grab this once in a lifetime opportunity with two hands and love the heck out of your woman.", I try offering the best advice I could possibly have.

He nods and a small grin pulls at the corner of his lips, "You're right ntwana, thank you. Phela already I'm freaking out since we haven't been sleeping in the same bedroom for days now. I can't take it anymore, I need my wife."

"Ugh man...you are so whipped. Let's talk about something else less depressing please.", I laugh.

MAYENZIWE

After my hangout session with Thacente yesterday, I realised that I'm not doing enough to show my wife how truly sorry I am for what I've done and that I really love and appreciate her. She didn't deserve my dishonesty and that's why I took it upon myself to correct my mistakes. Even though today is my birthday, I want to do something special for her.

I won't lie, seeing the breakfast she and the kids had made for me, I felt a little emotional. Even with our unresolved issues, she went out of her way to make this day special for me. That's why I'm anxious to get off work early so I can buy her flowers and maybe some chocolates to show her that I appreciate all she does for me. I'm happy that I get a half-day since it's my birthday, it gives me more time to look for the perfect gift.

"Boss?", Kamo calls out to me peeping in.

The door is open so he didn't invade my privacy in any way, "Yes Kamo, what's up?"

"There's been a slight change to your day schedule and unfortunately, it can't wait. It needs your attention.", he gives me pitiful eyes.

Just when I was sure I could leave a bit earlier today, "Can't Isisa handle it? I really wanted to do something nice for my wife."

He shakes his head, "No she can't because she's also out on a site today doing her rounds. This particular client wants to be in touch with one of the CEO's and since you're the only one available, you have to be the one to meet with him."

"Just great!", I sigh, "Who is this person and what do they want to meet for exactly?"

He shrugs, "I'm not too sure but he complained about the produce not being fresh or something along those lines. He said his name is Kobus Van Der Merwe."

I frown, "I've never heard of him before. Is he new?"

"I don't know but he said if you don't meet with him he'll be forced to take his business elsewhere. He specifically mentioned that you should wear formal clothing because it's a dinner and some of his business associates will be there. In case you want to socialise and get a wealthy clientele.", he smiles.

"Kamo, you're joking right?", I sigh once again.

"Nope! And I'll send you the details of when and where the dinner will be held via email. May you please also send me the sizes of your clothes, from your shoes to the shirt you'll wear.

I'll run down to a boutique to purchase it for you real quick. Bye!", he leaves just after saying that.

"Thank you!", I half-yell.

Indeed an email follows and I reply with my outfit sizes. I've said this before but I'll say it again, Kamo is proving to be a great assistant. He's offering to go buy the tuxedo for me without me even asking. If he continues this way, I'll give him a raise after one year of him working for me. He would have earned it. I take time to go over the email and I feel my anger rising.

The dinner will be held pretty late so I have no choice but to inform my wife about the last minute change of plans. As the CEO, I could decide not to go to this dinner but I don't want to send the wrong impression to our clients. Should they feel like I ignore complaints about our produce, then we might just lose them all. I decide to give Veronica a call just to tell her not to wait up.

"Babe, hi! How are you?", I say as soon as she answers the call.

"Mayenziwe, yes hello. I'm well thanks and how are you? Are you enjoying your day?", she responds.

This woman is everything I've ever dreamed of and more, "I'm okay and my day was going well until some bad news came up."

"Bad news? Is someone hurt?", I can hear the fear in her tone.

"No! Nobody is hurt, it's just that I won't be able to make it home early today. There's a client that wants to meet up with me because our supply of produce was not fresh. I need to deal with it or else it will cause problems.", I exhale.

She's quiet for a while before she takes a deep breath, "Oh okay, well if it's for work then I understand. The kids will be disappointed to hear that."

"I know and I am too. I really am sorry babe, please do tell them how sorry I am. I didn't expect this and it happened so last minute, forgive me please.", I say hurriedly.

"There's no need to apologise to me Mayenziwe, if it's work then you should do it. We'll see you when you get back home.", she says.

"Okay thank you, and I love you baby.", I say before we end the call.

She takes a deep breath, "Goodbye."

Once the call is done, I decide to get back to work. There's no use of me stressing myself because there isn't much to do at this point. I chose to work and if it means I have to sacrifice some special moments in my life, then so be it. The aim is for me to leave my kids a legacy so they won't ever struggle when they grow up. Hopefully it won't come down to me always missing important moments of their lives.

"Fuck!", I blow my breath as I relax back on the chair.

ISISA

I'm preparing to go to Mayenziwe's surprise dinner party that Veronica has planned. The invitation stated that it will be a cocktail theme, classic black and white style. So of course I had to look for a dress that would go along well with the theme. I bought a black knee-length dress that has white polka dots on it, and I paired it up with a black pair of heels.

For my face

I used minimal make up in case Thelente and I decide to get a little freaky during the night. My face won't be dramatic so I decided to put on big silver hoop earrings to add that 'Wow!' factor. Time is not on my side so once I've laid out my outfit on the bed, I decide to freshen up a little bit before lotioning my body and wearing my clothes. After I'm done, I take a moment to look at myself in the mirror. I must admit that I look stunning, with my big forehead and all.

A knock on the door catches my attention and I quickly put on some perfume before heading to the door. I'm sure it's Thelente because we will be going to the venue together. When I open the door I don't find Thelente but my mother instead. My adoptive mother. She has a slight frown on her face and I

know she's not happy with me. Ever since I've known Mrs Jackson, I've come to terms with the fact that she's a sensitive person.

"Mom, how are you?", I smile at her.

"I'm not okay baby. Can I come in?", she says in a shaky voice.

"Of course mom. Ugh... excuse me for my bad manners, I'm sorry.", I say opening the door wider letting her in.

She smiles at me but it doesn't reach her eyes, "Thank you baby."

We walk to the kitchen together and I offer her a seat while I fix her a cup of coffee. She can never refuse a cup of coffee, she's addicted to it. At one point my father was scared she'd get a heart disease but since it hasn't happened yet, I guess she's still doing good.

"So mom, why are you not okay? Are you and dad arguing again?", I hand her the cup.

She shakes her head, "No, your father and I are okay. It's you and your siblings I have a problem with."

"What kind of problem? The last time I checked, we were all okay.", I say.

"Well not anymore. None of you check up on me anymore and I can't help but feel neglected. I know you guys have lives to live

but I would have thought that as your mother, I'd at least be called once or twice a week. But to show that all of you don't need me in your lives anymore, none of you have called in weeks.", she says as she sips on her coffee.

I take a sharp breath in, "That's not true mom! I still need you, we all do. And I apologise on all of us, we are sorry we neglected you and made you feel like you're not important. Life has been really busy, and I think they can attest to that as well but I'm sorry nonetheless."

"It's okay but the reason I'm even complaining is because I expected this from Tyler and them, but not you. You always check in on us. Tell me, is everything going okay on your side or do you need our help?", she says taking hold of my hand.

See? She's a great mother, gets emotional over unnecessary things but still, she's great. The way she cares for me and all of my siblings is something to be commended for because regardless of her having worked most of her life, she managed to care for us as much as we needed. That's why I feel so bad that I haven't even told her of my little reconciliation with my mom. I'm scared she'll feel betrayed or worse...that I don't love her like a daughter would her biological mother.

"No no no, I'm good mom. It's just that work has been keeping me busy lately.", I avoid talking about it any further.

Oh...did I mention that I haven't told her or dad about Thalente? I'm sure she's going to freak out about these news when they come out to her. Speaking of Thalente, I'm expecting him to come fetch me any minute now and I must say that the nerves are having a field day with me. My palms are starting to sweat and I don't understand why I'm so nervous for her to meet him. He's not my first boyfriend so this shyness I suddenly have, is annoying.

"Well mom, the thing is-", there's a knock on the door that has me trailing off.

I leave my mom in the kitchen and I head to the door to open up for Thalente. As soon as I see him, my eyes cannot believe that this is him. For the first time ever, I see him wearing a black tuxedo and I must admit that he's very good looking. That's what he looks like to me everyday but today, he looks like a God.

"My love, you're early!", I say as he pulls me into a hug.

"Well I thought that you and I could stop at that ice cream place you like before making our way to Houghton.", he gives me his ridiculously beautiful smile as we pull apart.

"Oh baby, thank you. That's so thoughtful of you." I beam.

"Yeah well, I try. You look absolutely stunning by the way.", his eyes roam my entire body.

"Thank you and you look handsome as well."

"So are you done or are you still busy?", he asks.

"I'm done but there's someone I-"

"Isisa who is it?", my mom asks from the kitchen.

I see Thalente's eyes widen and I know he's surprised to hear someone is with me. I don't know if he's ready to meet her yet but I'm hoping that he'll handle everything like a champ. I know she'll try to scare him or intimidate him in the least, but I can only hope that some of the things she does, he doesn't take to heart.

"Who's that?", he whispers.

"My mom.", I reply much to his dismay.

THALENTE

Mrs Jackson is staring at me and I'm starting to feel a little uncomfortable. Isisa is fixing up some snacks for us so we're left alone. I have no idea what to say to her, if I'm being honest. She's got this overprotective look on her face and I don't want to screw up by saying anything bad. Everything about her screams expensive and I'm sure she can tell that I'm far from being wealthy.

"The weather is pretty good today, don't you think Mrs Jackson?", I find the words leave my mouth unexpectedly.

Of all things I could have mentioned, I chose to speak about the weather. I feel stupid right now and I'm certain that I look the part right now. She cocks her head to the right and gives me a weird look, as if she's discovered something.

"Yes, the weather is good.", she says after an awkward pause.

"Hmm.", is all I can say as she continues staring at me.

For some reason, my eyes can't meet hers. I look towards the direction of the kitchen and my girlfriend is still nowhere in sight. We should be on our way to the venue but I'm starting to think she's stalling. The way I see it, she hadn't told her mother about us and maybe she's running from explaining to her about our relationship. Even when we entered the lounge, she didn't

introduce me as a boyfriend, she just told her my name and that was that.

"So are you and my daughter dating?", she asks.

Just as I'm about to respond, Isisa walks in with a glass of water for me and some snacks. She places it on the table and gives me the glass which I quickly gulp down my throat. I feel better once I've had some water so I turn my attention back to her mother who has curiosity written all over her face.

"I'm sorry about that Mrs Jackson, do you mind repeating your question again?", I clear my throat.

"I asked if you and my daughter are dating.", there's no disrespect in her tone which is good for me.

"Oh-

"Mom, why didn't you ask me that? I was about to properly introduce you to each other.", Isisa comes to my rescue.

I relax a bit and let her take control of ths introductions. She tells her mother that I'm her boyfriend and that we've been seeing each other for months now. I can tell that her mother is surprised by the news but still she's not being mean or anything. Finally she gets to ask me the question that's been burning her.

"Do you love my daughter?", she asks.

I nod, "Yes I do ma'am."

That question is a no brainer, and I will never hesitate to express how much I truly love Isisa. She's the first woman I've been with who didn't mind helping me out at my lowest point in life. Even when she loaned me a huge sum of money to settle my mother's hospital bills, she never rubbed it in my face. I was able to pay her the entire amount in installments and she never complained.

"I really hope so son because if not, then you and I will have problems."

"I promise to treat her well ma'am.", I say.

She chuckles, "Call me Jane, please."

I smile, "Alright Jane."

As a black person, calling an older person than you using their name is straight up disrespectful. I'm sure if we were in the township, I would be the rudest person they know. Isisa tells her mother that we were actually on way to Mayenziwe's party and that we can't stay to chat. Mrs Jackson- I mean Joan, tells Isisa to wish Mayenziwe a happy birthday on her behalf.

We all leave Isisa's place together and the ride in the elevator is not awkward as the mother and daughter talk about their family. Since I have nothing to say, I listen to them speak until we get to the parking lot. They hug each other and Joan turns

to me and gives me a hug as well as we bid her farewell. We watch her drive out then head to my car to drive to the venue as well.

"Well your mom is...nice.", I say as the engine roars to life.

She giggles, "I guess you can say that but I know she can get a little too much sometimes. She came unexpected today."

I shrug, "As she should. You are her child and she cares for you."

"I guess so.", now it's her turn to shrug.

"Uhm so... why didn't you tell her about us?", I finally ask the question I've been dying to ask since I met her mother.

She gives me a brief look before looking back at the road, "I don't know...I guess I was just waiting for the perfect moment to introduce you to my entire family. They can be a bit overwhelming to other people and I didn't want you to run before you and I got the hang of things."

"But it's been months already, and I thought you and I were doing really well. Or was I wrong?", I frown.

"No, we are. I'm sorry if it seems like I'm making excuses, that wasn't my intention.", she places her right hand on my thigh.

I sigh, "It's okay, I just don't want it to feel like I'm forcing you to do it. You should do it when you're ready."

"I am ready babe. Mom already invited us to lunch next week Saturday so that I can finally introduce you to everyone else. It's been long overdue but it's happening hey."

I nod and we continue talking for the rest of the drive to the venue. When we get there, it's packed and there are cars everywhere. It's hard for me to find parking but I do eventually and I park it a place that's hidden. If Mayenziwe sees it first, he'll figure the entire thing out and that's not the aim. Once I've parked, Isisa and I share a kiss before getting out and heading inside the mansion.

"I love you.", she whispers as we make our way in.

I look down at her and smile, "I love you too sthandwa sam."

VERONICA

Kamo told me that Mayenziwe has left the office and that he'll be here shortly. He said he keeps checking on him acting as if the client wants to know how far he is. I'm glad that he won't be suspicious of this party, it took me a long time to plan. I mean regardless of our clashing right now, I couldn't just cancel it because I had already invited people. He is turning 40, which is a big deal the way I see it because apparently life begins at forty. So I really want him to enjoy this day.

"He just parked his car, and he'll be walking in any minute now. Everybody keep your voices down.", Kamo says as he walks to where the rest of us are standing.

We wait for a few more minutes and he rings the bell before one of the waiters from the catering services, opens the door for him. He is completely oblivious to his surroundings as the waiter directs him to the lounge. The chat between them is completely dull and it's all his fault. He sounds bored if and I can guess the reason is because he's sulking over working on his birthday.

"Surprise!", we all shout as he walks into the lounge.

He's startled at first and he looks around the room first before his eyes settle on me. A smile graces his handsome face as it dawns on him what is really happening. People flood around him wishing him a happy birthday and hugs as well. Mayenziwe is a people person, that's why there's a pile of presents at one corner of the room we're in. I let him talk to his people and give him time to chat with his guests.

I head to the kitchen to see how everything is going with the cooking and the drinks being served. When I get there, everything is going well and there's no need for me to even be there so I head outside the mansion. I take out a cigarette and light it up as it helps release the tension. I don't smoke everyday but once in a while I need it to feel good again.

"I didn't take you for the smoking type.", I hear a deep male voice speak from behind me.

I turn to look at who it is and his face looks so familiar, "Excuse me

do I know you?"

He smirks and walks closer to where I'm standing, "I don't think so, but I know you and I've been looking at you since I got here. You don't look too happy to be here."

I puff out the smoke looking at him from head to toe, "So you are a stalker, nice to know."

He laughs and I'm surprised at the rumble of laughter, "I wouldn't exactly call myself a stalker, maybe more of an admirer. And you are just so beautiful, I couldn't stop looking at you ever since the first time I laid my eyes on you."

"Now you're freaking me out, maybe I should head back inside.", I throw the cigarette bud on the ground and step on it.

"Wait!", he grabs my arm as I try walking past him.

"Let go of my arm.", I say to him.

He looks at hand and quickly lets me go, "Sorry, I didn't mean to do that or to freak you out. I just wanted a chance to talk to you and now seemed like the perfect moment. I am Mandla Zikhali,

son of Dumakude Zikhali. I know you because I've been to conferences with him and you were present, with your boss."

"Oh, so Mr Zikhali is your father? Well okay then. But that doesn't mean I'm giving you the go ahead to touch me as you please. I'm a married woman now.", I reply with a bit of sass.

"Really? To who?", the spark in his eyes dims.

"Well-"

"To me. She's married to me.", I hear my husband's voice say and I can't help but feel butterflies in my stomach.

I look over Mandla's shoulder and his eyes meet mine. He walks over to where we're standing and he comes around to place his hands around my waist. His touch alone sends shivers down my back and I get wet almost instantly. I look up into his eyes and a smile plays on his plump lips. This man is gorgeous my God!

"Uhm baby...this is Mandla Zikhali, son of Dumakude Zikhali. Mandla this is-", my attempt to introduce them to each other is disrupted.

"I know who he is, Mayenziwe Bhembe. I see you are still winning in this thing called life.", Mandla scoffs.

A dry laugh leaves my husband's mouth, "And I see you are still a loser as always. You can't tell me you didn't see the 12 carat

diamond ring on her finger. I bought it so losers like you could see it from a mile away."

Okay so I've established that these two don't like each other but why, I doubt I'll ever know. It has turned into a staring competition as neither of them is willing to back down from the challenge. Mandla is even huffing with his nose flared. I can tell that Mayenziwe annoys him, even a child could see that. I decide to break this little awkward reunion by getting Yenziwe's attention.

"Love, I think we should head back inside. We don't want to keep the guests waiting.", I say looking into his eyes.

The anger in them quickly vanishes and he breathes in and out, "Yes let's do that baby. See you around Zikhali Jr."

Disrespect is oozing from Mayenziwe's tone so I try to make things a little less awkward by telling Mandla he'll see us inside. He gives Mayenziwe a mean look before turning to me with the most disturbing smile ever.

"Of course my lady, enjoy the rest of your night.", he blows me a kiss.

I clench on Mayenziwe's hand as I feel him wanting to move to Mandla, probably to hit him. He huffs and relaxes, we then make our way inside the house and instead of going to the

lounge, he takes us up the stairs. I hope he's not thinking we'll have sex here with his parents and friends just downstairs.

"Your parents are here Mayenziwe.", I say following behind him with my hand still in his.

"I know.", he says and continues walking.

We walk in silence until we reach a door, and he opens it. I don't know where he gets the nerve to parade this place when he just got here but I guess he doesn't care. He shuts the door and turns the lock. I give him a quizzical look.

"I love you Veronica.", is what he says first.

"Okay...I know that.", I say.

"I want you to understand that no matter what we're going through, I'll always love you.", he walks towards me.

"Is this about Mandla? I promise there's nothing going-", he stops me from speaking.

"I don't care about Mandla, I know he can never be half as good looking as I am.", he chuckles.

I blush and look down, "Cocky now are we?"

He shrugs, "The reason I'm saying all this is because even though I have done you wrong, I want you to know where you stand in my heart. You and the kids mean everything to me, I

would never intentionally ruin things between us. I'm sorry my love, I really am. I am only human and I am bound to fuck up here and there but I hope you know my feelings for you are genuine."

I sigh, "I hear you Mayenziwe, and I understand that you are bound to fuck up. The only reason I was so mad was because you didn't trust me enough to confide in me. I'm so tired of this hostile environment we have put each other in, I want us to be okay again."

"Please forgive me my love, I'll never do something like this ever again.", he kisses my knuckles.

I sigh and roll my eyes, "I forgive you. Let's hope we'll never find ourselves in this situation ever again."

"We won't, I promise you.", he smiles and lifts me up in his arms.

He twirls me around and I laugh my guts out. We kiss and it feels like everything else doesn't matter. What matters is that we are both here and we love each other. It was only a matter of time until I forgave him and today is the perfect day for that. Hopefully I'll get some good loving tonight.

"You smell like cigarettes.", he says as we pull apart.

I giggle, "I know, but it's your fault. I was going to get chewing gum before you pulled me up here."

He places me down, "Well let's go fix that then. One last kiss before we go down?"

"Of course.", I say already pulling him to me.

MAYENZIWE

As we lay in each other's arms, I can't help but feel grateful for her presence in my life. A week later and I still have people calling to tell me how much they enjoyed themselves at my party. To be honest, it was great seeing all my friends and family, as well as a few business associates that I hadn't seen in a while. My wife really went all out for that party and I still can't believe she did all that for me.

I decide to get out of bed and head to the kitchen to fix her something to eat. Before going to the kitchen, I start in the bathroom to freshen up first. Once I'm in the kitchen, I take out the ingredients I'll need for this scrumptious breakfast and soon get started on it. She's been eating a lot of peanut butter and jam sandwiches lately so I make sure to include it with all the other things I'll be making like bacon and eggs.

The birthday celebration was a blessing in disguise because we were able to fix things between us. Even though I didn't do much to gain back her trust, I am glad she gave me the benefit of a doubt to show just how much I truly appreciate her. This past week has been nothing short of amazing, the kids are at their happiest and so are we. I couldn't ask for more.

As soon as I've finished preparing breakfast, I head back to the room to wake up Veronica then I'll wake the kids after. I decided to go all out for this breakfast just to show them a little love since they have been spoiling me a lot these past few days. I get to the room and Veronica is still fast asleep, she is totally out of it and I can tell that she can't even hear my footsteps as I make my way in.

I get to her side of the bed and shake her body slightly, "Baby, wake up."

A few seconds later she mumbles visibly annoyed, "No...let me sleep Mayenziwe."

"Please wake up babe, the kids are up already and their waiting for you so we can start eating.", I lie.

If I don't do this then she'll spend the entire day in this bed, "Fine but only this once."

She sighs and gets up from the bed, not forgetting to sulk of course. While she's gone, I fix the bed and head to the children's rooms to wake them up for breakfast. They also take their time and freshen up before joining me in the kitchen. I've already placed their dishes on the counter and there's a variety of good for them to choose from.

Veronica soon joins us and greets the kids. We kiss before she moves to her seat and we say a short prayer before digging in.

Like I predicted, the peanut butter and jam sandwich is the first on her plate then everything else follows. Ndumiso makes cornflakes for himself and Londi only has bread, eggs and sausages. She doesn't eat pork because she's allergic to it.

"So what do you guys want to do today? We have the entire day to ourselves.", I say.

Londi shrugs, "Well we can do anything really, I don't care. As long as we're together, I'm fine with anything."

I nod, "What about you Ndu?"

"I don't mind us just sitting inside the house and watching movies. It's been a while since we were together.", he says.

"I agree with Ndu, plus I'm too lazy to be walking around somewhere. After bathing, we can go to the lounge and just watch movies or series the entire day. There's plenty of snacks in the pantry cabinet.", Veronica says after having a sip of her coffee.

"Well okay then, I guess it's decided. We will spend our time in the lounge lazing around all day long. Let's finish up quickly so we can shower and get started on binge watching some cool stuff.", I smile at them.

We chat about how their week at school went and I learnt that Londi is the new captain for her school's swimming team, for kids ages 13-15. I am so proud of her because I know just how

much time she's put into making sure she got this position. I've seen her cancel our playdates just to go to swimming practice and competitions. So I am more than confident that she will take this team to greater heights.

Once breakfast is done, the kids head to their rooms to bath and I'm left alone with my wife. She gets started on washing the dishes and I help her out. I play some music as we do all this and one of my favourite songs plays next. 'Ego' by Saint Harison. I stop wiping the dishes and wrap my arms around her waist.

"You know I love this song.", I whisper in her ear.

She giggles, "Can you stop so we can quickly finish up with these dishes? The kids will be done soon."

"They can wait... I'm just showing my wife some love.", I kiss the nape of her neck.

I hear her inhale a sharp breath, "Stop Mayenziwe."

"Why?", I plant kisses on her neck.

She starts breathing heavily, "What you're doing is not right Yenziwe."

Hearing her call me that way makes me fall for her even deeper, "Let's go finish this in the bedroom my love."

She lets out a sigh of defeat and places the dishcloth inside the sink, "Okay let's be quick about it."

I grin deviously and spank her ass, "We'll be quick alright."

NARRATED

Sizakele is rushed to the hospital by her mother as the contractions get even more intense. Her body feels like it's on fire and the tears keep on rolling down her face. Nothing could have prepared her for this moment and it is even worse that she can't take out her frustration and pain on the father of her child.

"We're almost there baby, hang on.", her mother says catching her attention.

"Please hurry mom... I can't take the pain anymore.", Siza yells with sweat for covering her entire face.

"I know baby... I know.", her mother sighs and continues driving at a reasonably high speed.

Seeing her daughter in so much pain hurts her, she wishes she could do something to get rid of the pain for her. Knowing that the man who is responsible for her daughter's pregnancy is not here right now pisses her off. She wants to give him a call just to give him a piece of her mind but she refrains from doing

that. Sizakele gave her the numbers to use only for emergencies and since she hasn't told her to call him, she can't do it without her permission.

"Let me call him baby. He needs to know that his baby is on the way.", the mother tries her daughter once more.

"Not yet mom. We need to know if it's really labour or maybe it's just another case of Braxton Hicks. It's way too early for me to be giving birth so maybe it's a false alarm.", Siza replies breathing heavily.

"Alright then. We're almost there.", mom responds even though she knows that this response is annoying to her daughter.

A few minutes later, they get to the hospital and they are attended to almost immediately. This is what's amazing about the services in private hospitals, you get attended to immediately. Siza's mother is instructed to find parking before making her way inside the building. Her anxiety is shooting through the roof as she looks for parking space. And with luck on her side, she finds it easily and rushes inside with her handbag in hand.

"Hello, I'm looking for my daughter. The pregnant one that was just brought in a few minutes ago.", she says hurriedly to the receptionist.

"Hi ma'am. Please calm down so I can be able to help you."

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the lady behind the counter says calmly.

Siza's mom takes a deep breath and speaks calmly, "I'm looking for my daughter who is in labour, she was brought in a few minutes ago."

"Oh yes of course ma'am, I'll direct you to her shortly. Firstly, I would like you to fill in this form and fill in the methods of payment.", the lady gives her a sympathetic smile.

The older lady does as requested and she's directed to where Sizakele was taken to. She is forced to spend her time in the waiting room where she waits to hear about her daughter's state. Time flies by pretty fast and when she realises, five hours had already passed with her waiting for news on her daughter. She didn't think that it would take this long because of how much Siza was screaming. A part of her thought that maybe she was already fully dilated.

Her body is exhausted from all the sitting she's been doing so she decides to stretch a little by taking a walk. Just as she's about to leave, a doctor dressed in their full scrubs walks to the area she's at. She feels her heart race at the doctor's body language, it's saying a whole lot without him having said anything. She's not the only person in this waiting area so

maybe the bad news is not for her. So she waits to hear what he has to say as he looks at the clipboard in his hand.

"Sizakele Mvundla?", the doctor calls out and immediately she feels bile rise up her throat.

"Uhm yes... I'm her... I'm her mother. Is everything okay doctor?", she struggles to piece together the sentence.

The doctor lets out a small sigh as he walks closer to her so that the others in the room don't hear what he has to say, "Ma'am, I am Dr Nkosi. There were some complications during the labour but your daughter managed to give birth to a beautiful baby girl."

Mrs Mvundla's lips stretch into a smile, "Oh praise the Lord. That is amazing, when can I see them? I'm sure all of you are very tired but thank you for doing a great job with my daughter and granddaughter."

The doctor's smile doesn't reach his eyes, "Well ma'am you can see your granddaughter any time you look. Regardless of being premature, she's as healthy as a full-term baby."

"Those are good news, I'm sure Sizakele will be happy to hear this.", she grins.

"Ma'am I'm sorry, I don't know how to say this but I'm going to say it anyway. Your daughter Sizakele, died during childbirth. Like I said, there were some complications and unfortunately

she didn't make it. I'm so sorry for your loss.", he says somberly.

"What?", a look of confusion is plastered on her face.

VERONICA

We are watching a series about a young prodigy who is moved to high school at the age of 9 because of his impressive skills. The name of the show is 'Young Sheldon' and I must admit that it's a funny series. I've been laughing since it started and I can't stop. We are on episode 20, season 1 and I can't believe time has passed so fast. I don't know how much junk we've eaten but I'm not complaining.

"I'll be back babe.", I say getting up from the couch.

"Where are you going?", he whispers in my ear so that he doesn't disturb Londi and Ndu.

They can get so cheeky when they are disturbed so we've been doing our best not to disturb them in any way. It's actually kind of funny how they give us these murderous looks just for laughing out loud. I mean, what should we do when something is funny. Not laugh?

"To the toilet, my bladder is too full.", I whisper back.

He nods, "Okay hurry up then."

"I will.", I peck him on his lips then head to the nearest bathroom.

I release myself and when I wipe I see blood. I can't believe it's that time of the month already and I haven't even checked my calendar. My periods weren't supposed to start until the middle of the month but I guess the date had changed. As soon as I finish wiping, I flush then head to our room to fetch a pad. I put one on and washed my hands before returning to the lounge.

"That took you long enough.", Mayenziwe says putting his arm around my shoulder as I sit beside him.

"Yeah, I just started on my period so I was still fixing myself up.", I say softly.

He nods then kisses the side of my head before focusing on the TV again. We watch the show and like I mentioned before, this show tickles my laughing buds, if there even is such a thing. Not long after I'm back from the bathroom, I feel intense period pains that I start to whimper.

Mayenziwe turns to me as fast as lightning, "What's wrong love? Is everything okay?"

I shake my head, "These bloody period pains are ruthless. Can you get me painkillers from the kitchen?"

He nods his head hurriedly, "Of course."

He gets off the couch and heads to the kitchen to fetch me some pills. The kids have even stopped the show and turned to me. They ask me what's wrong and I tell them that it's nothing serious, just minor pains. I can tell they don't believe me, I wouldn't too with how much whimpering I'm doing. I can't help it, the pain is just too much to handle.

"There you go babe.", he gives me the pills and a glass of water.

I take them from him, "Thank you."

I drink them and wait a few more minutes for the pain to subside. After a long time, it subsides and I start feeling much better. We get back to what we were doing and soon all is forgotten. An hour later the pain comes back multiplied and this time I scream in pain.

"It hurts Mayenziwe...it hurts a lot!", I yell as tears roll down my face.

"What hurts love?", he asks worriedly.

I look around the room and the fear on the kids' faces makes me sad but I can't focus on them right now. The pain I'm feeling makes me want to get up on my feet and jump around. Just do something... anything.

"My abdomen, there's a lot of pain in my abdomen.", I sob.

"Okay baby let's go to the hospital. I'll take the kids to your family once I've dropped you off at the hospital then I'll come back to you.", he says with his voice full of worry.

He picks me up and his eyes widen, "Baby you're bleeding."

I don't know why he's shocked because I told him that I'm on my period. I probably bloated myself so I look at what has him widening his eyes like this. To my surprise, there's an excessive amount on my pants and the couch. That's when fear takes ahold of every cell in my body.

"Let's go now Mayenziwe.", I say in a shaky voice.

NARRATED

Mayenziwe is losing his mind as he paces back and forth down the passage. His mind is running wild with the ideas of what could be happening back there and he can't help but feel scared. One minute they were all sitting in the lounge enjoying a movie and the next, Veronica is screaming her lungs out. His palms start sweating so he wipes them on his pants.

"You need to stop pacing like this Bhembe, or else you will lose your mind.", Mr Sibanda says looking at his son in law.

He has been watching him lash out on everyone, the staff definitely felt his heat and this act has proved to him that Mayenziwe loves his daughter. When he came to drop off the children at his house, he didn't think it was because of an emergency. It was only after the children were taken to a room that Mayenziwe told him what had taken place and that Veronica was rushed to the hospital.

Mayenziwe sighs, "I can't do that sir. Two hours later and we still haven't heard anything from these doctors. Veronica was awake when I brought her here so what is taking them so long."

Mr Sibanda gives him a polite smile, "I know, but at least sit down for now. I'm sure they'll be back with more information shortly."

With great resistance Mayenziwe takes a seat beside him and they are both silent, each lost in their thoughts. The hospital isn't busy so they aren't disturbed by anyone, just the staff doing their jobs. There are some nurses and doctors clocking in for their shifts and others are clocking out. The one thing these two men can be grateful for is that there isn't any noise.

"So tell me, what really happened? You didn't give us more context as to what happened.", Mr Sibanda asks calmly.

"Nothing happened sir. One minute, we were watching something on TV and the next she started yelling in pain. She did say that she had stomach cramps but they got more intense and now we're here.", Mayenziwe says rubbing his forehead in frustration.

"Let's hope that it's nothing serious.", Mr Sibanda says calmly.

His voice is very convincing that he has everything under control and that he's not feeling emotional. As much as he's trying to stay strong, the fear of losing his daughter after losing his wife not so long ago has him on a chokehold. He will be heartbroken that's for sure but his biggest worry is Azivaishe. She barely managed after losing her mom and now her sister? That would completely destroy her so he hopes these doctors are doing their best to make sure his daughter is okay.

A few minutes later, a nurse approaches them. It is the same nurse that spoke to them when Mayenziwe had lost his cool and was fighting with everyone wearing uniform. The nurse's lips stretch into a polite smile at the two men seated on the uncomfortable chairs as he makes his way to them.

"Evening, gentlemen.", she says.

Mayenziwe immediately stands up, "Yes doctor, is my wife okay?"

"Mr Bhembe, yes your wife is doing well now. She's awake and I'm here to fetch you both so you can see her.", the nurse says.

"Oh that's good news. But what was wrong with her in the first place?", Mr Sibanda asks with a hint of relief in his voice.

"Well I'm not allowed to disclose that to you as of yet but the doctor will join you all shortly. Let me take you to her.", she says and walks them to the room Veronica is in.

They get to the room she's occupying and Veronica's father walks in first and Mayenziwe stands outside afraid to walk in. His mind is still processing that he nearly lost his wife and he couldn't do anything about it. That thought alone scares the shit out of him and he can't help but feel sad. Losing Veronica would have hurt him beyond measure.

"Aneni, you scared us.", her father says pulling her into a hug.

Veronica chuckles, "Oh dad, I'm sorry I scared you all. It won't happen again."

Mr Sibanda sighs and shakes his head, "I was scared I was losing you."

Veronica can see the tears in her father's eyes so she tries to lighten up the situation

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"Hey now dad, I'm still going to be around for a very long time. You don't need to worry about that."

"I'm sorry my child, I guess because this happened so unexpectedly my fear shot through the roof.", he wipes his tears and smiles at her.

"I understand.", she smiles and nods at him.

Mayenziwe finally pulls himself together and moves towards the bed to see his wife. She looks beautiful but the dry lips and pale skin tone give away that she was sick. He can't help but point out how his wife is scared of being sick. It's barely been four hours with her feeling sick and already she's as pale as a ever. But it must be because of all the blood she lost, he thinks to himself.

"My love.", he says caressing her cheek.

"Babe.", she smiles at him.

"How are you feeling now?", he asks to refrain from kissing her since her father is here.

"I'm feeling a lot better now. Where are the kids?", she asks feeling worried.

"The kids are at your dad's place so don't worry about them.", he says and brushes her head.

"Let me go and call your aunt to tell her that you're okay. I'm sure they are very worried about you so I need to put them at ease. I'll be right back.", Mr Sibanda says before leaving.

The couple is then left behind to talk and the first thing they do is kiss and hug each other. Mayenziwe questions his wife and asks if she truly isn't in any pain anymore. Veronica tells him that she's okay and they chat until her father comes back. He doesn't come back empty-handed but with coffee and muffins. They eat and laugh as they talk about different topics.

The doctor makes his way into the room after a long while and immediately the chatting ceases. He introduces himself as Dr Nkosi and he soon tells them that Veronica is doing well, and that she should try eating more fruit to help with the loss of blood.

"Dr Nkosi, why was I bleeding in the first place?", she asks.

Dr Nkosi sighs, "I'm sorry to say this ma'am but you had a miscarriage. We suspect it was an ectopic pregnancy so the

foetus had no chance of survival at all. I'm really sorry Mrs Bhembe."

"What? How did this happen?", Mayenziwe asks concerned.

"This usually happens when the fertilised egg couldn't move down the fallopian tube fast enough. There is nothing anyone could have done and I believe you were lucky it didn't cause any harm to you. This kind of pregnancy is usually more of a risk for the mother.", the doctor tried to make them feel better.

"How far along was I?", that's the first thing Veronica asks.

"6 weeks ma'am.", Dr Nkosi replies.

Life in the United States has been okay, not as thrilling as she had hoped it would be but it's okay. Every bone in her body misses her children and she wishes she could see them one more time. Not the virtual meetings she's been getting which are not something she wants. Her hate for the lovebirds grows stronger every passing day.

"My baby, you need to stop this now. It's not healthy. Look at how thin you are getting.", Rosette's mother says as she walks in her room.

"Nee ma, ek het vir jou gesê ek is nie honger nie. (No mom, I told you that I'm not hungry.)"

"Then why don't you go back to South Africa to fetch your children? It's not fair that you are forcing us to watch you fade away.", the mother takes a seat beside.

"I'm not forcing you guys to do anything mom. You are the one who is all up in my business and it's unnecessary.", Rosette sighs.

"I don't know what else you want us to do but I refuse to let you stay cooped up in this room. It's either you go out there and do something about this situation you're in or you leave us in peace. I refuse to bury any of my children.", she stands up and leaves.

Rosette starts rocking her body as her mother's words get to her. She doesn't want to live without her family, especially since her children aren't with her anymore. Her mind is made, when the time is right, she will go back to SA and reclaim what's rightfully hers. She carried those children for months so they belong to her.

"It's time you meet your maker Mayenziwe.", she starts laughing like a psycho.

NARRATED

Loss can make one lose their sanity, for a short while or even for a lifetime. It takes time for a person to get over losing someone they held dear to their hearts, and therefore it can either break or make you. That's how this specific couple feels right now as the cloud of sorrow, hangs above their family.

It's the next day and Veronica is getting discharged from the hospital. After spending a night in the hospital, she feels more than ready to go back to the comfort of her own home. Her husband is already here to take her home so he can take good care of her as they mourn the loss of their unborn baby. It is the saddest time for them both.

Veronica just finished taking a shower and now she's wearing her clothes brought to her by her aunt and sister. Speaking of those two, they came to see her this morning to check in on how she's holding up and she must admit that she didn't like the looks of pity that were on their faces. Yes she lost a baby but she doesn't want everyone around her to feel sorry for her to the extent that they can't even pretend to be okay. It makes her feel even worse.

"So are you just going to stand there and stare?", she says to get her husband's attention.

Mayenziwe snaps out of his thoughts and smiles at her,
"Uhm...no. Baby are you okay?"

"Yes I am, why do you ask?", she finishes putting on her cardigan.

"The fact that you are even asking me that worries me. We just lost a baby Veronica and not once did I see you shed a tear. Therefore I am worried that you are not dealing with this situation but rather, harbouring your feelings.", Mayenziwe says to her.

She rolls her eyes and sits on the hospital bed, "I am sad Mayenziwe but you don't expect to mope around all day now do you?"

"In a way, I do actually. Crying is not a bad thing babe and I really thought that you would be more affected by this. Yesterday I cried but you didn't.", he says.

"What is this now Mayenziwe? Yesterday you cried and I didn't, boo hoo. We are not in primary school whereby when you cry, I have to cry as well. We are different types of people and therefore we will react to situations differently.", she clicks her tongue.

"But I just thought-", he tries to say but gets cut off by her.

"But nothing Mayenziwe! I don't understand why you're pretending as if you care. When I told you about having kids,

you said you weren't looking to have more and now you're the world's greatest person because you cried and I didn't!? Spare me the speech please."

"When I was telling you all this, I was speaking from a place of concern. Just because you're hurting doesn't give you the right to piss on other people's feelings. That was my baby as well you know, but I'm not out here pushing people away. Especially people who want to be there for you."

Veronica's head snaps to Mayenziwe's direction in the speed of lightning, "Don't you dare Mayenziwe! Yes I lost a baby but at least you still have a baby on the way. One that is not from me so excuse me for feeling like a human."

"I thought we were working on that babe? WE lost a baby and even though I might still have a baby on the way, doesn't make our child less of my own than the one that's on the way.", he moves toward her.

She shakes her head rapidly and blinks the tears away, "I need space Mayenziwe. Some time alone might do me some good."

Mayenziwe doesn't get a chance to respond as the doctor walks in with the discharge form in his hands. Veronica is then discharged from the hospital with Mayenziwe escorting her back home. Aunt Nosibusiso offered to care for Vero until she got back to her usual self but the couple declined the offer and

asked for some time alone. And that's exactly what they got as they took the children instead, to care for them while the lovebirds process their loss.

"Should I buy you anything? A milkshake maybe?", Mayenziwe asks Veronica as he gets into the car.

"No thank you.", she sighs and looks out through the window.

Mayenziwe nods and drives out of the hospital premises with the argument between him and Veronica replaying in his mind. This is a sad time for them both and the fact that they are even arguing during this time, hurts him to the core. Regardless of how much he feels like shit, he is hopeful that this is something that can still be fixed.

Seeing that no one is making any means of a conversation, he turns up the volume of the radio. They listen to some music as they make their way home. Mayenziwe reaches out to hold Vero's hand and she doesn't object to this little act of care. It makes her happy that at least her husband is not pulling away from her and hopefully he won't.

ISISA

I just got back home from a tiring day at work. Handling two roles at the same time can be so tiring and overwhelming. Today I got to understand why Mayenziwe always complains of

being tired. Having to deal with clients and their complaints is not necessarily my forte, so today was not easy for me. All I need now is a long hot shower and some good food. Judging by the smell coming from the kitchen, I know Thalente is making something great.

I walk to the kitchen and I can hear him humming to a song by Zola 7, Nomhle. Not that I'm judging him or anything, but I doubt there are still people listening to Zola's music in this day and age. Yes the music is good but for its era, not in these times that's for sure. He's so engrossed in what he's doing he can't even hear me walk in.

"Hey sthandwa sami. (Hey my love.)", I say loud enough for him to me speaking through the music playing.

He turns to the door and a smile replaces the seriousness on his face, "Yebo muntu wami. Unjani? (Yes my person. How are you?)"

I place my bag and keys on the empty chair and walk towards him, "Ngi grand ntwana, wena? (I'm great man, and you?)"

He chuckles as he wraps his arms around me, "When did you start speaking like that manje wena?"

"Since I started listening in on conversations between you and your friends. Sometimes I even get lost while listening. What do you guys even say?", I laugh.

"Serves you right and it's none of your business. Now...can you give your handsome man a kiss please?", his crooked tooth comes to view as his smile broadens.

"Well I can only wish that my man was handsome but what can I say, we don't choose who we fall in love with.", I shrug.

"And what is that supposed to-", I kiss him before he gets to finish the sentence.

If I didn't do this then we'd still be talking and we'd be far behind on eating. After the kiss, he instructs me to go and freshen up while he finishes up in the kitchen. I head to my room to change out of my work clothes and hit the shower. Since I did go to one site today

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it only makes sense to take this shower even though Thallente would say it's unnecessary. He says I smell good all the time.

While I'm in the shower, I can't help but wonder how Thallente will take the suggestion I have for him. I want to ask him what he thinks about us moving in together. I mean we already spend so much of our time together, why not move into one place. That might not be a big deal to him but I know that if I suggest that we move into my place specifically, he might not agree with it.

No offence to him or his mother, but it will feel very weird to move into the house his mother once stayed in. Sleeping over there is already such a challenge for me because all I think about is what his mother would say to us if she were here. All if not most parents are against their children having people sleep over their homes, so I can imagine that is how she'd react as well.

I get out of the shower and apply a little lotion on my body before getting into my pyjamas. It's late anyway so there's no need for me to dress up as if I have an event to attend.

Spaghetti and mince is placed on the table as I make my way to it. Thalente is already seated and is busy on his phone, he puts it down when I take a seat opposite him. We say a short prayer before eating and the food is delicious.

"This is good sthandwa sam.", I say as I take another bite.

"Thank you baby. I'm trying to improve my cooking skills.", he smiles.

"You did good hey. So about Veronica and Mayenziwe, I was thinking we should go and see them on Friday. You know, just to give them some time for now to deal with their loss.", I say.

"Yeah I guess that's true. It's really sad what has happened to them.", Thalente says.

"It is...I will pray for them.", I say.

"That's a good idea.", he says.

"Babe?", now is the moment of truth.

"Yebo.", he looks at me.

"I think we should move in together.", I'm crossing my fingers hoping he says yes.

MAYENZIWE

We are currently not on speaking terms, Veronica and I that is. She is pissed at me and I am giving her space. As much as I'm giving her space, I try to be near her so she won't struggle should she need anything from me. I made her some vegetable soup so she can regain her strength.

"Here, I made you soup. I hope you'll like it.", I say giving her the bowl.

"Thank you.", she says and gets back to watching her favourite show.

I nod and sit on a different couch. This is as much space as I'm willing to give her. Especially since I don't know what's going on in her mind or if she has suicidal thoughts. It's better to be safe than sorry so I'm going to nag her until she feels a whole lot better to talk to me. The reality show that's currently on is

about housewives, not sure from where but they sure are entertaining even though it's not what I would be watching.

Once she's done with the soup, I take the bowl to the kitchen to wash it then bring her a bottle of water and some fruits for her to snack on as we continue watching the show. I decide to take a chance and sit next to her hoping she won't deny me that opportunity. And indeed she doesn't so I pull her towards and she lays her head on my chest.

"We'll get through this right?", she asks after a few minutes of silence.

"We will, it might take some time but we will get there eventually.", I brush her arms.

"It hurts Mayenziwe.", she speaks softly.

"I know, and I'm so sorry my love.", I place a chaste kiss on the top of her head.

"I'm sorry for being such a bitch.", she sighs.

"And I'm sorry for being such a jerk. I love you Vee and I'm here to stay.", I smile at her.

"I love you too.", we kiss and get back to watching TV.

Just as the show is getting more interesting, my phone rings and it's an unknown number. I decide to ignore it because I

don't usually answer unknown numbers. It rings again so I'm forced to pick it up this time around.

"Hello, who is this?", I ask already annoyed.

"Hi. You are speaking to Sizakele's mother. I'm so sorry to call this late but I had no other choice.", she sighs.

"Oh hello ma, how are you?", I sit up which in turn makes my wife sit up as well.

"Not okay my son, I'm not okay at all. I know you don't know me but my daughter said I should give you a call should there be a need. She also told me that she told you about the baby?", she says.

"Yes she did, ma. Is she in labour already? Because I thought she wasn't due until a few more weeks.", I look over at Veronica and she has her eyes on me.

"That's the reason why I'm calling son. See, Sizakele gave birth to a beautiful baby girl last night but there were some complications. Siza died on the operating table.", her voice starts shaking and I know she's crying.

"Siza is dead ma? Are you sure? I mean-", I feel my palms start to sweat.

"Yes mfana, she's gone and now your daughter is left motherless. That's why I'm calling to find out if you would like to raise her yourself or maybe I should do it?"

I'm finding it hard to even form a sentence so I tell her I'll call back tomorrow before ending the call. Sizakele and I were never a couple and I've never had any romantic feelings for her whatsoever. But hearing that she's gone leaves a bitter taste in my mouth. And now there is a baby involved and I just don't know what to do.

I look at Veronica and I can tell she has questions but where do I even begin to tell her that the mother of my alleged baby is dead. Oh and how about, if the child is mine then I'd like to have her living here with me. We just lost a baby for goodness' sake and now this?

"What is it Mayenziwe? What happened to Sizakele?", she asks after seeing that I'm not paying her any attention.

VERONICA

Today is Sizakele's funeral and I am in mixed emotions about it. I know that she's being laid to rest for good but my heart still feels heavy. It turns out the child she was carrying is indeed Mayenziwe's child. Apart from the DNA test that he carried out, the baby looks exactly like Londiwe, his first born. So when I saw her picture, there was no denying that she belonged to him.

The baby is still living with her grandmother but I'm sure Mayenziwe will want to have her here with us. It's in the way that he speaks about her that I know that he wants her here. I can already tell that he adores her, more than anything and honestly I cannot blame him, it's his child afterall. But my feelings are much more confusing. I'm even ashamed to admit it but I really don't want her here.

It's nothing personal but I know that if the baby gets here, I will definitely not bond with her in any way. Despite her cute looks, I can't help but wonder if my baby would have looked anything like her. Or if she would have looked like me. I'm not sure if I'm over analysing things but I believe my baby was sacrificed so that this baby gets to live. It sucks.

I still can't believe that I was carrying a baby and I didn't even feel the changes in my body. But then how could I because I still had my periods the previous month, even though it wasn't a heavy flow, I thought nothing of it. And now here I am without a baby of my own but I am supposed to accept Mayenziwe's child like I'm not hurting. Everything is still new and fresh and I just can't find it in my heart to have her live with us.

"How are you feeling sisi?", Azi asks as she sits next to me.

She's been here for the past three days now and I'm glad she is. This is after she's been begging to come and since I had put off her visit for a long time now, I decided that I do need my sister here with me. Her and Londiwe get along like a house on fire so her being here is good for the kids as well. They enjoy being around her.

"I feel okay, just tired. How are you feeling?", I smile at her.

"I'm good, just worried about you. You barely eat which is so unlike you. I know you're hurting but you need something to fill you up. Do you have a specific request on what you want perhaps?", she asks.

I shake my head, "No I'm honestly not that hungry but I promise to eat when I am."

"That's good. What time is Bhut' Mayenziwe coming back? Should I start cooking?", my sister is just so considerate hey.

I sigh, "I don't know Azi. The last conversation we had he said they were on their way to the cemetery so maybe by now they are back at Sizakele's home for food. And there's no need for you to cook, you've been doing that since you arrived. We'll order in tonight."

"Oh okay, I didn't mind but I guess that's okay. So what's going to happen with the baby situation?", she's asking about Siza's baby.

I already told my family because there was no use in me hiding it from them. It would have come out one way or another so I just ripped off the bandage on the matter. My father wasn't pleased that I would now become a stepmother to three children but he understood that this happened before Yenziwe and I got married.

"I am not sure hey but what I do know is that I don't want that baby living here with us. Does that make me an awful person Azi?", I start tearing up once again.

"No you're not sisi. You're the most loving person I know and everyone has their breaking point, I believe this is yours. You do so much for others you always forget to cater for yourself. And yes this is a normal reaction for someone in your position but you have to remember that the baby is innocent in all of this.", she brushes my hands.

I chuckle through the tears, "When did you get so wise huh? I want my little sister back."

She laughs, "Your little sister is right here and I guess it's all part of growing up. I have depended on you for almost my entire life and I believe now is a good time for me to be here for you."

"Well thank you sweetie.", we share a hug.

"You're welcome. Let me go check on Londiwe, I'm sure she's losing her mind over the homework she's doing.", she stands up from the couch.

"Londiwe is always complaining so I'm not surprised.", I laugh.

"We both don't like school but are forced to go regardless of our feelings. So I understand how she feels.", she shrugs.

"Don't you dare give my child silly advice Azi, you both need to go to school. Whether you like it or not.", I point at her in an accusing manner.

"Yeah yeah whatever mummy. I'm out.", she bolts out of the living room laughing her ass off.

I shake my head and chuckle at what she just said. I've come to accept Ndu and Londi as my own, I mean how could I not seeing that we live under the same roof. Plus they are such good kids, regardless of Londi's mood swings which are

expected from teenagers. I can only pray that there are not many changes in the future.

Now that I'm alone I get to finally take in what my sister said. It's not the baby's fault that it was born and mine wasn't, but how do I tell that to my heart.

MAYENZIWE

We just came back from Westpark Cemetery and I must admit that it was a sad sendoff. Everyone that spoke at the funeral mentioned how unexpected all this was and I mean, I agree as well. It was packed, expensive cars and many friends and associates of Siza's were present. I didn't think she was this well-known but the number of people present proved me wrong.

Her best friend spoke of how excited Siza was when she found out she was expecting a baby, no less a baby girl. Apparently she had prepared her nursery and everything, all that was left was for her to see the baby. Unfortunately that didn't happen and today she was laid to rest without ever setting her eyes on her one and only child. It was a sad moment indeed and I also found myself shedding a tear or two as she read her eulogy.

After all the tears we shed and sending her off, we are finally back at her home in Fourways. Her mother's house to be exact.

It's a beautiful mansion and there is so much order at this funeral. Sandwiches and tea or juice are being served, no cooked meals are being served. Like I said

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it's different from what I'm used to but it is still a beautiful way to end the service.

"Mayenziwe, Mam' Cebekhulu would like to see you.", Siza's best friend says.

"Oh okay, you can lead the way. Ntwana, I'll be right back.", I say to Thamente who accompanied me today.

"Sure.", he nods.

I follow the lady and she leads me to the living room where Siza's mother is seated. She is surrounded by a few family members so I'm sure what she has to say is important. And I'm pretty sure it's about the baby. The friend who came to fetch me informs her of my presence and she leaves thereafter. Mam'Cebekhulu stands up from her seat and asks me to follow her. I do that without asking any questions.

We end up in front of a door and now I'm curious as to why we had to move away from the people, "Ma, if I may ask, what is this about?"

"You'll see.", she offers me a smile and opens the door.

She opens the door and walks in first, and I follow suit. I'm immediately blinded by the amount of pink in the room, it's the baby's nursery. We walk in further and only then do I hear the gurgling sounds coming from the cot. I immediately feel my heart beat faster, I'm about to hold my baby in my arms for the first time. It's an exciting yet scary feeling and one would think I'm used to it by now since I have two other children. But I'm not because it's a different experience for every baby.

Mam'Cebekhulu reaches inside the cot and lifts the baby up, "Her name is Busisiwe."

I stare at her as she makes her way to me with the baby, "Oh, okay."

It's disappointing how those are the only words to leave my mouth right now but I sure can't take them back now.

"I'd tell you to hold her gently but I'm informed that you already have children of your own so this won't be difficult.", she chuckles as she hands the baby over to me.

"Uhm...thank you Ma.", I say as I stare at my baby's face.

I didn't even ask what her name was when I asked for samples so I could do a DNA test. This is the first time I'm holding her in my arms and a part of me feels guilty. When I got the pictures of her, Vee told me she looks like Londiwe but I didn't see it. Or

maybe I just didn't want to but now that she's so close-up, I can tell that she's a replica of my first born.

"She's beautiful isn't she?", Mam'Cebekhulu's voice pulls me out of my thoughts.

"She is...and she looks so much like my other daughter.", I chuckle as I play with her tiny hands.

The older woman chuckles, "I've been wondering why she looks nothing like my daughter.", she then sighs as a sad smile replaces her smile, "I wish she were here to see how beautiful her Busisiwe is."

I look at her, "I'm really sorry for your loss Ma and I'm sorry I've been such a jerk about it. I wasn't there when Busisiwe was born and even after that. There's nothing I can do to fix what I've done but I can only ask for your forgiveness."

She nods, "If you came to me two weeks ago when Siza was still alive, I'd probably tell you where to get off but now I've made peace with everything. My daughter had already informed me that you wanted to be sure of the baby's paternity and that I shouldn't give you hell about it. So I promised her I wouldn't and I intend to keep that promise."

"Thank you so much Ma. I promise to do better.", I say offering her my smile.

"You can do that by treating my daughter right. I know you still have to bond with her but please, don't let anything bad happen to her.", she pleads.

"I won't Ma. She's my child and I already love her, I will protect her with my entire being.", I say.

"That's good. I also understand that you are married...how will your wife feel about her? Will she accept Busisiwe?", she asks timidly.

"She already knows about her and she is accepting of my children. None of them are hers but she loves them nonetheless. Busisiwe will be no different.", I say proudly.

I really hope that's the case because I won't have any other options.

"I'm glad to hear that because I was hoping you could take her with you today. The family and I are travelling to KZN and I don't want to keep her away from you. I'll be gone for a month or so.", she smiles sadly.

"Oh okay, of course Ma. I will take her with me.", I say.

"Thank you son. I'll prepare some of her things for you, but she's not a problematic baby from what I've seen. I doubt you'll experience any troubles with her.", she starts collecting some of Busi's stuff.

"Ma, did Siza give her this name?", I ask out of curiosity.

She giggles, "Yes she did. She had planned on naming her that from the moment she found out it was a girl."

"It's a beautiful name.", I add before going back to focusing on the baby in my arms.

My fear is Veronica's reaction to me coming home with a baby. I left for a funeral but now I'll have a prized possession with me when I return. The loss of our baby is still fresh so I have no idea how she'll take this. I can only hope for the best but expect the worst.

NARRATED

Mayenziwe has always been a smart man but sometimes he lacked common knowledge. For instance, he didn't inform Veronica, his wife, that he'd be bringing a baby back to the house with him. The first thing a person would do when faced with such a huge change, you would think that their spouses would be the first to know. But not Mayenziwe.

He just got back home from the funeral, and unlike when he left alone this morning, this time he brought another human being along with him. The little human being is sound asleep as the father carries her inside the house in her car seat. Sizakele had really prepared for this baby, every essential item has been bought and Mayenziwe was forced to come back with those items.

It's a struggle opening the door with the baby's car seat in his other hand and the other carrying the bag of important items. He manages to get the door open and walks in, closing the door behind him. There's noise coming from the living room and he's anxious of what his family will have to say about this entire situation. A part of him hopes that all goes well but hoping won't do him any good right now.

"Baba!", Ndumiso beams in joy as he sees his father walking in but a frown soon replaces the smile as his eyes land on the baby.

Azi, Londi and Veronica weren't facing the direction of the doorway so when they turn to look, they are surprised by what they see. Their game of 30 seconds is long abandoned as Azi and Londi get up from the couch to help Mayenziwe with the baby. The girls are soon gushing over how adorable Busisiwe is and have even forgotten about the other people in the room.

"Baba what is the meaning of this?", Ndumiso asks his father like the young man he now is...or at least, the young man he thinks he is.

"Ndumiso what kind of question is that? I told you that you are going to be a big brother and this is your sister, Busisiwe."

"Wow that's her name? It suits her Baba.", Londi continues gushing over the baby.

A scowl sits on Ndu's face and his nose is pinched, "I told you I didn't want another sister, Londi is just fine. Why don't you listen baba? Do you want Aunt Veronica to leave us like mum did?"

"Aunt Veronica is not leaving my boy, I don't know why you'd think that. But I promise you, she won't leave because she already knows about the baby.", her brushes his shoulder.

He huffs, "I'll be in my room."

And just like that, Ndu has left and awkward silence lingers in the living room between the couple. The girls are oblivious to the tension in the room because their focus is on the little girl in pink. Mayenziwe fails to look Veronica in the eyes as his eyes sweep across the room. He is nervous about her reaction, and seeing that she's just quiet right now adds on to his anxiety.

"Bhut' Mayenziwe can we take her with to Londi's room? I promise we won't hurt or disturb her from her sleep.", Azi asks after taking notice of the mood in the room.

Mayenziwe looks at her and smiles, "Yes of course you can. Please call me when she wakes up so I can feed her or change her diaper."

"Cool! She looks a lot like me, don't you think baba?", Londi asks the obvious.

Mayenziwe chuckles nervously glancing at Veronica, "She does look a lot like you, a mini version of you perhaps."

Londi nods happily, "Yes she is a mini version of me. I can't wait for her to grow up so I can dress her up in cute outfits."

"Uhm Londi, let's go.", Azi jumps in to save the day.

The two girls leave with Azi carrying the car seat baby Busi is in. Once they are out of sight, Mayenziwe turns his attention to his

wife who has been quiet since he walked in. She's still packing up the things they were using for the games they were playing. He walks towards her slowly as if calculating his steps.

"Baby, I'm sorry I wanted to call and tell you about the change of plans. Busisiwe's grandmother is going to KZN so I have to look after her. ", he says feeling like shit.

"Okay.", she says as she packs the last of the games and heads up to the bedroom.

Mayenziwe is left confused by her reaction to this information. He thought she'd get mad him and throw stuff around but this reaction was definitely unexpected. Having a person express their anger or disppontment towards you is better than silent treatment or no reaction at all. This has him feeling like crap so he walks up the stairs to their bedroom and he finds her changing into loose fitting clothes.

"Baby can we talk please.", he pleads as she focuses on what she's doing.

"About what?", she asks as she puts on a pair of socks.

He sighs and walks towards the bed to sit next to her

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"About the baby. I know I didn't tell you about me bringing her here but it was kind of a last minute thing so I thought maybe it would be better if I told you in person."

"You're lying.", she says calmly.

"I swear baby I'm-

"I mean you're lying about you thinking. I doubt you ever think before doing something Mayenziwe. That big head of yours is just there for decoration, there's nothing inside. It's empty.", she spits as she crawls inside the bed.

A frown quickly settles on his face, "I'm not sure I get what you mean babe."

"Yini lena longayivisisi ngobe loko lengikushoko kumelula. Ngitsi awunayo ingcondvo. (What is it that you're not getting because what I'm saying is straightforward. I'm saying you don't have brain man.)", she gives him a quick nasty look before focusing on her cellphone.

He grinds his teeth, "Baby I know you're mad at me but there's no need for us to be disrespectful towards each other. We can talk about this in a civilised manner."

A laugh of disbelief leaves Veronica's mouth, "You are kidding me right?"

"No I'm not babe... I really think we should talk about this calmly since the kids and your sister are around.", he gives her pleading eyes.

"I will not do that Mayenziwe, you wanted me to talk and now that I'm doing it you don't approve because it's not how you wanted the conversation to go? You wanted me to talk right? Fine I'm talking now but don't shut me up because you don't want to hear your flaws as a husband.", she clicks her tongue before focusing back on her phone.

Mayenziwe sighs and shakes his head. He didn't imagine things taking such a drastic turn. Yes he wanted her to express how she feels but he didn't think she'd turn it into such a huge deal. She already knows about the baby so why is she acting as if he cheated on her with someone else. He hopes that she may have calmed down by now.

"Veronica I'm sorry I didn't tell you I'm bringing the baby over, I promise to do better in the future.", he says in hopes of ending whatever this is.

"Ngiyaciniseka kutsi kunembhalo lomkhulu lobhalwe kutsi "Silima" ebuntini lami. (I'm sure there's a big sign on my forehead written Fool.) I mean why else would you treat me like trash. There's no running away from this conversation Mayenziwe, I'm going to tell you how I feel, whether you listen or not, it's up to you.", she speaks softly.

"Babe I-", he tries to speak but he's cut off before he can finish his sentence.

"Let me speak! You have taken advantage of my kindness for far too long Mayenziwe, and not only that, but my love as well. How many times should we go through this for me to finally understand that you don't care about me? I know this because if you did, I wouldn't be in this position right now explaining myself to you. I lost a baby, almost a week ago and already wena you're bringing babies into this house? How do you expect me to feel in this situation?", she wipes her tears.

Mayenziwe has no idea what to say to his wife at this moment. Yes she has all the right to feel this way because he didn't do anything right. Veronica's heart breaks as all this brings back a sense of déjà vu. She's been in such a situation before and her heart cannot take all this lying down. She needs to speak up before her heart bursts.

"I'm sorry my love.", he sighs.

"I'm sorry is not going to cut it this time around Mayenziwe. Do you have no regard for my feelings Mayenziwe? I'm really tired of this back and forth between us. Just because I choose to keep quiet doesn't mean I'm a fool. Angati kutsi kungobe umdzala kunami yini nobe kungobe unemali lenyenti kunami, lokwenta ucabange kutsi unelilungelo lekungiphatsa ngalendlela. (I don't know if it's because you are older than me

or because you are more monied than I am, that makes you think you have the right to treat me this way.)", she sniffs and wipes her tears.

"That's not even the case babe, I'm so sorry. I know this was wrong but please, forgive me.", he tries holding her hands but she pulls them away from him.

"Like I said, an apology just won't cut it this time around. Actions speak louder than words. Hopefully you have hired a nanny to take care of your child because I'm not going to take care of her for you.", she says.

"But Veronica I thought that maybe we could help each other out when it comes to her. Maybe take turns in caring for her.", he says worriedly.

"Hehehe you thought wrong shame. Are you even listening to yourself? Anginaye umntfwana wami Mayenziwe, ngako-ke ngicela ungangivivinyi. Ngikuphetse kahle, ngiko nje ucabanga kutsi ngitawugcwala ngemagcubu nawusho njalo. Angeke ngikwente loko. (I don't have a child of my own Mayenziwe so please don't test me. I've been to kind on you that's why you think I'll jump when you say so. Well I won't be doing any of that.)", she gets inside the covers and covers her entire head.

"Veronica why are you doing this? This is not like you.", he says shocked by her behaviour.

"Nyalo sengiyabona kutsi awungati kahle. (Now I realize that you don't know me very well.) Please close the door on your way out. I'm trying to rest since I'll be going back to work soon.", she says.

Mayenziwe sits on the bed for a few more minutes still digesting what his loving Veronica had just done. Never in a million years did he see this coming, he's still trying to make sense of her behaviour towards him. After asking himself questions that he can't find any answers to, he gets up and walks out of the room with a tail between his legs.

What confuses him the most is that she said all that with a soft voice. He's sure not even the kids heard her. Only confusion and disbelief flood his mind as he heads to Londi's room to fetch his daughter.

THALENTE

"Do you have everything you need?", I ask Isisa as she cooks away in the kitchen.

"Uhm... I think so but can you please buy two more packets of mushrooms so I can add it to the salad.", she says wiping her hands with a dishcloth.

"Okay no problem. I'll buy at least four bottles of wine so that you don't run out.", I say.

"Travel safe Baby Cakes.", she chuckles as she wraps her arms around my neck.

She knows I hate the name but I guess it amuses her that I do.

"I told you not to use that name anymore, imagine what my friends would say should they ever hear it.", I sigh.

"Well then I believe your friends should mind their own business. Can I get a kiss now Mr Ndlanzi?", her eyes linger on my lips.

I don't say anything but pull her into a deep kiss. She responds by kissing me and her tongue ventures forth a little, tentatively exploring my mouth. We slowly pull apart from each other and I feel her warm breath on my face as she exhales gently, and

the very taste of her breath has me wanting to strip her off every piece of clothing.

"You're making me wet Thelente.", she whispers.

"That was the aim.", I place a chaste kiss her on the lips.

"I need you right now Baby Cakes.", she says against my lips as her breathing quickens.

"You've developed an insatiable appetite for sex haven't you? Okay let's make this quick because our guests are probably on their way by now.", I say.

She nods innocently, "Let's go to your room so we can have more space."

We walk to my room after she's turned off the stove, and close the door behind us. She walks backwards towards the bed and she slowly peels off the dress.

"Don't! I'll do it.", I say as I walk towards her.

Very gently, I peel off the dress away from her shoulders, and slip it down at the front exposing her red lace lingerie. She knows just how crazy this red colour drives me crazy and I am sure she wore it to drive me insane. Once she's out of her clothes, I gently help her lay on the bed and undress myself. From thereon, I start paying attention to her nipples. I gently

stroke her nipple, in response she closes her eyes and takes a sharp breath. We share a deep and long kiss.

"That's so good baby...", she whispers.

"I'm sorry baby but I won't be able to pay much attention to these babies. People will soon start pouring in, we need to be quick.", I sigh.

"Say no more love. Fuck me!", she breathes heavily.

I get settled between her legs and we share a brief kiss before I pull away. I look into her eyes as I enter her. I feel shivers run down my spine as the sensitive head of my cock make its way inside her warm, wet opening of her pussy. Isisa tilts and lifts her pelvis, eager to help me in fully entering her, and just like that, our bodies were united.

I begin to stroke gently inside her sweet, and snug pussy. With each thrust, she lifts and tilts her pelvis to meet me, making me go just a little more deeper. We get into a perfect rhythm, and I can feel the walls of her pussy, as they seem to mould themselves to every curve of my hard cock. We continue at our slow pace while we share a passionate kiss, one that expresses all of our emotions.

"I think I'm going to come.", Isisa says panting as we thrust at each other.

"Let it go baby... don't hold back.", I say as I pick up the pace.

She wraps her arms around my back, and her legs around my pelvis. Through laboured breaths, she manages to kiss me once more.

She breaks the kiss and starts crying out, "I'm coming Thalente! I can feel-"

Her arms tighten around my shoulders as she continues to meet my thrusts. A few seconds later, she has her head tilted back on the pillow with her eyes closed.

She makes a long throaty gasp and says, "Ohh Thalente, that's good! Oh yeah... that's so good."

I feel my own orgasm build up and I'm certain that I'm not far from coming as well. Seeing Isisa in her throes of passion as her pussy worked my cock to perfection, and then hearing her call out my name like that, I have to give in. I feel my orgasm burst through me and I felt myself squirting every last drop of my seed into this beautiful woman.

I keep thrusting as her pussy seems to be milking my orgasm from me, and she finishes with a few shuddering breaths. She then opens her eyes and I kiss her softly as the twinges of our climax slowly fade away. After gathering ourselves, I take a quick bath so I can rush to the mall before our guests start arriving. Isisa follows to take a bath as well, and I take that opportunity to go to the mall to purchase a few more items.

Every time Isisa and I are intimate, I go crazy. She's everything I want and more in the bedroom and I guess being connected emotionally makes sex an even greater experience. I never thought I'd feel this way again, after Zanele my hope at finding love was gone. But now that I'm in love with Isisa, I can confirm that what I feel for her is nothing like I've ever felt before. Not even for Zanele who was the mother of my child.

At this point in my relationship with Isisa, I think I can confidently say that I will kill for her. If anyone were to harm her in any way, I would make sure I make them pay for hurting her. That is just how I feel and hopefully, it will never get to that point. Right now I'm on my way to get a few things for this lunch. My daughter is coming over as well so I need to make sure there are snacks for the kids.

I told Mayenziwe to bring his kids along so that we can have a beautiful family day with friends as well as our lovely partners. When I get to the mall, it's not packed so I'm able to shop for these few things and also stop at the liquor store. Mangaliso and Zakhele will be joining us as well and I know just how much they love alcohol. Once I'm done, I head back to the car and load everything inside before driving off.

On my way home, I can't help but think about the suggestion Isisa made about us moving in together. I asked her to give me

some time to think about it because it just didn't feel right moving into her place. But then again

I understood her point of view when she said she didn't feel comfortable with us living in my family home. That's why I've decided we should rent an apartment together.

I know she's used to being in the suburbs so I suggested an area where it's safe and affordable. Luckily she agreed and that's why we decided to even have this lunch. We're having it at my family home, in Soweto, so that we can tell our closest friends about this but also, welcome baby Busisiwe into the world. The least we can do is throw this lunch in her honour just so the couple can know that we are here to help them.

When I got back to the house, the friends and family had already arrived. Tyler, Isisa's brother, and his wife are already here with their children. I'm happy to see that they are comfortable even though they are in Soweto. Zakhele helps me unload all the items and I thank him once we're done. All the adults are seated outside as the beautiful music plays in the background softly.

"Hey man! A word?", Mayenziwe says as he gestures out of the gate.

"Sure!", I say and follow him as we make our way out of the yard.

He sighs deeply and I can already tell that there's trouble in paradise, "Ey kushubile mfana. (Things aren't going well man.)"

"Eh...z'khiphani? (Uh... what's happening?)", I ask as I take a swig of my beer.

"iVrou ayikho happy ngami ndoda. Ndaba ze ncosi ntwana. (The wife is not happy with me man. It's the baby matter dude.)", he shakes his head.

"That doesn't seem to cut it. How did this happen because Veronica seems like a nice and understanding woman to me?"

"She is man, I'm the one who keeps on fucking things up. I don't get why I keep ruining things like this. She said I do things without thinking, and she's probably right.", he shakes his head.

"Yini ngathi lento iyazi phinda? (Why does it seem like this thing is repeating itself?)", I say.

He looks at me and frowns, "What thing manje?"

I shake my head and sigh, "Rosette treated you like this and now, you are treating this poor woman the same way your ex did you. This is not right ntwana and soon you'll be crying saying she wants to divorce you. Should that happen, none of us will help you because you would have done everything to deserve it."

"When you put it like that man, you are scaring me.", he finishes his bottle of beer.

"I wasn't trying to but I was stating facts. Khula ndoda ngoba uzozithola sowungena meddie. (Grow up man because you'll end up alone with no wife.)", I say and leave him.

I have a hot girlfriend to get back to. I can't be nursing a grown man's feelings when he is going out of his way to destroy his marriage. He needs to understand how things work and that now that he's married, he needs to consult his wife before making major decisions.

ISISA

Lunch with our favourite people was nice, the kids being around added a nice touch to the vibe. Now that lunch is over, we are all having drinks. Veronica is helping me out with the dishes and I'm almost done wiping them. She has been downing glasses of wine as if it were water and I can tell that she's slightly drunk now. I'm starting to worry about her.

"Is everything okay sweetie?", I ask as I finish with the last dish.

She offers me a forced smile, "Everything is okay Isisa. I'm happy for you and Thalente by the way. Congratulations."

I grin, "Thank you. You've been having a lot of these glasses now, maybe you shouldn't be drinking this much."

"I need this alcohol Isisa...you have no idea what I'm going through. This helps.", she says dragging her words.

"I'm sorry my love, let me help you get some rest for a bit. I'm sure you'll feel better when you wake up. Come let's go.", I help her balance herself as I walk her to the room the baby is sleeping in.

Veronica cracks into laughter, "I'm not drunk you know..."

"I know.", is all I say as we enter the room and I help her in bed.

"You know...I don't want this baby here. A part of me wishes she could die as well just like my baby who didn't survive.", she starts crying as her eyes land on Busisiwe who's sound asleep.

"Don't say that Vee. Can you please just nap now, I'll come in to check in on you later on. Get some rest for now.", I say as I cover her with a throw and close the door behind me.

I'm not going to tell anyone about what Veronica just said, it's none of my business. And most importantly, she was under the influence of alcohol when she said it, not to mention hurt. I know she didn't mean any of it because I know that she's a kind person. Grief can change a person but I can only hope it doesn't change her too badly.

"Isisa ngwana, z'thini? (Isisa baby girl, how are you?)", Zakhele says jolting me out of my thoughts.

I don't like this guy. For some reason, he has this dark aura surrounding him.

"Yes Zakhele, how can I help you? Is Thalente not outside?", I ask as I try to move past him in the passage but he blocks my way.

"uNtwana is outside. I wanted to catch you alone vele.", he licks his lips.

"Catch me alone? What are you talking about? And do you mind please, I'm trying to get outside right now.", I huff.

"Oh so you're playing hard to get ne? Come on ngwana, I've seen the looks you throw my way. I can tell you want, and don't worry because I want you too baby girl.", he moves closer to me until I'm backed up to the wall.

"Get away from me Zakhele before I start screaming.", I say in a shaky tone as my usual loud voice seems to have abandoned me.

"You wouldn't do that.", he smirks as he wraps his big hand around my throat cutting off my air supply.

"Za...let go...of...", I can barely get the words out of my mouth as he presses on my windpipe harder.

I feel his tongue on the side of my face, "I want you ngwana."

Words are stuck in my throat as I start seeing 'stars' and everything becomes blurry and dark. I don't know what happens next but I feel myself drop to the ground as Zakhele lets go of me. I can hear Thamente shouting and what sounds like fighting taking place in the room. People start shouting and I can hear the kids crying but I can't seem to force my eyes open.

Regardless of all the chaos taking place around me, I feel myself drifting away.

VERONICA

My head is banging and I'm trying my best not to groan as I sit up on the bed. I could have sworn I just went to sleep a few minutes ago but already there's noise that's keeping me from doing that. There's shouting and begging that Tholente should stop what he's doing or else he'll get arrested. I have no idea what's going on but I am definitely going to find out.

I put on my shoes and straighten out my dress as I get up off the bed. I take a quick glance to check if the baby is up yet but she's still sound asleep. Busisiwe is such a cute little thing and if it were any other day, I'd pick her up and play with her chubby cheeks. I have to work on myself first before doing that.

The noise is still very much audible so I make my way out of the room. The shouting is coming from the lounge so I make my way there. As I walk further down the passage, I see keys, buttons and a bunch of other stuff laying on the floor. Now I have to know what was happening.

"Will she be okay?", I hear Maddie, Isisa's sister-in-law, ask.

Who? I have no idea but the minute I walk into the lounge I learn who she was referring to when she was asking about wellness. Isisa is laid on the couch and I can tell she's unconscious. I rush to where they are all standing.

"What's going on here? Why is Isisa unconscious?", I ask.

I still have a banging headache and I'm sure everyone can tell that I'm drunk. Since everyone seems to be caught up in their emotions, Maddie starts narrating to me what happened. Well from her point of view that is. Tyler is still trying to wake Isisa up and hopefully it will work.

"Maybe we should take her to the hospital guys.", Maddie says.

"She's still breathing so I think if we sprinkle her with a little water, she'll wake up.", I say.

They all turn to look at me as if I'm crazy but I shrug and Maddie heads to the kitchen. I hear the tap running and soon enough, she comes back with a glass of water in her hands. Tyler takes it from her and they sprinkle her face with it and she starts coughing a little.

"See? I told you it would work.", I giggle and burp, "Sorry!"

"Baby are you okay?", Mayenziwe asks standing beside me.

"I'm fine...where is Thalente?", I wave him off.

He sighs, "Outside. He's still cooling off and we sent Zakhele away."

"Good, otherwise I would have given him a reason to not be here. How dare he assault a woman? His friend's woman for that matter!?! I am hoping you are planning on getting him

arrested.", the words are slurry but I click my tongue to get my point across.

Mayenziwe grins, "Yes, we are just waiting for Isisa to be okay then she'll open a case against him."

We wait for Isisa to fully regain consciousness and once she is wide awake, Maddie helps her get something to drink. It's obvious she's still pretty shaken and it's unfortunate that there's nothing we can do right now to help her get over what just happened. I'm sure it's going to take some time to get over it and not to mention therapy, and hopefully she'll get better.

The vibe we had going on earlier is done, for obvious reasons so people start making plans to leave. Not long after, Thamente walks in with Mangaliso not far behind. I don't understand why Mangaliso is still here because he is closer to Zakhele but I guess it's none of my business. Anger is visible on Thamente's face but when he sets his eyes on his woman, they turn softer and the anger is replaced by pity.

"My love, how are you feeling?", he kneels in front of her taking her hands in his.

Isisa shakes her head slightly as tears pool in her eyes, "I'm... I'm not..."

I can tell it's hard for her to even get the words out of her mouth. It's such a shame that she almost got raped even with

so many people around. In a way, I feel as if we all failed her. But then again, none of us thought that something like this would happen.

"Hey relax, I'm here for you now. I'm so sorry I failed you my love...so sorry. ", Thalente huffs and pulls her into a hug.

"Uhm guys, I think we should give the couple space and do what we were already planning on doing.", Tyler says.

Mayenziwe clears his throat, "Yeah I think we should leave people. Isisa, I'm so sorry that this happened to you."

She nods and everyone else starts doing the exact same thing, and I hug her telling her that I'll organise lunch for us soon. Mangaliso's girlfriend was with the kids helping them calm down so we waited for her to bring them out. Ndu and Londi rush to hug me and I can't help but feel a little teary. These kids have made my experience as a stepmother so smooth and enjoyable.

This little act has me reevaluating everything I've been doing for the past few weeks. From how I've been dealing with my loss to how I've been treating poor baby Busisiwe. She doesn't deserve the treatment I've been giving her even though I wasn't really doing anything to her. I ignored her every chance I got, and maybe that's what's wrong. She is just a baby, an innocent baby.

She also lost a mother and didn't even get a chance to see her and she never will. Never will she ever have a single memory of her mother. That has to be the saddest thing ever and I don't think she deserves an evil stepmother to add to that. I hate myself for even wishing she could die.

The kids head to the car and now the adults are left wishing each other safe travels on the road. Even though this gathering ended horribly, it did start off really nice and hopefully we can do something like this again.

"Uhm guys...I think there's something wrong with the baby.", Constance, Mangaliso's girlfriend says with the baby in her arms.

"What do you mean by that?", Mayenziwe asks already marching towards her.

I don't know why but I just hate this girl's name. I mean sure she's a really nice girl to be around but her name isn't the nicest thing to keep calling out. I try not to use it a lot but rather call her 'Girl' or 'Babe' just so I don't have to use the name.

"She's not breathing.", I'm sure I didn't hear her correctly or maybe I'm still drunk?

"Excuse me, what did you just girl?", like I said, her name doesn't stick.

She looks at me with wide and worried eyes

Advertisement

"The baby isn't breathing. When I got into the room, I thought she was just asleep but something just didn't feel right. So I checked on her properly and-"

"We're taking her to the hospital now!", Mayenziwe half-yells as he cuts Constance off.

The baby isn't crying from fear but instead she's still like water. Constance can't be right because then I would lose my mind. Suddenly I feel all the alcohol drain out of my system and tears fall down my face. I look around the room and everyone is panicking like shit. Even the couple that was still trying to sort themselves, are up and going around the room like crazy people.

I can see Maddie take the baby and starts performing CPR on little Busi. My feet aren't moving and I'm just standing in place. I want to panic like everybody else and run around the room but my feet won't let me. Tears keep falling and staining my face. I refuse to believe that any of this is happening.

"Hey baby, we need to go. Now!", Mayenziwe shakes me out of my state of shock.

"Okay.", is all I say as he pulls me out of the house.

Maddie is behind us, with the baby in her arms and she's still busy with the mouth-to-mouth and chest compressions. Tyler is

with her and the four of us get into one car. Mayenziwe is behind the wheel and is driving like a madman, not that I blame him. Isisa and Thalete are following behind in their car. With Mayenziwe's extreme driving skills and Busi unresponsive, I can't help but turn to God. An internal prayer will do me some good.

"Dear God, it's me Veronica. I know I haven't been talking to you for some time now but I really need you in this moment of my life. A little girl's life is at stake here and I need all the help I can get. I've strayed from you God but I know that you always listen to those in need. I am your child Father and I am here today seeking your assistance. This baby is innocent.

Yes I haven't been good to her but I want to change all that. She deserves to live and I know my thoughts over the past week have confused you but all I ask now is for you to bring her back to us. I promise to treat her right and love her as if she were my own. Hear me O Lord as I come before you and ask for your help. Please. Amen.", I sigh as I open my eyes.

I look over at Mayenziwe and I can see the lines of worry on his forehead. His grip on the steering wheel is tighter than my jeans. I reach out to him and brush his arm. He briefly looks at me and I offer him a smile.

"She's going to be okay.", I say softly.

"You don't know that.", he lets out a shaky breath.

"But I believe in God and he won't fail us. Just believe!", I squeeze his arm.

He nods and faces forward. I'm choosing to believe the words that are coming out of my mouth. God will not fail us!

THALENTE

We are waiting for the doctor to get back to us with news on the baby but we've been waiting for quite a while now. Since we are already at the hospital, we decided it would be best if Isisa gets checked out by a doctor. She swears she feels okay but we don't know if that bastard did any damage to her throat. I'd rather be safe than sorry. The doctor who is examining her looks young but I guess he knows his job because they said he was the best.

"Well Ms Jackson, you are good to go. I've written down a list of medicine that will help you with the discomfort you feel in your throat. If you stick to the prescription, I assure you, you will feel like your normal self in no time.", he smiles at her.

The smile is a little too big for my liking but Isisa already asked me not to embarrass her in front of him so I'll keep this to myself. He gives us the note of the medicine and once he's done, we walk out and head to the pharmacy to buy it for her.

She has a medical aid so everything was sorted. We walk slowly as we make our way back to the group.

"How are you feeling now?", I ask.

She shrugs, "Okay I guess. I'm still a bit traumatised but I'm sure I'll get through it."

I sigh and shake my head, "You need to see a therapist. I'm sure that will help."

She chuckles, "I don't think there's a need for that. I've been through worse than this."

"What? You mean you've been assaulted before?", I ask as this is new to me.

She nods slightly and huffs, "We'll talk about it some other time but it's because of my biological father. He was pretty abusive."

"Oh okay, but we have to talk about it later on.", I say feeling my heart break for her.

"Of course. Now the only worry is Busisiwe.", she sighs.

"Yeah, let's hope all is well.", I say as we get back to the group and sit with them.

NARRATED

The question is burning her chest and if she doesn't ask now, she'll explode. So Isisa makes her way to Veronica and asks to speak to her. She doesn't tell Veronica the reason why she pulled her aside until they get a bit further away from everyone else. Nobody has to find out about this conversation.

"Did you do it?", Isisa asks jumping straight to the point.

Veronica is confused by her question, "Do what? What are you talking about Isisa?"

"Come on Veronica, don't act like you don't know what I'm talking about. That thing you said at the house when I was helping you take a nap. Did you do this so you can see IT through?", Isisa speaks through gritted teeth.

Now Veronica is completely puzzled by the question. The last thing she remembers about before going to take a nap was when they were in the kitchen washing dishes. Anything that happened after that is a blur to her. She tries to rack her brain to think of what the other woman is speaking of but nothing comes up.

She sighs, "I seriously have no idea Isisa. What did I say?"

Isisa doesn't want to say this out loud but she has no choice so she walks closer to her and whispers, "You said you wish she could die."

Veronica's body turns cold as she realises that she told someone about her dark thoughts. Just as she was planning on changing her ways, someone has to know about what she wished for the baby. She regrets it but not many will see it that way. As if an idea hits her, she realises what Isisa was referring to about doing "IT".

"What? I said that to you?", she asks completely horrified about all this.

Isisa nods sympathetically, "You did. And I know you didn't attempt to kill her but I just want to be sure."

"Veronica is this true?", Mayenziwe's deep voice is heard by the two ladies who are startled by it.

Anyone who knows him can tell that he is hurt beyond measure. He doesn't look like his usual self and that alone is a call for concern. The ladies are frozen in place as they watch him walk towards them.

"Is this true Veronica? Did you kill my baby?", his voice trembles with each word he says.

"Uhm baby no...I mean... I don't know.", Veronica starts crying.

"You-", Mayenziwe doesn't get to finish his statement as Tyler calls them to come back because the doctor has news.

There's tension as the three people head back to where everyone else is. When they get there, the doctor tells them that Busisiwe is going to be okay. All of them heave a sigh of relief as they learn that the baby will be discharged a few days from now.

"Baby Busisiwe experienced what we call Infant Apnea. This happens when a baby forgets to breathe and there's a pause in breathing. Premature babies experience this most of the time so it's not new. She'll be okay but we need to keep her under surveillance for a while.", the doctor says and leaves the group in a joyous mood.

Excluding the three pupils who were about to discuss what was about to be a possible murder.

NARRATED

"So Veronica tell me, how do you feel today?", the gorgeous therapist asks.

"Fine.", is all Veronica says as she shrugs.

"Just fine?", the therapist raises her eyebrows.

"Yes, or did they not explain to you what fine means at the institute you got your degree from?", she fires at her.

She offers her a gentle smile, "They did, Veronica. So tell me, how was your week?"

Veronica takes a pause and thinks back to how the week was for her. Not much happened to her except feeling like an outsider when with her husband. Things between them haven't been the same since the scare with Busisiwe. It's been over a year now since that horrible day but things at home are horrible.

"The week was okay. Nothing new happened so I guess that's good.", she shrugs.

Jane, her therapist, takes notice of how her entire demeanor changed when she said that. She's worked with many clients before but Veronica is a bit more complexed than the one's she's had before. After months and months of her attendance

here, she still hasn't opened up to her. The only thing she'd do is sit in her chair, in silence until the sessions were over.

Jane takes off her glasses and places them as well as her notebook, on the table next to her, "You know today's the last session you'll be attending. There's nothing more I can do since you haven't opened up about your reason to be here."

Veronica grins, "Yes I know and I'm happy about it."

"Oh really? And why is that?", Jane asks intrigued by her showing any emotion beside being okay.

"I'm glad that I won't be forced to come here as if there's something wrong with me when clearly, there's nothing. People will stop looking at me as if I'm some kind of psycho.", she sighs and shakes her head.

Jane quickly puts on her glasses and grabs her notebook, "How does that make you feel? When people look at you as if you're some kind of 'psycho' as you say."

Veronica sighs and stares into an empty space, "Like I am a psycho...isolated and alone. I mean...the only reason I'm even here is because they thought I could harm a baby. Imagine, a whole baby!? I would never hurt someone intentionally, no less kill a baby. The person I trusted the most is the one who even suggested I take therapy."

"Who is that person? Is that your family member?", Jane asks while taking notes.

"My husband. He was supposed to be my protector you know. My confidant, a person I turn to when I'm going through the worst but instead, he became my nightmare. We have become strangers in our own home and now I'm certain the kids can tell that things between us aren't going well."

"The kids? What are their names and how old are they?"

"Londiwe is the first born and she turned 15 earlier this year. Ndumiso is 10, almost 11. Then there's baby Busi, one year and three months old.", she smiles.

"You seem to be very fond of them. Are they all yours? I'm asking because I once heard you talking to them, and they referred to you as aunt Veronica."

"No, they aren't mine. All of them but I love them as if they were. These kids are really good and they've made me feel as if I were their mother. I'm just sad that I don't get to fully be that to Busi.", she sighs.

Jane frowns, "Why?"

"I once mentioned that I wished she could die but I swear I didn't mean it. But then she experienced what is called infant apnea where her breathing paused. Isisa, my friend, asked if maybe I had anything to do with it after I had told her about

what I wished for. Now all that was before we found out the baby had apnea. So I didn't blame her for asking me that question but I blamed my husband for actually thinking I could kill his child. Saying something and doing something are totally different things.", she sniffs.

Jane pulls out a tissue for her to wipe her tears, "Here, something to wipe your tears."

"Thank you.", Veronica accepts it and wipes her face.

"You don't have to get it all out in one day you know. This is the first time you've ever shared how you truly feel with me so it's okay to take it slow."

Veronica shakes her head rapidly, "Please no, it actually feels good talking about it to someone else. Sure I talk to Isisa but not about everything so I need this."

Jane smiles at her kindly, "Of course but I must admit that this step you just took is great and you should be proud of yourself. I'll cancel my next session so we can have one more hour then we'll continue some other time. Now tell me, do you and your husband ever talk about what happened?"

"No we don't. We talked about it once and that was when we left the hospital. I think that was the biggest fight we ever had and we both said some words to each other. I also said that I regretted getting married to him.", Veronica looks down shyly.

"Hey now Veronica, this is a safe space. There's no judgement here, just two people talking to each other. Why do you regret marrying him?", Jane asks.

"Because we barely had the chance to really get to know one another. It was his idea to get married and skip all the other steps of a relationship but I agreed because I loved him."

"You loved him? Does this mean the love you had for him isn't there anymore?"

She sighs, "I don't know...maybe. I can't tell honestly because we are just so distant from each other now and I never get to feel anything for him anymore except for missing him."

"If I may ask, if this is how things are between you two, why haven't you divorced him yet?"

"For the kids I think, this would totally break them. I don't know, I guess it's also because somewhere deep in my heart I still have feelings for him."

"I see.", Jane nods.

"You know, now I'm starting to question if I over reacted about the baby. Yes he came home with her unannounced but he had told me about her before. I had already accepted his other children so what was so different about this one."

Veronica starts telling Jane how she found out about Busi's existence and how Mayenziwe came back home with her. She doesn't forget to mention that that was the time she had just lost a baby of her own. Once she's done talking, she feels as if a load has been lifted off her shoulders.

Jane nods and relaxes back on her chair, "Wow Veronica, that was a lot. I honestly don't know how you survived for so long without talking to someone about this. I'm sure this was a lot for you." She nods and sighs, "Yes it has."

"It doesn't sound like you're the only problem here. Firstly, I suspect you suffered or are still suffering from post traumatic stress disorder. So I'll have to put you on light antidepressants and make sure you continue with your sessions. Secondly, you were never wrong to feel how you felt. It was expected of you to feel some type of way since you had just had a miscarriage. You are entitled to your emotions and your reactions. Lastly, you shouldn't allow anyone to make you feel bad for feeling, it is your right to feel. Not even your husband is entitled to that."

Veronica wipes her tears, "Thank you for that... I really needed to hear it."

Jane offers her a gentle smile, "I'm just telling you the truth Veronica. It seems to me that you always put other people's needs before yours and maybe it's time that changes. You need to put yourself first. I want to give you a task as you go home."

"Oh okay.", she says.

"Do something that you want, it can be anything. And by that I mean, don't include someone else but rather focus on yourself and what you need or want. This task is for you to show love to yourself. Do you have any idea what that is?", Jane asks.

A lot of ideas run through Veronica's mind but all of them include doing something for someone else. Now that she's put on the spot, she must admit that she never really gave it any thought. Almost her entire life, she has been dedicated to doing something for others. She used to take care of her sick mother for a long time while her father was at work.

Even when he quit to look after her mother, she was so dedicated to making sure that they were okay and never worried about herself. Her sister Azi needed a mother figure as well so she played that role to her as well. Now her mother is gone, her sister and father are all good. She takes a deep breath and looks at Jane.

"I don't know. I've never done something for myself so this will be a first.", she says.

VERONICA

I just left Jane's practice and I'm on my way home. Now I totally understand why she comes so highly recommended, she's good at what she does. I feel so much better than I've been feeling

for the past couple of months. I regret not talking to her sooner, I'd probably be all good by now but I guess it's because I was still in denial of needing help.

The antidepressants she prescribed for me are light but I can already tell they are making a difference in my body. I had two and I'm feeling a lot better. Hopefully I'll continue going to her and being honest with her. I really needed someone to offload to because this was all weighing me down. For the first time in months, I'm actually genuinely smiling and not forcing it.

The nanny is home when I get there and she's busy changing Busisiwe's diaper. I greet her before making my way to the room to freshen up. Once I'm done, I head to the kitchen to get started on the cooking. It's been a while since I've been in the kitchen and cooked anything for the family. I've decided to cook one favourite dish for each person, just so that they feel special.

"Uh ma'am, is there anything I can help with?", the nanny asks.

I turned to her, "No but thanks for asking though. Where is Busisiwe?"

"She's asleep ma'am, I already put her to bed.", she smiles.

"Well that's good and you can stop calling me ma'am. You can call me Veronica. Since you have already put her to sleep and

her father is already on his way, you can get off early. I'll take care of her should she wake up.", I say.

"I don't think that's necessary ma'am, I'll wait for Mr Bhembe to get back home.", she says hesitantly.

I can't help but frown, "Oh but why? I mean, it's not as if she's troublesome. I'll look after her, you go."

"Ma'am it's just that-

"Veronica, my name is Veronica.", I interject.

"Veronica ma'am, Mr Bhembe asked that I always keep an eye on Busisiwe. He didn't say why, but he did specify that I should be with her all the time.", she says.

Oh...now I get it. So Mayenziwe told her not to leave me alone with the child. I thought I was seeing things for the past few months but I guess this confirms it. Mayenziwe doesn't trust me with Busi yet he trusts me to take care of his other children!? Just when I thought he couldn't stoop any more lower.

I excuse the nanny and get back to cooking. It's the only way to get rid of all this anger I suddenly feel inside of me. Just when I thought I was getting somewhere, Mayenziwe took me a step back. I mean it's been over a year now, Busi has been living with us for that long and I haven't done anything to harm her. Why does he feel the need to protect her from me?

"Uh hello?", I hear Mayenziwe speak behind me.

"Hi.", is all I say as I finish off cooking.

"You're cooking.", he states the obvious.

"I am."

"That's...great?", he says seemingly not sure of what to say.

"Hmm.", I am not interested in talking to him.

"Why are you acting like this?", he asks.

I sigh and turn to him, "How exactly?"

"Like this. We can't carry on like this Veronica, at some point we will have to fix things between us."

"Actually we aren't forced to. Mayenziwe why did you inform the nanny to never leave the child with me? Do you not trust me that much?"

"I mean do you blame me? You wished her dead and mina I'm supposed to trust that you won't hurt her. I can't do that!", he says through gritted teeth.

His words cut deep and I can already feel myself slipping into a dark hole. I have no idea what has become of this man but I most certainly do not like it. The sudden pang of hurt in my heart makes me realise just how much I'm holding on to something that's not there anymore.

MAYENZIWE

"That hurts Mayenziwe.", Veronica says with her voice cracking.

I sigh and place my things on the counter, "I'm sorry babe, that wasn't my intention but I was being honest. I haven't seen you take an initiative to look after Siwe so I try to keep her out of your way. I don't want to bother you when she is my responsibility."

Honestly, I was hoping for some quiet time. Work was tiring and I could use a hot shower right now. But instead, I've hurt my wife with my words once again

"Don't say that. I've tried to hold her, countless times but you never give me the chance. Now I know it's because you think I would hurt your daughter whereas your other kids are safe from my craziness right.", she's hurt by this, it's not rocket science but then again I don't know how to say this without looking like a dick.

I walk towards and reach out for her hands but she pulls away, "I'm sorry this is happening, Veronica. I'm sorry that we're even in this position to begin with because of my doings. I'm an asshole I know but I have tried reaching out to you and you've pulled away every chance you got. I'm also a human Vee, of course I get tired and it's unfortunate that I got tired of trying

to make amendments between us. How long will I have to beg you for you to realise that I didn't intentionally go out of my way to hurt you? I love you."

"Yes, make this about you Mayenziwe because it's always about you.", she turns back to her pots.

"About me? You're kidding me right!?", I move to stand where I'm visible for her to see.

"I'm not kidding. You are a selfish man Mayenziwe. I take care of your kids even though I have work to do myself. I'm running my own business but you don't seem to care about any of that now do you!? You only care about yourself.", she clicks her tongue.

"That is not true Veronica and you know it. I support you the best way I know how, even when I have to do it in the distance. You think it's easy being in such a situation? Everything happening in our household is my fault, our marriage is on thin ice because of me. My kids are mad at me for not being in great terms with you and I don't blame them. I go to work everyday but I don't enjoy coming back home because of the tension I created. It's all my fault but just because I'm a man, it doesn't mean I don't deserve to ever show my emotions.", I say.

She starts crying, "You did this to us. Not your friend, not your mom, not your sister. You! So excuse me for pointing it out to you."

"I know and I'm reminded of it every single day. I am only one man Vee and I can only do so much. I'm always reminded of the bad things I've done, nothing I ever do is good enough for you.", I sigh.

"That's great... that's just great! You are the one who's exhausted. Just... go and freshen up before the kids make it down.", she shakes her head and sighs.

I don't say a word as I gather my things and make my way upstairs. The shower is refreshing and I wish I could spend more time here but I have kids to catch up with. I wear my comfortable sweatpants and a t-shirt before heading downstairs. The table is set and everything looks scrumptious. Akeelah has Busi in her arms and my frown immediately turns into a smile.

My baby girl has grown so much and it hurts that Ndu isn't bonding with her as much I thought he would. He blames her for the way things have been in the house, saying that if it weren't for her, we would all still be a happy family. It hurts that my family isn't how I want it to be, I want Ndu to love his baby sister like he loves Londiwe and hopefully his feelings towards her will change as time goes by.

"Sanibonani. (Hello guys.)", I say as I walk towards Akeelah to take the baby.

"Good evening baba.", Londiwe replies.

"Sawubona. (Hello.)", is what Ndu says focused on the TV.

"Evening Mr Bhembe.", Akeelah says as I take Busi from her.

"Akeelah, I have already organised a driver that will take you home. Thank you so much for staying over until this time but it won't be necessary anymore. If my wife is free to look after Busi and she wants to, you will do as she says. Is that clear?", this is the only way I can try to rectify my wrongs at this moment.

She nods, "Yes of course sir. I will take my leave now."

"Travel safe. The driver is already waiting for you outside.", I say.

"Thank you.", she bids us all farewell and leaves.

Veronica yells that dinner is ready and we all sit around the dining table. I place Busi inside her rocking chair and we are instructed to close our eyes as Vee says a short prayer blessing our food before digging in. The food is delicious, and I'm sure Londi and Ndu can attest to that, with how much they are eating right now.

"Slow down Ndu, or else you'll choke.", I chuckle.

He swallows then laughs, "Sorry baba, I'm just so hungry. And this chicken is so delicious."

"I can't argue with that.", I laugh and look over to where Veronica is seated.

She is lost in thoughts and I'd do anything to know what's going on in her mind. I try shifting my focus back to the table and I settle on the kids. Londiwe is eating quietly and even though her facial expression isn't saying much, I can tell she's enjoying the food. Ndu keeps on throwing compliments to the chef and even asks for seconds.

"How is school going?", I direct the question to Londiwe.

She shrugs, "Good I guess. But the girls want to take me down from the captain position. They said I've been hogging the position for way too long now and that someone else needs a chance to be in charge. I don't understand how that is my fault because the coach is the one who makes the decisions, not me."

"Well that's unfair, did you talk to the coach about this at least? If they have a problem with you being captain, then they should take it up with the coach.", Veronica chimes in for the first time since we started eating.

Busi is in her chair and she's eating that chicken drumstick as if it were her last, so I take it from her and wipe her hands. She's such a chubby baby.

"I spoke with the coach and she promised to talk to the team, which she did. But they still talk about it when she's not around. I've even come to accept that this will continue until the swimming season is over. It's my last year being a captain anyway so I don't care.", she says.

"How long has this been going on baby?", I ask.

"A few weeks now.", she stops eating.

"And you didn't say anything Londiwe!? Why?", Veronica asks ditching her plate of food and kneeling beside her.

Tears start rolling down my baby's face and I know that this is bad, "I didn't want to add on to the stress here at home. We've seen how you and baba are towards each other so we try not to bother you with anything."

"Oh you sweet girl, you shouldn't have done that. We are adults and what goes on between us has nothing to do with you guys. We will always put you first and that's a fact.", Veronica says.

"Veronica is right, baby. We are always here for you.", I say.

By the time dinner ends

everyone is in better spirits. I decided to wash the dishes since Veronica had already gone out of her way to make us delicious food. Washing the dishes is the least I can do, while her and the kids go to the living room to watch a bit of TV.

Once I'm done with the dishes, I join them in the lounge to watch the show they were watching. Busi is in my arms and by the time the kids prepare to go to bed, she's already fast asleep. She is such a daddy's girl this one.

"Goodnight baba, goodnight mama.", the kids say simultaneously as they make their way to their rooms.

Veronica and I are left shocked as they disappear up the stairs. This is the first time they referred to her as their mother and I won't lie and say I'm not happy about it. This is what I've wanted since the day they moved in with us. I look over to get Veronica's reaction and I can tell she still can't believe they said that.

"They just called me mama Mayenziwe.", this is definitely a surreal moment for her.

I can't help the smile that stretches on my face, "Yes they did."

ISISA

"I don't know what you want me to say to you ma, because it's very clear you've already decided on what you want.", I sigh as I collect the dirty plates we were using.

My birth mother decided to show up at my place uninvited. I regret ever giving her my address but I only gave her in case there was ever an emergency. I didn't want her to spend the night over but it's already late and there are no taxis to Orange Farm at this time of the night. She'll just have to leave in the morning. Now I'm glad we purchased a two-roomed apartment instead of one.

"Uyayazi ukuba ayonyani leyo mntanam. Ndifuna ukwazi ukuba ucinga ntoni ngokubuyela kwakhe endlini. (You know that's not true my child. I want to know what you think about him moving back in the house.)", she says drinking her juice.

"Mama uyazi kakuhle ukuba uluvo lwam ngalento luyakuba yintoni. Utata wakushiya ngelaxesha ubumdinga ngalo ngoku ubuye ngesiquphe? (Mum you know very well what my opinion about this will be. Dad left you when you needed him the most and now he's back all of a sudden?) Come on mama, you can't possibly let him back in.", I say putting the dishes in the dishwasher.

What I love about this apartment is the dishwasher it came with. It really helps Thallente and I because most of the time we are too lazy to even do the dishes.

"He is still your father my baby and whether I like it or not, we are married. He has rights to that house just as much as I do and soon enough, he will move back in.", she sighs.

"Then why were you even asking for my opinion mama? You already know so why tell me?", I returned back to the lounge.

"I am telling you because I didn't want it to be a surprise when you visit and find him there one day.", she says.

I sigh as I take a seat next to her, "Well thank you for telling me mama. Does this mean you and him are getting back together?"

She stares into space for a while before replying, "Well I can't be too sure about that. We might, we might not. I guess only time will tell."

"Kodwa mama, le ndoda yanyamalala ngaphezu konyaka. Animazi ukuba ebephi na nenani labantu ebelele nabo. Uya kukunika izifo mama. (But mother, this man disappeared for more than a year. You don't know where he's been and the number of people he's slept with. He will give you diseases mum.)", I say.

She gives me a murderous look. Why, I don't know because it's not like I'm making this up. A man who has been gone for so long probably slept with other women and it's better if she takes precautionary measures to prevent her from contracting whatever diseases he might or might not have.

"Musa ukuthi "laa ndoda", loo ndoda nguyihlo. (Don't say "that man", that man is your father.)", she clicks her tongue.

Bathong! Someone get Penelope out of my house because wow! I am trying to open her eyes to see the truth but she wants to start arguing with me. I don't know why I even waste my time when it comes to her and that man. She will never get enough of him.

"Noba kunjalo mama akakufanelanga. Mna ngokwam, andizukunyathela endlini yakho okoko nje ekhona. (Even if that's the case mum, he is not right for you. I for one, will not be stepping foot in your house as long as he's there.)", I say and fold my arms across my chest.

Her eyes shoot wide open as if I've insulted her, "Ndixelele ukuba uyadlala mntwana!(Tell me you're joking child!)"

"Andidlali mama. (I'm not joking mama.)", I say with a serious face.

"Thixo wam! Lomntwana ufuna ukundibulala. Kungcono ndilale ungekandibulali Isisa. (My God! This child wants to kill me. It's better I go to sleep before you kill me Isisa.)", she says standing up.

"Mama kutheni wa dramatic ngoku? (Mum why are you being dramatic now?)", I ask shocked by her reaction.

"Hayi mandihambe ndiyolala Isisa ndingekaphambani. (No, let me go and sleep Isisa before I go crazy.) Goodnight.", she walks to the room allocated to her.

"Night mama.", I say as she shuts the door closed.

Thalente comes out of our room and chuckles, "Your mother is so dramatic my love."

"Yes she is and I'm glad she's leaving tomorrow.", I sigh.

"Well I think she's funny.", he cackles.

"I don't find it funny. Let's just go to sleep tuu.", I say getting off the couch.

"Can you speak in Xhosa one more time? It really turns me on when you do.", he smiles.

I smile deviously, "Oh really now?"

He nods and so I say, "Masihambe siyokonwaba ekamereni mntu wam."

"What does that mean?", he asks intrigued.

"Let's go and have some fun in the bedroom my person.", I giggle.

"Say no more.", he gets off the couch and makes his way to me hurriedly.

I can't help but laugh at his foolishness, Tholente never says no to sex.

MAYENZIWE

Veronica and I are in bed and she's facing the other way and so am I. I can tell she's still awake by her breathing pattern so I decide to take a chance and speak from the heart. I know there's a chance that what I say might be meaningless, but at least I would have said it.

"Vee?", I call out to her.

"Yes?", she responds.

I take a deep breath before speaking, "I have hurt you, countless times. Mostly because of my selfish reasons and sometimes I hurt you unknowingly. I'm so sorry for putting you through this. Nobody deserves a selfish partner, and I know I've been that to you. We are new to this marriage life and therefore, I will ask that you bear with me as I try to return to being the man you fell in love with. You are my wife, and I'm sorry that I haven't been treating you as one. Your support means the world to me and I promise to never take it for granted ever again. So will you please forgive me?"

I hear her sniff, "All I ever wanted was to hear you take accountability for your actions Yenziwe, that's all. And I'm sorry

for ever having negative thoughts towards Busi. She's a good baby."

"It's water under the bridge my love. All I ask for is forgiveness, so we can be able to mend what is broken and hopefully we will be able to get back to the way things were before I turned into a selfish prick.", I turn to her and she is already facing my direction.

"I forgive you Yenziwe and I hope that you will forgive me too. I know I haven't been the easiest to deal with lately, so I'm sorry."

"I forgive you.", I smile at her and we seal it off with a passionate kiss.

This feels like a dream come true.

VERONICA

Jane is not happy that I rescheduled the session for this afternoon. I explained to her that I have a crisis to attend to but still, she didn't sound too pleased. Londi is getting bullied so I decided to pop in at the school to see if there's anything that can be done to stop this madness. Nobody deserves to be bullied, Azi used to be bullied and my father stepped in when it was almost too late.

At the time, I didn't take her seriously when she said some kids were picking on her, my dad too. We only saw the magnitude of what she was experiencing when she attempted suicide. That was a wake up call for all of us and so I vowed from thereon to never take any form of bullying, lightly. There won't be a repeat of Azi's situation, not while I'm around.

The school grounds are empty as I make my way inside the premises, I guess the children are already in their classrooms. I turn off the engine and make my way to the office to start at the reception area. I've only ever spoken to Londi's coach once or twice so I can't exactly say I even know where her office is.

"Hi, I'm Londiwe Bhembe's parent and I'd like to see her swim coach please.", yes I do identify as her parent now.

"Oh, hi ma'am! Let me get in touch with her and see if she's available. Please take a seat on the chair over there for me and I'll call you once I get in touch with her.", she smiles at me brightly.

I return the gesture, "Thank you."

I head to the empty chair to take a seat and wait for her as she makes the call. My phone vibrates and it's a message from Mayenziwe informing me that he'll fetch the kids from school later since I have a session with Jane then I'm headed to my supermarket later on. I sent a text telling him that I'm at the school to talk to the coach and that we'll see each other later.

Speaking of my supermarket, after that whole saga with Mayenziwe, I decided to quit from his company and go a different direction. Isisa didn't want me to leave since her and I had already developed a great work routine. That was the case but I just couldn't continue working there knowing that he didn't trust me. So after taking some time to myself, I decided to open a supermarket.

I already had the capital so I purchased a space that was already built and had everything a supermarket needed. For fresh produce, I made a deal with Isisa to get a supply from their company and of course, I'll pay. I know their company doesn't deal with small companies like mine but since I'm

sleeping with one of the bosses, it wasn't a problem. And well...the rest is history.

"Mrs Bhembe? This is the head girl of the school and she'll accompany you to Coach Bennett's office. She is free so she is expecting you.", the receptionist says after calling out to me.

"Oh thank you so much.", I say as I stand up and follow the head girl.

She is well mannered and she tells me more about her school as we walk to the coach's office. I am impressed by how much she actually knows about her school and I can tell that she is very proud to be here. We get to the coach's office and she leaves me there once she's introduced me to Ms Bennett. The coach is a very modern young woman, who looks very passionate about her job. She welcomes me in and offers me a seat.

I start narrating to her what Londi said to me and she listens to everything attentively until I finish. She tells me that she didn't even suspect that this was still ongoing because she was very firm when she spoke to the girls about this act of bullying. By the time we conclude the meeting, I feel a whole lot better and I leave my trust in her to make sure my girl doesn't get bullied anymore.

The school is like a fortress so finding my way back to the reception is a challenge but after fifteen minutes, I am able to locate the exit. I check the time and it's almost afternoon, so I have to head straight to Jane's practice. My stomach grumbles and now I know that I can't ignore the fact that I haven't had anything to eat since morning.

I start at a drive thru to buy myself a milkshake and some fries. It's best I start with something light first before eating in large quantities or else I'll start feeling nauseous. Once I've bought those I make my way to the practice and since I have twenty minutes to spare, I start eating. Time flies and I'm now making my way to Jane's office. Her PA said she's available and that I could make my way inside.

I knock twice before she instructs me to come in and so I do exactly that. We share a hug and we take our respective seats. I place my bag beside me and turn off my cellphone. I don't want any disturbances when I'm here, this is time for me to heal and find myself.

"You look... different. You're glowing. Did something happen?", she asks wearing her glasses and taking her notebook.

"Thank you.", I giggle, "Well maybe it's because Mayenziwe and I fixed things between us."

"Oh you did? And how have things been since then?", she asks with that smile on her face.

"Things have been good, I mean it's only been two days but already there's a change in our house. I feel so much better now that I'm talking to you.", I say.

"I'm glad you are. How did you and your husband fix things?", she asks.

I sigh and clasp my hands on my lap, "Well...when I left here that day, I was in a good mood so I got home and cooked some of the family's favourite dishes. I was finishing up cooking when he walked in and like usual, we got into an argument."

"What was it about?"

"The usual, him being selfish and also, he had instructed the nanny to never leave the baby alone with me. That to me seemed like he didn't trust me so I asked him why he did that and we ended up arguing. When I had had enough, I asked him to give me space to finish up what I was doing. By the time he came back, we were seated for supper and we started eating.", I say.

"What happened after that? Did you guys reconcile after supper?", I don't like that crinkle between her eyebrows.

"Well yes, but we had to talk to Londi first. She said she was being bullied at school and that she was afraid of telling us

because there was already tension at home and she didn't want to add on to it. I mean, imagine a child worrying about us whereas we didn't even take notice of what they had been going through. That was very selfish of us. Fast forward, when we got into our bedroom, he apologised and I did too.", I smile thinking of the sweet love making session we had after that.

"That's good, as long as you're happy. Did you do what I tasked you with?"

"Uh...no. I had planned on doing something for myself but then I forgot.", I totally forgot about that.

A heavy sigh escapes her mouth as she takes off her glasses and rubs her eyes in frustration, "I thought we spoke about this, Veronica. You need to put your needs first once in a while and the fact that you didn't do it when I asked, says a lot about you."

"What do you mean?", I kept my gaze fixed on her every movement.

"I mean you don't care what happens to you. You could be in an accident tomorrow and you wouldn't mind as long as your loved ones are safe. And that's a good thing but as they say, too much of something is not good. It goes for bad things as well as good things. You are pouring from an empty cup, and in this case, you're the cup. I can't tell you what to do but all I can say

is that, you need to find something that gives you the will to live.", she says softly.

I mean I hear what she's saying but at the end of the day this is who I am. My family and friends are the ones that give me the will to live and without them, I don't know what I am or what I'm living for. So maybe, I do a little too much and I sacrifice a lot for others, but I'm not the only one who does what I do.

"My family and friends give me the will to live.", I say.

"See? Nothing you do or say is just about you. I am not saying stop living for your loved ones but also, take time to love for you. Now, since you failed on doing the task I gave you, I hope you'll be able to do this. I want you to take a notepad and write down a list of ten things that make YOU happy. Things that only you do or want to do, things nobody else is involved in. Can you do that for me?", the look of concern on her face makes me feel fuzzy inside.

"Yes I will.", I say.

The reason I feel fuzzy inside is because I doubt I've ever had someone look at me with so much care. My mother was too sick to care for my sister and I and, my dad was always too busy caring for her to notice us. The look on Jane's face makes me

want to impress her and that's why I'll do my best to do as she's asked. If not for her, then for myself.

She then changes the topic and asks me if I've been taking my medication the way it's prescribed and I tell her that I've been taking it as I should. Time flies and the session is over. It's hard for me to leave because of how relaxed I've grown to be when I'm around her. She hugs me goodbye and I bid her farewell as I make my way out of her office.

I wave goodbye to her PA as I make my way to the elevator. The ride down to the underground parking lot, I feel a sense of relief. I guess this is how I'll always feel when I leave Jane's office and I wish I could come to see her everyday but I'm still happy with the two days I attend in a week. The elevator pings open and pulls me out of my train of thoughts.

The number of cars parked now are way less than the time I was coming in. I guess people have left for home and I'd definitely head straight home from here but I have a supermarket to check on. I've been neglecting it for a while now so I need to do what's right. As I make my way to the car, something feels- no, I feel uneasy.

I feel the hair on the back of my neck stand and immediately get goosebumps all over my body. Sometimes a person gets the feeling that they're being watched, and today, I'm that person. I immediately look around the lot and there's nobody in sight so I

quicken my pace to the car. But I still have the feeling that I'm being watched and it's freaking me out.

Once I'm in the car, I lock the doors and immediately fire up the engine. As I drive out, I look around to see if maybe someone was staring admiring what God created but I see no one. I heave a sigh of relief once I've completely driven out of the underground parking lot. That was a weird experience and I hope I never get to feel that way again.

MAYENZIWE

I don't think I've ever seen Londi this excited to see me fetching her from school. She didn't even care that her friends were around but she came to give me a bone crushing hug. My heart swelled in happiness when she did that and even Ndu was shocked by her reaction. She tends to care about what others think rather than what she wants.

"Well somebody's excited to see me.", I chuckle.

She laughs and looks up to me, "I am baba. It's been so long since you fetched us from school."

I smile at her words, "I'm sorry about that baby but I promise, I will change my ways from now on."

"Thank you!", she says as she pulls out of the embrace.

I look over to Ndu and he's got this stupid grin on his face, "Aren't you going to hug your father boy?"

His nose twitches as he shakes his head, "No baba, I won't be hugging you. I'm way too grown for that now but I can give you a handshake."

"A handshake? What are we? Business partners? Woza la wena! (Come here you!)", I laugh as I pull him into a hug.

He doesn't return the gesture but I don't let go until I'm satisfied. Once I feel like I've embarrassed him enough, I lead them to the car and I drive out of the school premises. Ndu is in the front seat and his is connected to the car's stereo with an aux, playing music. I don't when he started listening to such music but he is playing what sounds like Hip Hop on high volume.

It's been a while since I've taken time to be with my kids and seeing them like this today, makes me realise just how much I've been neglecting them. Yes Busi is a baby and she needs most of my attention but it doesn't mean I should ignore my other kids. I'm definitely going to do better because I want them to know that they can depend on me even on rainy days.

Londi tells me she's hungry so I stop at McDonalds, her favourite, to buy her a Big Mac and a soda. She doesn't like the milkshake because it's too sweet, her words. I get Ndu the

same thing and I drive home. The drive home is nice as we chat over the music and laugh at nothing in particular. It felt good having them so carefree around me and I hope it will stay this way.

When I drive into the yard, Veronica's car is already parked out front. I don't understand why she doesn't like parking it inside the garage, I always have to do it for her. Sigh. I do it without complaining because I know it won't change what she does. As soon as the car comes to a halt, the kids are out and running into the house. I guess they are in a good mood today.

I take my laptop bag and the rest of my stuff before making my way inside the house. The smell of ribs immediately hits my nostrils as I walk in and I am already salivating over them without having seen them. I can hear chatter coming from the kitchen so I head there and the kids are sitting on the stools talking to Veronica. They are telling her about their day at school and I can tell this is a norm for them.

It's wonderful seeing them embrace her like this and since they started referring to her as "mama", they seem closer to her than before. Now I am sure that having them live with me is the best thing that's ever happened to me.

"Hi love.", I kiss her cheek and embrace her from behind.

"Hey you!", she giggles.

"How are you?", I ask still holding on to her .

"I'm good and how are you? How was work?", she asks as she turns to me and wraps her arms around my neck.

"Work was good. Did you have a good session today?", I smile at her.

"Yes I did, thanks for asking. We'll talk more later for now, go and shower. You stink.", she pecks me on the lips and turns back to her pots.

I chuckle, "I was out with Isisa at a site today, that's why. Before I go, there's a business fundraiser I have to attend this weekend and they said we can bring our plus ones. Do you mind accompanying me? I'd take Kamo but he talks nonstop and it's tiring."

She bursts into laughter, "Sure, I'll go with you. And I'm going to tell Kamo what you said about him."

"Don't, please. Thank you so much babe, I'll send you some money for the preparation. Okay?", I say.

"Okay.", she nods.

I'm about to leave when I hear her ask the kids if anything interesting happened to them today. Londi answers and she says nothing much happened. Except that the girls on her swim

team apologised to her. What Ndu says makes me stop in my tracks.

"I think I saw my mom today. She looked like she lost some weight but I'm sure it was her.", Ndu sighs.

"What!? You saw Rosette?", I ask as I change direction and make my way back to where he's seated.

He nods with his eyes wide open, "I think so baba. The woman disappeared before I could take a good look at her so maybe I was wrong."

MAYENZIWE

The time reads at 18:36 pm and I'm worried that we'll end up running late for the function. It starts at 19:00 pm and it's all the way in Sandton, I'm hoping we get there on time. Veronica has been getting ready for almost two hours now and I'm starting to get worried. I finished bathing and dressing up a long time ago so now I'm just waiting for her.

It is said that if you keep on checking time, then it will drag for a longer period. Now that I can't keep my eyes off the watch, I know that it is true. We are already late because I'm sure there's going to be traffic ahead so I might as well just relax back on the couch. I unbutton my jacket and sit down, I start scrolling through the different channels. Nothing interesting is playing so I leave it playing on the F1 channel.

"Hey handsome.", her voice catches my attention.

I turn to the stairs and I'm in awe of her beauty. She looks stunning in her red mermaid dress, with a slit on the side. Those black heels she has on make her legs look longer and I'm already getting a hard-on just staring at her. Everything about her look screams beautiful and I know that I'm the luckiest man alive to have a woman who is beautiful both inside and out.

"You look gorgeous my love.", I say after picking up my jaw from the floor.

"Thank you baby and you don't look too shabby yourself.", she blushes as she makes her way to me.

I let out a breath, "I think we can leave now, if you have everything you need."

She nods, "I do, we can leave. Has Akeelah arrived yet?"

"Yes and she's in the kitchen cooking dinner. Before we leave, I need to do something first.", I say.

Her eyebrows meet in the middle and she wears a quizzical expression, "And what is tha-"

I pull her in for a deep kiss before she finishes her question. My hands roam all over her body as I fondle her ass and a moan leaves her mouth. She bites on my lower lip and I know that I've achieved what I wanted. Every time she starts biting on my lip, I know it's because she's turned on. I pull away from her with great difficulty and smirk at the frown on her face.

"Can we have a quick one before we leave?", she asks panting.

I chuckle, "I wish we could my love but we're already late. Come on, let's go."

I take a hold of her right hand and lead the way to the kitchen. Akeelah is busy plating up the food and she's lost in the music

playing from the speaker, she's dancing around. Veronica giggles and I clear my throat to catch her attention, which I do. She is startled by our presence she immediately turns off the music and starts apologising.

"There's no need to apologise Akeelah, you can do whatever suits you as long as you're doing your job.", Veronica giggles once more.

I give her warning look before focusing on Akeelah. I clear my throat, "We are leaving now, so can you please come and close the door. Please make sure that all the doors are locked, I have the spare key so we'll open up for ourselves."

"Okay sir, I'll do that.", she says boring holes into the ground.

I nod, "Good, we'll see you in the morning because we'll come back very late. Tell the kids we'll see them tomorrow as well. And remember, don't let anyone you don't know inside the house."

She nods and accompanies us to the car and waves us goodbye as I drive off. I'm choosing to trust Akeelah to look after my children while I'm away. She's proven to be capable of doing it in the afternoon so I believe it won't be that hard now that it's night time. The only person that will need more attention is Busi because she's still so dependent on an adult. Ndu and

Londi will probably be on their cellphones until they retire to bed.

"You need to stop doing that.", Veronica says.

I'm puzzled by her statement so I glance at her before focusing on the road, "What are you talking about?"

She sighs, "You keep on tapping your thigh, and I know you only do that when you're stressed. What are you stressed about? Is it about Rosette again?"

I breathe out and clench on the steering wheel, "Yes, it is. I just can't stop thinking that maybe she really is here."

"Why? I mean, the private investigator you hired told you that she's still in San Francisco. We both saw the pictures and it confirmed that she's still there, so you don't have to worry so much.", she wraps her hand around the free one on my thigh.

Yes, the PI I hired confirmed that she's still in America but I just feel so uneasy all of a sudden. When Ndu said that he saw her, or rather someone who looks like her, I got scared and so I found someone to look into her whereabouts for me. Rosette has been gone for so long now and I even forgot of her existence until a few days ago. The kids never asked for her so I didn't see the need to bring her up.

"I hope that's the case Vee because I have a bad feeling about all this. She disappeared for a long time and maybe now, she

wants to come back for the kids. I need to look into this some more, at least until I feel okay about but this.", I say aloud.

"Okay you can do that but today we focus on this event. It's for an important cause so you need to be in it wholeheartedly.", she smiles at me.

I nod at her and tighten my hold on her hand, "Yeah I will do that. Thanks for coming to this with me, I really appreciate it."

"I wouldn't be anywhere else.", she says.

The rest of the journey is spent with us sharing jokes and making plans for a family outing. By the time we get to the venue, we are already thirty minutes late. There are a lot of cars in the parking lot but I managed to find some space, and switch off the engine. I get out of the car and open the door for Veronica as she steps out.

"This place looks amazing. One would swear that a royal family owns it.", Vee says as we make our way to the entrance.

"It sure does, my love.", I say looking around.

"Do you know who is hosting this fundraiser?", she asks.

I shake my head, "No, I have no idea. Kamo said that the person who invited me was a businessman and that many of my clients were going to be here as well. So here I am."

She halts in her step, "What if this is a trap Mayenziwe? What kind of person does that?"

The seriousness on her face has me bursting into laughter

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"Then we would be too late to leave the premises. I don't think that's the case though my love, it's legit. Look at all the cars parked here."

She looks back at the parking lot and moves closer to where I'm standing and whispers, "It could be staged."

I burst into laughter once more, "Let's just go inside my love."

I can tell she's hesitant to walk in but I squeeze her hand to reassure her and give her a peck. We walk hand-in-hand and we're welcomed in by soft jazz music playing. I thought the place looked majestic when we were outside but inside it's even worse. The amount of gold furniture in this mansion is blinding and almost every detail in the house is gold.

We walk in and already people are mingling with each other, most of them I know from the business meetings or from events. My lady beside me, settles for a flute of champagne. I know it's taking a lot of self restraint for her to not have a lot of drinks at once but I'm proud she's doing this. She told me that she had developed a drinking problem and I am trying my best to support her.

I was instructed to not let her have more than three drinks, her words and I'm going to honour them. Scotch whisky is what I get for myself, and we go around the room mingling with other people. The MC tells us that the person responsible for this event is still dealing with something urgent but that he'll be out in a short while. We're all starting to get a little restless but we wait nonetheless. Fifteen minutes later, the MC makes an announcement to welcome the reason behind this fundraiser.

A person who I haven't seen in years makes his way up on the stage and my mood completely changes. If I knew that this was Zanothando's event, I surely would have made an excuse not to come here. The woman I had fell in love with years ago, was in love with him and she decided to go back to him rather than give me a chance. I don't have any beef with the guy but it feels awkward being here after how I told the woman I loved her only for her to choose him over me.

"Good evening ladies and gentlemen. As you all know, I am Zanothando and tonight I only invited a small group of people.", by small he means a hundred guests or more, "This event was planned by my precious wife, Nikiwe. She wanted to raise funds for a cause she holds dear. Please give her a round of applause as she makes her way on stage to inform us about it.", he finishes off.

My heart beat start picking up as the anxiety of seeing her engulfs. I haven't seen this woman in years, the last time I saw her was when she chose Zanothando over me. I won't lie, I did shed some tears that day because I loved her for real and now that I'm going to see her again, I don't know if I'm ready for it. Just as I'm racking my brain on what to do next, she makes her way on to the stage with a smile so bright.

I instantly feel my knees wobble I have to clear my throat a million times just to regain my composure. Seeing her like this, here after so many years, makes me feel all sorts of emotions. Old and new. I don't like the way looking at her or what I am starting to feel for her once again. The feelings I had for her never died and now, it's come back to haunt.

"Babe, are you okay?", I hear Vee call out to me and I look over at her.

My innocent wife doesn't even know about Nikiwe and that's because Nikiwe happened shortly after my divorce with Rosette. Not many people knew about her and now I will have no choice but to introduce Vee to Nikiwe.

I blink rapidly and wipe my clammy hands on my trousers, "Yes I'm okay, it's just that I know the people hosting this event."

I'm just going to rip off the bandage.

She smiles at me sweetly, "Oh really? Who are they and why haven't I ever heard of them?"

"That's because I try not to associate with them. Zanothando, the man, is just someone I've met a couple of times through other colleagues.", I say.

"Oh okay, and what about the wife? Do you know her as well?", she asks still clueless of where this conversation might be heading.

I clear my throat for the millionth time, "The lady is my ex...well kind of my ex. We dated years back but never got into a relationship."

I see the smile wiped off of her face and I know that the mood has changed. It would change for me too if I knew that one of her ex's is hosting an event and we're the guests. It just doesn't seem right and I can tell that Vee agrees as well.

"That is your ex?", she asks through gritted teeth.

At this moment, the speech happening on stage is long forgotten. My wife is not pleased and I'm going to try my best to make sure that we don't start arguing in front of all these strangers.

I nod, "Yes she's my ex."

VERONICA

The speech is over and the guests are back to mingling again. Earlier on, I was in a great mood but now, all I want is to go home. I don't know if it's jealousy that I feel but I'm threatened by this strikingly gorgeous woman. We haven't spoken to the power couple yet but every now and again, I can hear her laughter. Her laughter itself makes me want to get my shit together right now.

"Are you mad at me baby?", Mayenziwe asks.

I sigh, "No I'm not mad at you. You did nothing wrong, I mean you also didn't know that it was your ex that would be hosting this event."

"Yeah, now I regret not asking Kamo to seek more information. We can go home now if you'd like.", he says sincerely.

I'm about to give him an answer when my eyes land on the power couple that's walking towards us. I don't think I've ever seen two people look so suitable for each other. They are giving off a Steve Harvey and wife vibe, but definitely a younger version of them. I can't seem to find my words as they stand in front of us. Not only do they look good, but they smell good as well.

"Mayenziwe, it's nice to see you here.", Zanothando says to my husband who looks pissed.

"Nice seeing you too. Nikiwe, nice to see you. It's been so long since we saw each other.", he says.

"Hi Mayenziwe and yes... I know right!?", she beams in joy.

Okay now I'm starting to feel like a fourth wheel so I continue taking sips of my drink.

"Ugh! Where are my manners!? Nikiwe, Zanothando, this is my wife Veronica.", he stutters.

Since when does this man stutter? I fake a smile and greet the power couple. The husband greets me warmly but the Mrs sounds like she's forced to even say something to me. I don't like the lady and I sure as hell won't be pretending like I do.

"I thought you guys moved to Durban?", my silly husband says.

I can see Zanothando's jaw tick, "We did but then we moved back here again. The twins had to be closer to their extended family so we thought why not."

"Ah well... that's nice.", I chime in.

The Mrs over here gives me a dirty look and I'm really surprised by her actions. I never would have guessed that a woman of such stature could be so childish, maybe she thinks I don't know that she once dated Mayenziwe. Oh well, that's history and there's a new sheriff in town.

The husband starts a conversation about kids and I indulge him by adding my two cents worth of opinions here and there. My husband and the now chirpy Nikiwe, are having a conversation like they've been friends since forever. Her hand keeps making contact with his shoulder and in a very flirty way. Now Mayenziwe can't tell me he doesn't notice this.

I'm trying to concentrate on the conversation I am having with Zanothando but my eyes are glued to the two laughing at whatever. Something catches my eye as I watch these two interact. There's something about the way Yenziwe looks at this woman when she speaks. He looks at her with so much adoration and I feel a pang of hurt in my heart. What in the world is going on right now?

NARRATED

Veronica is working at her supermarket today and she is feeling slightly under the weather. She blames it on her constant mood swings which are a side effect from her antidepressants.

There's nothing she can do about it because she needs them so, she never mentions it to her therapist during their sessions.

Her supermarket is doing really well, better than she expected it to do in just a year. With more work needing to get done, she has hired even more people to work at the supermarket. She has hired over 35 workers, and that includes the cashiers, cleaners as well as shelve packers. Things have been going really well for her business wise and hopefully, a few years from now, she will be able to open another branch.

"Ma'am, two of our staff members are in university and they want to know if they can still work here part-time.", the manager of the store says to her.

Veronica takes a minute to think about it and says, "Yes of course they can. What you can do for them is to tell the supervisor about their situation so she can draw up a working schedule that won't clash with their classes or when they are writing."

"Alright ma'am, I will get to it right away. I'm sure they will be pleased to hear this.", the manager smiles.

Veronica nods and returns the gesture, "I'm glad. Will that be all or is there more I still need to look into?"

"No, that will be all ma'am. I'll leave now.", she says.

Once she's out, Veronica takes a huge sigh of relief. She's been a ball of emotions a lot lately but anger takes the trophy. For some reason, she is short-tempered and is always ready to snap at people. Maybe it's also because she's stressed about her husband who is busy spending a lot of time with another woman.

Nikiwe is proving to be more of a thorn than she had anticipated. She's constantly calling Mayenziwe and asking to meet up with him, and like a fool that he is, he always agrees. They've been meeting up for a few days now and she wanted to ignore the amount of time he spends with her but now she's had it.

It's obvious that Nikiwe has some kind of hold over her husband and she can't just sit idly by and not do anything about it. This is messing up her hormones and she's had enough of it. In as much as she loves Mayenziwe's children like they were her own, she won't be able to stand for whatever it is that he is doing right now.

She takes a deep breath as she tries to calm herself down, she still has plenty of work to get through, including stocktaking. Yes she has people to do all that for her but she wants to double-check and make sure that everything is the way it's supposed to be. Her business is still fresh so being a hands on boss will help her build a good reputation for herself. Not only that, but it will also make her employees respect her as well.

It takes Veronica almost two hours for her to go over all the important paperwork that needed her attention. Once she's done, she grabs her notebook and pen before heading out to check out how things are going on the actual floor, where customers are. It's important she makes sure that the staff is good to the customers and treats them with the utmost respect.

She starts at the cash registers to see if the cashiers are doing okay. She observes all the tills and everything is okay except for when she gets to the last till. The saying, 'The customer is always right', won't work in her store. She believes everyone deserves respect and that respect is earned, so she decides to get involved.

"Excuse me Gladys, but is there a problem here?", Veronica asks the cashier.

"Uh bo-", Gladys is now trembling in fear.

"Yes there is a problem. This stupid woman here wanted to rob me of my change!", the woman being assisted yells as she packs the groceries for herself.

Her back is turned to Veronica so she can't see her but the voice sounds very familiar. She decides to walk closer to the lady to get a clear view of who she is. Veronica can just tell that this woman is the problem.

A person she hasn't seen in the longest time comes to view and she can't help but gasp, "Mantwa?"

The lady in washed out clothes turns to Veronica who is calling out her name, "Veronica? Is this really you?"

Veronica is speechless as she takes in Mantwa's new look, a person who was her best friend once upon a time. She looks nothing like the lady who was getting married to her enemy all that time ago. The beauty, makeup and glamour...all gone. It's as if she never lived the life of a wealthy person, something must have gone terribly wrong.

"What happened to you?", Veronica asks Mantwa failing to keep the question in her mind.

Mantwa sighs and looks to the ground, "A lot happened to me Veronica. I regret ever betraying you like that, can you please forgive me?"

"Wow Mantwa, this needs us to sit down and maybe talk things through. How about we meet for lunch on Wednesday so we can talk things through without any interruption because I'm a little tied up at the moment?", Veronica says.

"I'd like that very much. Thank you so much.", she says with a scratchy voice.

"You're welcome and don't worry, whatever you just bought is on the house. Gladys, please give her back the money she just paid for all these items.", she turns to the now relaxed cashier.

"I'll do that right away ma'am.", Gladys says feeling relieved.

"Thank you so much Veronica, God will bless you!", Mantwa says going down on her knees.

Veronica helps her up and tells her that it's not a problem. They exchange numbers and they bid each other farewell. Veronica continues with work even though she is still shocked by the state her ex-friend is in. She looks like she's been dealt the hardest cards of life and it felt right helping her in any way that she could.

Stocktaking is a tedious process so she focuses on the most important and expensive items like eggs, margarine and flour. She might have not recorded everything but these at least give her an idea of how well or bad her store is really doing. Her last task for the day is to take down some performance reviews.

Not that there's anything bad that she's noticed from any of her employees but, it's always better to make sure rather than not assessing them. She walks in each aisle taking notes here and there of each employee and the way they do their work. The last aisle she walks in is the toiletries aisle. It's not that packed and there are no employees here so she just walks by looking at the neatly packed shelves.

"Hey, I thought that was you!", another familiar voice says to her.

She looks up to see her husband's nemesis, Mandla Zikhali. He still looks fine in that suit, she thinks to herself. A lazy smile is plastered on his face and as much as she hates to admit it, it makes him look even more handsome. She's yet to understand why she's attracted to old men who still look good enough to be on the covers of Vogue magazines.

"Mandla, hey! How are you?", she asks trying to get rid of the image of him in her head.

"I'm great now that I've seen that beautiful face of yours. How are you? Still not ready to divorce that spineless man of yours?", he says.

"He's not spineless!"

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Veronica retorts, "And I'm good thanks for asking."

"Whatever you say beautiful lady. It's a beautiful store you have here.", Mandla says casting his eyes all over the place.

"Thank you. Do you need help finding anything?", Veronica asks already fed up with this conversation.

His eyes land on her once again, "Yes actually. I was hoping I could take you out for a late lunch?"

"Uh no thanks, I'm good.", she lies.

She hasn't had anything to eat the entire day and now she's starting to feel it. Her hands are starting to tremble lightly, an indication that her sugar levels have dropped and she needs to eat to get them back up. Her eyes find Mandla's and there's something about his eyes that draws her in.

"Please my lady, I promise it's just lunch. No funny business, I won't be harassing you by asking you out for a date or for a relationship. Pinky promise?", he pulls a puppy face which immediately sends Veronica into a fit of laughter.

Mandla is funny without trying and maybe having lunch with him isn't such a bad idea, "Okay then I'll take that offer, just let me get my bag then we can be on our way."

A smile of victory pulls at the corners of his lips, "Alright sure. I'll wait for you at the exit and please don't change your mind Veronica."

She smiles at him, "I won't. Give me a few minutes."

He nods and watches her walk away before he makes his way to the exit. The plan is to wait for her out here while she grabs her stuff so they can leave for lunch. Excitement has him doing a quick self check to make sure that he still smells and looks good enough for this lunch. He takes his phone out of his pocket and dials a number.

"What's the update?", the voice on the other end asks.

"Everything is going as planned. The lady and I are about to go for lunch.", he says proudly.

The other person on the line exhales audibly, "That's good. Good job. And make sure you find out everything that I said you should find. Remember, you have a lot to lose."

"I promise to do my be-"

"I don't want to hear excuses, do as I say or there'll be hell to pay for.", the person clicks their tongue and cuts the call.

"I'm ready to go.", Veronica's soft voice snaps him out of his haze.

"Okay sure, let's go.", he forces a smile.

It's late in the evening and Mayenziwe still hasn't arrived home. Veronica has been sitting in the lounge for the past hour and she's sure he is planning on sleeping out. She's holding baby Busi who is sleeping soundly in her arms. Akeelah had to leave earlier because of a family crisis, so it's been her and the kids since she got back home from work.

Ndu and Londi have already retired to bed, they have school tomorrow so they can't stay up till late. She keeps on checking her watch and she realises that it's already nine pm so she has to put the baby to sleep. Busi is not a troublesome baby so looking after her is not a problem at all. She places her in her cot and closes the door behind her, the baby monitor is already in their room so she'll be able to hear Busi cry, that's if she even does.

She gets into bed and lies on her back, her mind starts to wander. Marriage isn't worth it if she will always feel depressed, oppressed and unhappy. It's time she puts herself first and gives herself the love she's been giving everyone else but herself. She constantly casts her eyes to the door and checks the time waiting for him until she hears his car pull up in the garage.

Ten minutes later, he walks in through the bedroom door with his jacket off and shirt untucked. She thinks of giving him time to change but she changes her mind and sits up on the bed. She

can tell he's not aware she's awake so she clears her throat to catch her attention. He's startled before greeting her.

"Are you cheating on me with that woman?", she cuts straight to the chase.

"What? Babe no! I'd never cheat on you!", he says placing his items on the ottoman.

"Then what have you been doing with this Nikiwe lady? She always calls you and asks to meet up. Why are you entertaining her?", she asks full of anger.

"She's just a friend now baby and she's going through some things so I am just helping her.", he says as he takes a seat at the foot of the bed.

"I don't like it. I've been taking your shit for the longest of time but this is really where I draw the line. I can't keep taking your crap and making excuses for you. If you continue entertaining this woman then I'll have no choice but to leave this marriage, for my sanity and peace of mind.", she says deadpan.

A pained grimace settles on his face, "So you want me to choose between supporting a friend and my marriage? Please don't make me do that."

She sighs from exhaustion, "Supporting a friend while you fail to support your wife!? Amazing! Listen mkhulu, it's either you do what's right or I leave. Simple as that."

"Why wou-", he doesn't get to finish his sentence as his phone rings.

He takes it out of his pocket to answer it and it's the very same person that is making his marriage stand on rocks. A part of him wants to ignore it but it could be an emergency so he answers. Even with the look of hurt on his wife's face, he decides to listen to the other woman on the other end of the line. He ends the call and starts looking for his car keys.

"Where are you going?", Veronica asks after rolling her eyes.

Mayenziwe scratches the back of his neck, a sign of nervousness, "Nikiwe needs my help so I'm going to help."

"Mayenziwe if you walk out of that door, I am going to pack my things and go. Like I said, I won't tolerate this bullshit.", she says breathing fire.

"Please don't go my love, I promise to explain when I get back.", he pulls her hands in his, which she retracts quickly.

No tears are coming out of her eyes, she's finally fed up, "Give me a reason."

"What?", he asks confused.

"Give me a reason to stay, to not walk out of that door and out of your life for good. Give me a reason to not leave you.", she adds.

"The kids... they-"

"They aren't my biological children so that's not going to cut it. Another one."

Mayenziwe shakes his head, "I don't know what else you want me to say... I don't know what you want from me."

Veronica gets off the bed and starts pacing around and finally comes to a halt, "I want you to love me like you do her. You are willing to sacrifice everything for her so I want you to love me, your wife, like you do your ex. If that's not possible then I am leaving and there's nothing you can do to stop me."

MAYENZIWE

Things are not going my way and at this point, I just feel like giving up. Regret and guilt has kicked in all at once, and I have no idea how to deal with everything going on in my life right now. I have lost a real woman over something that isn't even there, something that never existed. My mind is reeling in thoughts, mainly from the events of that unfateful night.

I left my house and drove to the hotel Nikiwe was in regardless of my wife's plea and tears. Nikiwe sounded like she really needed my help and so I decided to go help her out. The reason I even went to help was because she mentioned that her husband has become abusive towards and that she wanted a way out for her and her children. And so, I did what I thought was right at that moment and that was to rescue her from that abusive prick.

When I got to the hotel, I didn't even stop at the reception to find out what room she was in, I already had the room number so I went straight there. I knocked on the door two or three times before she opened up for me. My initial thoughts before seeing her were, she was beaten to a pulp and that she had bruises all over her face and body. To my surprise, she looked okay...better than okay.

My first reaction when I saw her in a good state, I thought that maybe she was lying to me but then again, maybe she wasn't. I decided to give her the benefit of the doubt and also considered the fact that she may be hiding the bruises under the robe she was wearing. Without hesitation, I walked in when she made way for me and she closed the door behind us.

"Where did he beat you up this around?", I asked her as I looked around at a neat hotel room.

"What?", she asked looking confused.

I raised my right eyebrow and gestured to the room, "The room is clean and there's no sign of there being any struggle here. Where is Zanothando?"

She then looked like she had remembered something, "Uhm...he left! I even had to change rooms because it was too messy. Anyway, you can sit right here and I'll pour a drink for you."

I might be a lot of things but a fool has never been one of them. I knew at that moment that something wasn't adding up and I had to find out what it was, and so I did. When I accepted the seat, I had already figured out that she is definitely up to no good but still, I sat. I could have just stood up and left but I wanted to know why she's doing what she's doing.

"Here's your drink.", she gave me a glass of cognac.

I accepted, "Thank you. Where is your husband Nikiwe? And don't lie to me, I can tell that you were lying."

Suddenly she looked confused and scared all at the same time, "I uh... I don't know what you-"

"I don't and won't repeat myself Nikiwe. I left my wife and children to come and help out a friend but wena unamanga!? Do you know that you could have cost me my marriage right now? You better tell me what's happening right now or all hell will break loose.", I placed the glass on the coffee table and started pacing.

She placed her flute of champagne on the table and stood up as well. The minute she placed her hands on my chest I felt my heart beat pick up and I knew that I had to do something. If I had let her continue to touch me as she pleases then I would have cheated on my wife, which is something I could never do. I pulled her hand from my chest and turned to face her.

I could tell her cheeks started heating up but I didn't care about that at the moment. My questions needed answers, and only she could provide all that for me. The look I gave her immediately made her retreat and she fell back on the couch. I followed suit and sat on the opposite couch, impatiently waiting for her to speak up and tell me what the hell she had planned.

She took a deep breath as she pulled on her robe, covering up the bit of flesh that was showing. For a moment I got distracted by the sight of her breasts which have grown over the years and that black lace number she was wearing. Regardless of the bulge I had growing in my pants, I couldn't lose focus on what's important.

"Did you lie to me?", I asked as guilt set in.

"Yes, I did. But I swear, it's only because I thought you and I were on the same page. The looks we were giving each other at the party and the touching, it just all made sense to me you know.", she said.

"No I don't know. What look are you talking about because I sure as hell wasn't give you any looks. As far as I know, we are friends, friends that support each other so this is surprising.", I said.

She stood up from the couch with a bit of attitude, "You know exactly what I'm talking about Yenziwe. That little smirk you do when you're flattered and of course, you allowing me to touch you even with your wife present. I thought you were interested."

"Well you thought wrong ke sisi. And by the way, where is your husband? Does he even abuse you?", I was beyond the word pissed.

It was the middle of the night and here I was with a woman who didn't care a shit about me. I had left my wife and children at home even after her begging me to choose, and I chose Nikiwe over her. What kind of man did that even make me?

Nikiwe shook her head and sighed, "No he doesn't, all that was a lie so I could get attention from you. It felt good seeing you Mayenziwe, and not to mention how amazing you look. When the opportunity presented itself to get closer to you, I did that."

"That is horrible and you should be ashamed of yourself. You chose Zanothando because you loved him so why do you want to pull me into all this once again? I let you go back to him because you said you still loved him and now...you want to have your bread buttered on both sides. It doesn't work that way.", I spit angrily.

She started crying, "I don't know why I'm doing this but my craving for you is getting more intense each day."

"You have no shame Nikiwe, and I can't believe that this is who you have become. This version you are showing me right now is definitely not the woman I once fell in love with. Hopefully you can still fix your act and love your husband the way he deserves. The husband YOU chose over me

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remember. So please get your act together! I'm out of here.", that was the last time I saw her.

I know it's only been a few days since that incident but it feels like a lifetime since it took place. My wife is gone, and now I'm not sure if she will ever forgive me. The kids are beyond mad at me and I'm not sure how to go about in making things better between us but I have to try. Through all this madness happening right now, Thalente is the person I decided to get.

"Yini manje ndoda, wadwadla imask? Z'khiphani? (What is it now man, why are you so serious? What's going on?)", Thalente asked.

I sigh, "My life is literally crumbling before my eyes and I've reached the point where I'm even tired of talking about anything. I've run out of tricks on how to fix the mess I created."

Thalente sighs and shakes his head, "There's nothing I can say to you to make you think or feel otherwise, but I must admit that I saw this one coming. You were always so invested in something else other than your marriage and it has now cost you your family. This was bound to happen because awudenki nja yami. (...you never think my friend.)"

"Ndoda how can you-"

"It's all true, so don't fight it. Now tell me what I can do to help because I have to go visit my mother with Isisa, so I don't have much time.", he interjects.

ISISA

I don't know since when did I start having a baby but Thalente is really acting like one right now. We are on our way to see his mother and he is busy sulking for some reason and I can tell that he's just being dramatic. He woke up complaining about a backache and a headache, so we started at the doctor before the journey to see his mother. The doctor gave him medicine that will help tackle these problems and also mentioned that he should return should the pain persist.

"But sthandwa sam', it hurts nje.", he huffs.

He has been complaining that the toothache is more painful than the ache on his back. Which confuses me because he keeps on talking and talking as if all is well. I am no doctor but, I do know that if you have a toothache then you should avoid opening your mouth a lot lest you have a huge intake of cool air which will cause more pain. That hasn't been the case for my boyfriend here and I'm starting to think that he's exaggerating.

"Fezeka please talk to your father. I don't know what else to say to him honestly.", I sigh.

Fezeka bursts into laughter, "You are complaining way too much dad. Maybe you should try getting some rest."

It's amazing how this child has accepted me as a part of her father's life. We even go out to do our nails and hair when we get the chance. She doesn't live with us full time but she does visit for two weeks a month. I have no complaints when it comes to her and I must admit that I enjoy our moments of ganging up on her father.

"So you don't want me to express myself anymore huh my baby?", he asks looking to the backseat where Fezeka is.

She giggles and shakes her head, "No baba, I'm sorry. You can cry if you want to, I won't judge."

Thalente smiles foolishly, "Thank you my baby. Daddy loves you."

This man is really full of it. He knew that Fezeka would fall for his tactics and now he can only deal with me. I sigh and continue to drive as I try to avoid looking at him with that smug look on his face. To make sure that I don't get to hear his whining, I turn up the volume of the stereo and listen to Tamia. The facial expressions on both the people I'm traveling with are hilarious.

I'm in the mood for old RnB so they have no choice but to listen to music of my choosing. We arrive at the hospice twenty

minutes later and I pull up into a parking spot. I must say that the number of cars parked out here indicates that there must be a lot of people here to visit their family members.

"It's awfully packed today.", Thamente sighs.

"Yeah it is. Come on, let's get going then.", I say as I start walking.

The two follow suit and soon we are inside the building, we get assisted almost immediately and then directed to MaNdlanzi's room. I don't know what I expected to find when we got here but it's definitely not her seated on the bed all on her own. Oh and not just that, but she's speaking...well sort of.

There's a speech therapist on a chair facing towards her, showing her cards with words for her to call out. We knew that there was a therapist helping her but we didn't know that they had progressed this much. One can tell that it's hard for her to pronounce the words but at least she's trying. I look over to my side and I see Thamente's eyes fill up with tears. It's such a huge moment for him.

"Go and hug her mfondini. (...dude.)", I whisper.

He gives me a sharp glare, "I told you not to call me that."

Yes he did but I can't exactly stop myself. I just find myself saying it and well... that's that.

I can't help but burst into laughter at the look he's still giving me. We catch his mother's attention as well as the therapist and a grin forms on her face. It's been a while since I came to visit and so seeing her is really nice, especially seeing her in such a good state. After catching my breath, we walk in with Thalete holding Fezeka's hand. We greet and the therapist responds and gives us space.

"Mama, you didn't ask anyone to call us to share the good news. Why?", Thalete moves in closer to her and holds her hand in his.

"Hi.", is all she says with a smile on her face.

My man takes a deep sigh and bows his head, "Sawubona maoleli. Ugrand? (Hello mother. How are you?)"

"Good.", she scans the room with her eyes and sees Fezeka first then me.

Her eyes light up even more and we also take our turns to greet her and kiss her on the cheek. Fezeka sits on the bed next to her and I remain standing because I want to marvel at her beauty. Being here is proving to be good for her, she's glowing and looks way different from the woman we dropped off here.

"You...are...pre-", she takes a deep breath as she fails to get out the word she wanted to say.

"Relax maoleedi, you need to take it slow. The therapist said it's going to take a very long time for you to learn how to speak and read properly, so take it slow.", my boyfriend says.

I nod agreeing with him, "Yes it's going to take time Ma so ungazicinizeli kakhulu. UThixo uyakukuphilisa. (... don't stress yourself too much. God will heal you.)"

She nods lightly and focuses on Fezeka who is telling her all about school and her friends. This child never runs out of things to talk about and that's one thing I had to get used to. After she's done speaking to her, we get to talk about all sorts of things before visiting hours are over. Her face says everything and I know we made her happy.

"I love you mntu wam, uyeva? (...my person, you hear me?)", Thalente says as we make our way to the car.

I blush at his use of Xhosa, "Ndiyakuva sithandwa sam kwaye ndiyakuthanda nam. (I can hear you my love and I love you too.)"

NARRATED

She's been lurking in the shadows for way too long and now her time to shine has finally come. It's been a long time coming but now is her time to strike so she can take her kids back to where they belong. The couple has separated, and all thanks to the husband's foolish ways. She didn't have to use her plan after all and so there is no use for Mandla anymore.

When she got to the U.S., she thought life would be better and that she would be able to distance herself from anything that is from South Africa. But how could she when her children were not with her. She feels better now that she's back in the country to reclaim what's hers, not that she thinks the kids are some kind of property, but she believes that since she gave birth to them, they belong to her.

"Rose my love, you look so lost in thought. Is everything okay or are you having second thoughts about your plan?", Chad, her new boyfriend asked as he took a seat beside her.

Rosette turns to him and exhales deeply, "I'm just thinking about how it's all going to play out. To be honest, I don't care what happens to the father of my kids but I know that they will never forgive me if they ever find out what I did. Not even my

reasons would make them forgive me so now I'm not sure if I want to risk it."

Chad's eyebrows crease as he takes in what she just said, "That can't be Rose because then you would have wasted my time."

"How so Chad because I didn't want you to tag along but you came with me instead? You're wasting your own time.", she says feeling irritated.

More lines form on his forehead, "First of all Rose, you will not speak to me in that way. I am your man, not your child and for that reason you will respect me. You can't just talk to me as if you're speaking to one of your friends. Is that clear?"

"Yes.", she answers feeling scared of her boyfriend.

This isn't the first time he's snapped at her but she still can't just get rid of him. He has all the resources she needs and when she asked for his help to organise a few things, she thought he would stay back in San Francisco. If only she knew that asking for help would make him want to come with, she wouldn't have asked for it.

"Good. Now you need to understand that I am putting my image on the line here for you. Should this thing ever go public and that I was an accomplice to your criminal acts, I don't want to have any regrets. You disrespecting me will start making me feel like a fool for helping you, so don't piss me off. Secondly,

you have to go ahead with your mission here or else you will lose all of your family members.", he shrugs casually.

"Chad, what do you mean by that? You promised to never hurt people I hold dear to me.", she says.

He nods a little and chuckles, "That is exactly what I said but that was before you wanted to pull away from the plan. You need to do this, not for me but for your kids and yourself. And plus, you don't want to make daddy mad, now do you sweetheart?"

She shakes her head, "No, I don't want to make daddy mad."

"Good. Let me go and get started on some work, I'll see you during lunch okay?", he says and kisses her on the cheek.

She bids him farewell as he makes his way back into the penthouse they are sharing. A lot is currently going through her head as he disappears inside the house. She wants to go ahead and do as she had already planned but now her fear is having the kids ever finding out about this. They will never forgive her no matter how much she loves them.

"I fucking hate you Mayenziwe!", she starts screaming as she throws stuff on the ground.

At this moment, she is confused. If she doesn't do anything about him, Chad will definitely do something to hurt her and she just can't have that. She has no choice but to hurt

Mayenziwe at this point in time. This is what she gets for dating psychopaths, Chad will definitely be her doom and that's why she's going to get rid of him once they get back to San Francisco.

VERONICA

"You've been doing the same thing for almost an hour now, when exactly will you finish?", my aunt is seated on my bed, looking at me.

I pause with the eyebrow pencil in my hand and turn to look at her, "I'm almost done MaAuntiza, I told you that putting on make up takes time."

She shakes her head in disapproval, "You girls nowadays always put in extra effort into all these meaningless things. If that man will love you, he has to love the real you without all of these products."

I chuckle at her response as I continue doing my eyebrows, "Well aunty, the whole point of doing this is not to impress any man, well most of the time. We do this because we want to feel good about ourselves, to feel empowered, and putting it on makes us feel that way. So you see, we please ourselves, and if any man finds me beautiful while I have it on, it's totally their decision."

"Kuhle-ke njengobe usho njalo, ngiyacondza. (Well since you put it like that then I understand.) Hurry up and finish here so you can eat before you leave.", she says getting up heading for the door. "Okay aunty.", I yell as she leaves.

Once the door is closed, I get back to finishing up my face beat which looks absolutely stunning by the time I put down the brush. I start packing up my things and when that's done, I make my way to the dining room where my aunt has set up breakfast for us and I can't help but to salivate at the sight of all my favourites on the table.

"Hawu MaAuntiza, you didn't have to go through so much trouble, I would have made a quick sandwich to go.", I say taking a seat on one of the empty chairs.

"It's not a problem at all, start eating.", she says taking a seat as well.

I do exactly as she says and start digging in after a short prayer. The food tastes great, and I tell that to my aunt who is proud of herself. A knock on the door disturbs our conversation and she offers to go and get it. I let her do as she pleases and she's gone for a few minutes. When she comes back, she has a bouquet of roses in her hands.

"Lomkhulu wakho wetama kwenta lokuncono Veronica. (This old man of yours is really trying to do better Veronica.) Look, he bought you more flowers.", she says all excited.

I sigh and roll my eyes, "I don't want those flowers aunty, the best you can do is to throw them away because I do not want anything from him."

"But he also bought you some chocolates, and they look so expensive.", she whispers the last part and I don't understand why.

"I still don't want anything from him, if you want the chocolates then you can have them but I really want nothing from this man. I gave him countless opportunities to make things right with me but still, nothing changed. I've left him and only now does he see my value

I honestly don't want anything that will make me feel like I owe him.", I push my plate of food away as I feel myself losing appetite.

That's what happens every single time Mayenziwe's name is brought up or if there's anything that involves him. Ever since I came back home, I'm starting to feel more and more like myself again. That is how much this man nearly ruined me, I refuse to let him take away my joy once again. I now feel at ease and peaceful.

"If you don't want them then I will take them for myself, but don't tell Azi because then she'll want me to share.", she chuckles sadly.

I giggle, "Of course I won't aunty."

She smiles sadly and sighs, "You never really told us what this man did to you. It's been days now and still you haven't said what he did. Did he hurt you physically and do we need to get him arrested?"

"No he's never laid his hands on me, you can relax. He has hurt me so much emotionally though and I'm just done being his puppet. I tried being a good wife to him and all he did was use me for his own benefit. I hate him so much for that because he got me to bond with his children who now see me as a mother figure. I mean...what am I supposed to do with those kids? Do I continue being there for them despite their father's bullshit?", I feel the tears roll down my face.

This is exactly what I didn't want, to cry over anything that has to do with that man. He doesn't deserve any more of my tears and that's a fact. I have shed tears over him for a very long time now and it's time I start reclaiming my strength. It's too bad I can't get back all the years I wasted with that self-absorbed prick.

My aunt places her hand over mine, "I'm glad you're opening to me, it means you are healing. I won't ask you questions about why you stayed with him for so long after he kept on proving he's not worth your love. But I am glad that you are back home to people who love and support you. We will never turn our backs on you, I can promise you that."

My period is due in a few days and these emotions I keep on feeling so intensely are caused by my fluctuating hormones. That's why my face is covered in tears and I'm experiencing hiccups. It's not always when I get to hear my aunt be so vulnerable and loving towards me, it really is an amazing feeling. She gets off her seat and comes to my side to hug me.

We share a long hug and pull apart after I feel better. The thing I like about my aunt is her ability to change the topic and make one feel better. For instance, she's already talking about something else and I feel even better for it. She starts talking about my father and how he said he's coping at the supermarket. Apparently he enjoys having something to do once again.

I don't know why, but her cheeks start heating up every time she talks about him. I really thought that the crush she had for him would have subsided by now but I can tell that that won't be happening any time soon. I'm choosing to ignore the hints she's throwing me about my father, I don't want to get involved

in old people's relationship matters, I'm already struggling with my own.

After breakfast, I bid my aunt goodbye as I make my way out. I get into the car and drive to KFC to get their famous Krusher. My sweet tooth has gotten so bad lately and I can't seem to help myself. It's not even 09:00 a.m. but already, I'm craving something sweet. I already know it's because of my periods. By the time I get to my lawyer's firm, the Krusher is already history.

There aren't a lot of cars in the parking lot so I know that there aren't a lot of people. I make my way into the building and sign in at the reception before I'm directed to his office. Anxiety starts to kick in with each step I take closer to his office, I don't even know why I'm getting anxious over this. Mayenziwe doesn't shit from me.

I take a deep breath before knocking on my lawyer's door, "Come in!", he yells from the outside.

I walk in after pacing my breath, "Uh good morning Mthokozisi."

He lifts his head up and I can tell that he's a little surprised to see me, and I know it's because I'm fifteen minutes early.

"Hey, come on in.", he says with a warm smile on his face.

"Uh, thank you.", I returned the gesture.

Mthokozisi is a good looking man, and I think he's the reason why I even spent so much time in the mirror fixing myself up this morning. I'm not a huge fan of make-up but I made sure to put enough, just so I can look good in front of him. It's not because I'm trying to seduce him or anything but I believe it's something we instinctively do as women when we want to impress. And I'm glad my time paid off because he sure does look impressed.

We share pleasantries and talk a little about how things have been. All that talk was unnecessary but we still had a conversation about it anyway. From there, we jump straight into the main reason why I even came here today, to discuss everything I want out of this divorce. After that last stunt, there's no way I'll be getting back together with Mayenziwe ever again.

"You were married into a community of property, so that means everything he has or owns, you now own fifty percent of it too.", he says with that warm smile never leaving his face.

I sigh and shake my head, "To be honest with you Mthokozisi, I don't want anything from that man. I'm willing to forfeit anything that he worked for, just as long as I get to keep my own stuff without having to share anything with him. I don't want anything to tie me up with him."

He nods, "Alright ma'am, but before we can be sure about that, I'll have to reach out to his lawyer so we can discuss this. If he agrees to this then there will be no problem but if he wants to fight it then, we will have to renegotiate. But are you sure you want nothing from him ma'am?"

I giggle at the number of times he's referred to me as ma'am, "I told you to call me Veronica, Mthokozisi and yes I am sure. I am going to keep everything he bought for me though, including the car he bought me. If I can get those things then, I don't mind him keeping what's his."

"Okay then Veronica, then I will draw up some paperwork and send it to his lawyer. Hopefully he will get back to me soon and with good news at that, so that we can settle this out of court.", he says.

I nod, "Thank you so much for this Mthokozisi."

"It's not a problem, it's my job to ensure that every client leaves here happy.", he says.

We continue discussing the rest of the details I want in the divorce and after what feels like forever, the meeting is over. I'm happy about all the things I mentioned in my divorce papers and hopefully my soon to be ex-husband, will agree to everything I've mentioned.

"Goodbye Mthokozisi, I hope to hear from you soon.", I say shaking his hand.

"I hope so too, take ma'am. I mean- Veronica.", he chuckles.

Leaving his office is a bit hard because this man just made me wet without even doing anything. I don't know what it was about him that made me feel this way but I'm glad it did. This just goes to show that I'm still alive and I need to start enjoying my time on this planet called Earth.

My first stop is the restroom and after I'm done, I make my way to the parking lot in high spirits. This mood I'm in was just too suspicious and now I understand why. Something was bound to go wrong or annoy me, and it seems Mandla is that today. He's leaning against my car with his hands in his pockets. I feel all the happiness I was experiencing, dissipate from my body. What the hell does he want?

"Mandla.", is all I say crossing my arms over my chest.

"Hey beautiful, surprise seeing you here.", his smile is way too wide for my liking.

"And yet your back is against my car, so it's not much of a surprise now is it?", is what I want to say but instead I say, "Yeah sure it is. How can I help you?"

"I want us to talk about something important.", the smile disappears from his face. Okay what the hell is this now.

VERONICA

"What is it Mandla?", I ask already feeling my patience running thin.

"We have to talk about it in a more private place, it's important.", he says stepping closer to me.

I raise my eyebrow at his comment, this man thinks I'm a fool. He really thought I would fall for his tactics to get me to be with him. If only he knew that I'm a different person now and I don't have time for people who are trying to push their own agendas using me. I have already gone through the most and I'm not about to put myself through stress once again.

"Unfortunately, I don't have time for you Mandla. I'd also appreciate it if you left me alone and start treating me like a stranger. We can't talk to each other anymore unless we are greeting each other, but if it's anything else I really don't want to be a part of anything.", I say.

"But this is important Veronica.", he says under his breath.

If I wasn't standing so close to him, I'm sure I wouldn't have heard him, "You keep saying that Mandla and yet, you haven't said what it's about. I don't want to involve myself with you. Goodbye and I'll see you around."

He looks shocked by my act that he doesn't even get a word out as I get into my car and start the engine. I wave goodbye as I drive out of the parking space and out of the gate. The look on his face expressed how he was feeling, and that is shocked and hurt. I would regret that action but I don't because I know what I want in my life right now.

I'm about to go through a divorce and what I need now is some peace of mind as well as to be surrounded by my loved ones. The last thing I need is stress from a man who I know very well just wants to get into my pants and make his rival angry by sleeping with his ex. I really want to make this divorce drama free so there aren't any problems along the way.

My supermarket is being run by my father so I'm positive that everything is going well. I don't want to disturb him by going there just to ruin the momentum he must have created for himself by now. With business out of the way, I don't know what to do with myself. Londiwe asked that I fetch her and Ndu from school today so that won't be happening anytime soon.

They said they already told Mayenziwe about this and that he didn't have a problem with it. To be honest, I'm happy her agreed because I really miss the kids. Busi as well, and it's unfortunate that I can't bring her along since she is still so young. Her father would probably have a problem with it so I didn't even bother to ask him if I could take her as well.

I was already on my way home but I decide to change the route and head to the nearest beauty parlour. My body is tense and I could use my muscles being relaxed, it's been a long time since I set my foot in one so hopefully all goes well. I got one called Ntombifuthi's Beauty Parlour and Day Spa. I make my way inside the building and my jaw is on the ground as I take in the beauty of this place.

The place has a peaceful ambiance, like some kind of oasis. I felt all the tension in my body leave as soon as I stepped foot inside that place. I like the nature kind of vibe they've given the place with the pot plants at almost each and every corner. The reception area is even more beautiful, with sounds of waterfalls playing in the background and the smell of scented candles adds to it's lightness.

"Welcome to Ntombifuthi's Beauty Parlour and Day Spa. My name is Florence and how may I be of help to you today?", the lady behind the counter asks with a polite smile on her face.

"Hi Florence, my name is Veronica and I was wondering if I could get a full body massage even though I haven't made an appointment?", I really hope I can because I need this.

"Yes of course ma'am, there's more than enough space.", she says happily.

I decide to book myself in and my session doesn't take long to start before I get taken to a free room. I'm left alone to undress and wrap myself with a towel. Once I'm done, I make my way out of the changing room and head straight to where my masseuse is waiting for me. She greets me and asks that I get comfortable on the massage table.

"I am Ntombifuthi, the owner of this place and let me just say that it's amazing to have a woman of your stature in this place of mine.", the masseuse says massaging my back.

I can't even turn to look back at her, "Oh my God wow! This place is amazing really and it's my first time here. I hope you continue to run your business and take it to different heights. I don't know how I've been missing it hey."

She chuckles, "Well you probably haven't been missing it because I just opened it not so long ago."

"Oh really? How long have you had this baby opened?", I ask gesturing to the parlour.

"Close to four months now. And what about you? How far along are you?", she asks moving her hands up my neck.

I can't help but moan a little as I feel the knots in my neck loosen, "I'm not sure I understand what you mean."

"Uh... I was referring to your pregnancy. I'm a mother of five so I know when someone's pregnant, no matter how far along you are.", she giggles.

I feel myself forget how to breath as I take in what this woman just said. It can't be true... Mayenziwe and I have been playing it safe. How did this happen?

THALENTE

It was exactly two weeks ago when I came to the realisation that Isisa is everything I've ever wanted in a woman and that I'm ready to settle down with her. As much as she doesn't like her real parents, especially her father, I had to go to them and ask for their blessings. Of course that was all after I went to her adoptive parents who were more than happy to learn of my intentions with their daughter.

Time is running out and I'm not getting any younger, and since I've found the woman I truly love, I don't see the reason why not to settle down. I already went to tell my mother about the news and I'm confident enough to say that she was happy for me. This is exactly what I've been looking for and I'm happy that I've finally found it.

"Do you see any ring that you like?", Mayenziwe asks pulling me out of my thoughts.

I turn to him and sigh, "Not really... I'm just not sure what kind of ring she'd like. I mean

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I can't afford and overly expensive ring but I don't want to buy something cheap as well."

He gives me a concerned look, "You know your woman Thelente and if you think she'll care more about the price of something rather than appreciating the effort, then maybe she isn't good for you."

I can't help the furrowed brow that pulls on my face, "Isisa isn't about materialistic stuff Mayenziwe, you know this."

"I do but I don't think you do. She's proven to love you regardless of your status or wealth, so why would you think she'd expect more from you just because you're the man. Come on ndoda, be serious. You're about to ask for her hand in marriage, the least you can do is trust her character.", he says with a smile.

I smile and shake my head, "Yeah, you're right. This woman has done so much for me and the least I can do is not expect her to do the worst. I seriously need to get myself in line. Thanks man."

"Sure thing man. So do you have any idea on how you want to do this proposal thing?", he asks looking at the different diamond rings.

I shrug, "I'm not sure. I want to do it at a dinner party with all of our family members and friends being a part of it. I just don't know where to have it so that it remains a surprise to her. Maybe I should rent a place out for that night."

He stops looking at the rings and turns to me, "Well if you're looking for a place to rent for the night then you should look for a restaurant. Don't worry about the payment, I'll pay for it. And before you decline, this will be my wedding gift to you both. It's the least I can do."

If we weren't in such a public place I'm sure I'd shed a few tears. Mayenziwe is the best friend any man could ever ask for. Yes he has his flaws like everyone else but he does a lot of good as well. Hopefully he gets to fix things between him and Veronica once again. Mayenziwe is my brother from another mother, and he's nothing like that two-timing, lying bastard called Zakhele. I'm glad I haven't seen him ever since that saga because I am pretty sure I'd kill him on the spot if I do.

"Thank you brother.", I say pulling Mayenziwe into a hug.

He chuckles and rubs my back, "It's my pleasure brother. You have been there for me at every chance I needed you and so

this is my way of saying thank you. Thank you for loving me ntwana."

"Hayi ndoda! (No ways man!) Is this really you?", I chuckled pulling away.

"Just pick a ring ndoda!", he bursts into laughter.

It feels good seeing him laugh after these past couple of days. He needed a little laugh to feel better.

ISISA

My adoptive mother asked that I come and pay them a visit today since I've been "scarce", which I haven't. The last time I paid them a visit was two weeks ago I think, when Thalete had gone to see his mother. Both my mothers like exaggerating but I guess it's because I'm still this young woman in their eyes and that maybe I still need their protection. Sigh!

I'm on my way to their house but I decide to stop at a pharmacy first. I haven't been feeling like myself lately, my energy has dropped and I'm always tired. At first I didn't think anything of it but after researching what this could mean, I decided not to waste any more time. Google says always being exhausted is one of the symptoms of pregnancy.

I wouldn't be worried about pregnancy since I use an injection but this time around, I forgot to go get a shot. It was very reckless of me to forget but it's only because I got the dates confused. Now I'm hoping that I'm not pregnant, I honestly don't know if I want a child or if I want to have one out of wedlock. This is really just a stressful moment for me, I won't lie.

When I get to the pharmacy, I grab three pregnancy tests just so that I'm sure about the results. I go to the counter and pay for them, ignoring the cashier's judgemental eyes. Most people my age have sex so she must stop giving people unnecessary looks and do her job. I'd give her a piece of my mind but I'm already in a hurry to get home.

I get into my car and drive off at high speed, anxious to get to the house. I want to know if I'm pregnant or not so that I can figure out what my next stop will be. My mind is all over the place but I manage to get to the mansion in one piece and safe. After parking the car, I make my way inside the house through the garage door that was opened.

"Hi baby!", my mum gets off the couch and rushes to me.

"Hi mum, hi dad. Mum let me go and do something real quick, I'll be back.", I say already making my way upstairs to the room I used to use back when I lived here.

I don't take time to look around the room but I make my way straight into the bathroom and take out the pregnancy tests. I pee on all three sticks and wait for the results. The tests say I should wait for ten minutes so I wait and wash my hands while at it. Ten minutes later, I grab the sticks and look at them. My whole world comes to a standstill as they all show two lines, an indication that yes I am pregnant.

"Oh God!", I blow raspberries as I sit on the cold floor.

I don't think I'm ready to be a parent, and I don't even want to think about how Thalente will feel about this news. He'll probably be happy about it whereas my feelings about it are still rocky. I have all the money in the world to take care of a child but I lack the warmth and love a mother gives to their children. This is going to be a hard decision. Do I even tell Thalente about this?

Sigh!

NARRATED

Rosette and Chad already have their plans set in motion, the guys are awaiting their permission to go ahead and do what they need to do. Tonight is the night where she gets to have her children back with her, and she can't wait for that moment. It has been way too long since she last saw them, and she can only hope that they welcome her with open arms.

"My Rose, are you ready for this?", Chad asks with a cynical smile pulling at his lips.

Rosette smirked looking into his ocean blue colour eyes, "Yes I am my love and I am more than excited for this moment."

"That's good because I really don't want you having any second thoughts. You know I shoot to kill so best believe that everyone in there is going to die.", he says casually.

"I know babe but remember, the main person I want dead here is Mayenziwe. Everyone else can have injuries, as long as he's gone. And if the children are there, you have to be careful how you carry out this mission.", she chooses her words carefully.

Chad can have a bit of a temper that stems from anything really, so she needs to choose her words wisely when speaking to him. This is definitely not the kind of relationship she wants and that's why she plans on leaving him as soon as she has her

kids. She doesn't want them to be in an environment that is toxic to them, so he will have to go.

"Sure, I'll try and keep an eye out for your children.", he chuckles.

She frowns at his words and the tone of his voice, "What is that supposed to mean? You mustn't try to look out for my children, but you must do so. The whole reason why we're even doing this is because of them."

He raises his eyebrow, "Oh is that so? The only reason I agreed to even help you is because I enjoy spilling blood. Now if you get your children, that's good for you. But if they somehow end up in the crossfire, that is not my business. I'm out for blood."

"Don't say that Chad, please.", fear makes her feel shivers down her spine.

Chad laughs, "Oh come on now Rosie, you know I'd never hurt your children intentionally. Don't worry, I'll make sure they are safe before the boys do their thing. Calm down okay?"

"Okay.", she forces a smile.

He smiles and pecks her on the lips, "Now get ready, we leave in an hour."

She nods at him as he walks off and she waits until he's out of sight to call her mother. Speaking of her mother, it's been a

while since she spoke to her or her father and Chad is the reason why. They didn't approve of him and so since she wanted to be with him regardless of their opinions, she distanced herself from them.

Being away from them was hard in the beginning but she was coping without them in her life until now. She has this gut feeling that wants her to badly reach out to her mother and speak to her. The thought of getting a lecture from her mother doesn't sound like a great thing but she still wants to reach out to her and hear how they are doing.

"Hello?", her mother says as she answers the call from an unknown number.

"Ma, dis ek Rosette. Hoe gaan dit? (Mum, it's me Rosette. How are you?)", she asks feeling a little scared of her reaction.

There's silence on the other end and it continues for a few more seconds. Thinking her mother has ended the call after learning it's her, Rosette removes the cellphone from her ear so that she can put it away. To her surprise, her mother is still on the line even though she's not saying a thing. She wants to end the call out of fear but the fact that her mother hasn't ended it gives her comfort.

"Ma ek is baie jammer dat ek nie na jou en pa geluister het nie. (Mom I'm very sorry that I didn't listen to you and dad.) You

and pa have been so patient and loving towards me but I spit in your face when I got the chance to do what I wanted. Please forgive me.", her voice cracks.

Mrs Van Zyl takes a deep breath before answering, "It's okay Rosette, just come back home to us and we'll figure out the rest. The matter about the kids as well."

A smile pulls at her lips, even after being out of touch with them for a while, her parents still care about her. Not just her, but her children as well. This has to be the highlight of her day, this and getting her children.

"I will do exactly that ma, I'm going to get the kids and make my way there as soon as I do.", she says.

"Mayenziwe is willing to have the children visit you even though it's not school holidays that side? That's a first.", Mrs Van Zyl says shocked.

"He didn't ma, but I'm going to take the kids permanently. Chad is helping me get them by getting rid of him.", she responds.

"Chad again. You barely know this guy and already you are trusting him about such serious matters? Are you crazy Rosette?", the older woman yells in frustration.

"You can shout at me all you want ma but I'm still getting my children at the end of the day.", the attitude in her tone slowly resurfaced.

"I should have known that being foolish runs in your blood because why else would you be acting like this. You have lost it and now you are with a strange man who is not good for you. I hope you won't do anything you'll regret later on."

"How is pa?", she tries changing the conversation.

"Don't even waste your breath asking about your father because I won't be answering to anyone who has ties with a criminal. Sorry.", she says.

"Ma don't say that, your words hurt."

Mrs Van Zyl sighs heavily and shakes her head, "Weet jy, ek en jou pa blameer vir die mens wat jy vandag geword het. (You know, I blame your father and I for the person you have become today.) We spoiled you way too much and today

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we are reaping what we have sown. I can only hope that you do what is right. Goodbye."

Before she can get another word out, her mother ends the call. She's left feeling like shit. There's no turning back now, she has to see this through. She wiped the lone tear on her cheek and headed to the direction Chad took.

ISISA

I feel drained and if it were up to me, I wouldn't even be going to this dinner party but Mayenziwe already invited us so I can't exactly cancel now. My emotions are a bit all over the place right now and I'm still just trying to think of a way to tell Thamente about this pregnancy. A part of me knows he'll be happy about it but I'm not sure if I can feel that way.

Children are a lifetime commitment and I know that once you have them, there's no going back. That's why I wanted to wait until I atleast got to my thirties but it seems like God had other plans. Hopefully I will become a better parent than my biological parents ever were to me, they are the reason why I don't want to have kids.

"Babe we have to go now or we'll be late.", Thamente says walking into our room.

I look at him through the mirror and fake a smile, "Yeah let's go, we don't want to disappoint Mayenziwe now do we."

He smiles timidly, "Are you okay my love? If you're not, we can stay at home. There's no need to force ourselves."

"I'm good babe, I promise you.", I turn and make my way to him.

He holds my hands and pulls me into a hug, "I love you baby, don't you ever forget that."

"I love you too mntu wam.", I whisper in his ear.

He pulls away and gives me a passionate kiss, one that has me wanting more and breathing heavily. We walk out of the house hand in hand, he makes sure to lock the door before leaving. He opens the door for me when we get to the car and I get settled as he walks to his side. I remember the day he purchased this Polo VW, he was the happiest I had ever seen him be. He loves this car almost as much as he loves me and I've made peace with that.

"Are you okay mntu wam?", I ask as he drives out of our complex.

The reason I'm even is asking is because I can tell that he's nervous, he keeps on tapping the steering wheel. Now that I think about it, he has been acting kind off for the past few days. I've just been caught up in my own world to address it. He looks like he has a lot going through his mind.

"I'm okay babe, just stressed about work.", he looks at me briefly before focusing on the road.

"Oh okay. Don't worry babe, all will be well.", I squeeze his bicep before relaxing back on my seat.

He blows his breath and gives me a faint smile, "Thank you my love, I needed to hear that."

We talk about how work has been for him these past few weeks and I also share how I've been coping at work. Without

even realising, we get to the venue and I must say I'm impressed by it. It's a restaurant, a fancy one, and I must say that it looks amazing. Hopefully they serve good food as well because I'm hungry.

Thalente walks around the car to open my door and if anyone could see the blush on my face, they'd swear we are on our first date. I don't know why but every time he does something for me, I can't help but blush...all the time. I thank him once I'm out and we make our way inside the restaurant. My first thoughts when entering are that this is an Italian restaurant.

"You finally made it.", Maye walks to us and gives me a hug and a kiss on the cheek.

Him and Thalente shake hands, "Yeah we wouldn't miss it."

Before I can even add on to what my man just said, my mothers rush to give me a hug. I give Thalente a quizzical expression, he needs to explain what these two are doing here. Last I checked this is Mayenziwe's event, so why would he invite them. I raise my eyebrows at him and all he does is shrug and look away. I can't believe this man.

The two pull away from me and I can tell that they already got off to a bad start. They both can give it so I'm not worried about one of them being overpowered by the other. Penelope pulls me further into the room and only now do I realise that most of

the people here are people we know. Fezeka, Londiwe and Ndu are here as well. Now I'm confused...is it Christmas and I forgot maybe?

I turn to look for Thalente so he can explain and he's down on one of his knees, "Baby you know I'm not good with words but all I ask for is that you give me a chance to love you forever. Isisa my love, will you please make me one of the happiest men on earth right now and marry me?"

Alright, this I did not see coming and there's no way in hell I'm not saying yes. I love this man and I want to spend the rest of my life with him.

"Yes I do.", I say before cheer erupts from the small crowd in the restaurant.

NARRATED

There's happiness all around the restaurant, everyone is happy that the beloved couple is soon to marry. That and also the fact that they've already had something to eat. Veronica is already planning on going home, she came here to support these two wonderful people and now that that's done, she can go and rest.

She has been trying her best to avoid Mayenziwe, she is still coming to terms with the fact that she's pregnant for him.

Every time she looks at him, she can't help but feel angry at him. All the time she wasted on him for him to treat her like garbage. That's why she is still going through the divorce even though the doctor confirmed that she's over four weeks along. She'll only tell him about the baby once the divorce is finalised.

"Vee, can we talk please?", Mayenziwe asks her.

"No.", is all she says before going to the couple of the night.

She congratulates them before bidding them goodbye, and hugs them both. Her last stop is by Londi and Ndu who are sad to see her go. They hug her tight not wanting to let go of her but she chuckles at their clinginess. Meanwhile outside, on the rooftop of the opposite building, Chad and his people are waiting for the right moment to open fire.

Their firearms are already loaded and facing the direction of the restaurant and all they need now is a go ahead from Chad. He signals them to prepare to open fire as he turns to look at Rosette for a go ahead. She looks into his cold eyes and sighs, this is what she wanted so there's no reason to have any second thoughts now.

She nods at him, "The wife as well."

Chad's lips pull into a devious grin and he nods before turning to his men, "Open fire boys!"

NARRATED

"There's something I need to tell you.", Isisa smiles nervously looking into Thalente's eyes.

Veronica just excused herself and they are now dancing to 'Unchained Melody' by Roy Hamilton. Isisa thinks the song is a bit outdated but it's still the greatest love song, so it fits perfectly with this moment. While Thalente on the other hand is clueless on who the singer is but finds the song rather perfect for this slow dance. He can't even keep his eyes off of her, she finally agreed to be his.

"Babe?", Isisa lightly snaps her finger in his face seeing he had zoned out.

His lips stretch into a wide smile as he looks into her eyes, "Yes my love, sorry. You were saying?"

Isisa returns the gesture and chuckles, "You look smitten, and I'm hoping it's by me because it would be awkward for you to have feelings for your friend's ex."

Thalente laughs at her teasing tone, "Oh come on my love, you know I only have eyes for you."

She blushes and rolls her eyes, "Yeah well, whatever. I wanted to tell you that I am preg-"

She doesn't get to finish the rest of her statement as she feels a burning sensation make contact with her skin. Her eyes are wide open and they immediately fill up with tears, making her gasp a little. The words nor scream don't leave her mouth as she slowly feels herself get weak in the knees. A look of shock and confusion rests on Thälente's face as he sees his fiancée crumble down to the floor.

"Baby what's go-", more bullets start flying in before he gets to ask what's wrong with Isisa.

Without fully comprehending what's happening, he stands on the same spot for a second too long before he feels a bullet pierce his flesh. A second one follows which has him going down on his knees. Chaos erupts in the restaurant as people start screaming and seeking cover to save themselves. He decides to not focus on what's happening around him but rather try to provide Isisa with more shelter from this rain of bullets.

"Baby...Isisa sthandwa sam', vuka. (...wake up.)", he lightly taps her face seeing her slowly lose consciousness.

"Hmm...it hurts.", she says through gritted teeth.

Thälente can already feel himself on the edge of tears but there's no time for that now, "Don't worry baby, I'll get you to the hospital soon."

"Okay.", is all she manages to say while trying to preserve her breath.

"Hang on tight baby.", he says digging through his pockets searching for his cellphone.

They can both still hear the noise happening in the background but they decide to ignore it and focus on each other. Thamente doesn't tell Isisa that he's been shot lest he worries her and she suffers more from hearing these news. He still feels okay so maybe the damage isn't too bad. After a few seconds of struggling to reach his phone, he gets it out of his pocket and looks for his friend's numbers.

"Sticks, zwakala no Jeffrey namajita daar. Kushubile nou. (Sticks, bring Jeffrey and the other guys with you. It's going down now.)", he says over the call.

"Sho bade, location. (Sure man, location.)", Sticks says and ends the call.

Thamente sends the location to him before putting his phone back in his jacket. Sticks and Jeffrey are the only people he can rely on to help him out right now. They might work together but he knows that they have some shady dealings which require them to have guns. So he's pretty sure that they will come through for him at this moment.

"I feel cold mntu wam.", Isisa says with her teeth clashing against each other.

"Sorry my love, where are you feeling cold? Maybe I can warm you up.", he tries moving away from her slightly.

"Everywhere.", she says now visibly shivering.

He skims his all over her body and he is surprised to see the amount of blood on her clothes. From the upper part of her dress down to the lower part, she's covered in nothing but blood. It's hard to tell which part of her body is bleeding. He looks down to his white shirt and it's stained in blood as well. Most of this blood must be from him, he needs to get help or they'll die here.

"Help!", he shouts to nobody in particular.

Meanwhile across the room, Mayenziwe has rushed to see if his children are doing okay. The shooting has ceased and he sustained one bullet wound to his thigh and another on his ribcage. He's finding it abit hard to breath but he pushes through the pain just to find his children. That royal blue dress definitely belongs to Veronica and it's the one she was wearing tonight, he thinks to himself as he picks up his pace to where she is.

"Veronica, are you okay?", he asks ignoring the pain he feels on his busyed lip.

She turns to him swiftly with tears flooding her eyes, "Maye come and help us please."

He frowns at how much she's sobbing, "Are you hurt?"

He limps his way to her and she finally comes to full view. She's kneeling on the floor with blood all over her dress, Londi next to her with equal amount of tears on her face. He looks beside her to see where Ndu is and he can't see him which gives him a sense of relief thinking that maybe he was in the toilet during this whole mess.

Veronica is a sobbing mess, "He tried to...to protect me Yenziwe and now he-"

"You are not making any sense Veronica, what is going on? Where is Ndu?", he tries to ignore the awful feeling in his gut.

Londi tries to wipe her tears so she can speak to her father since her stepmother was failing, "Ndu is shot baba and we need to take him to the hospital right now. I felt his pulse and it's getting weaker by the second."

His eyes go wide as he moves closer to inspect the scene and that's when his eyes land on the younger version of himself laying on the cold floor. The sight of his son in this state has him feeling weak he ends up falling on the floor with his knees. He shuffles towards his body and feels his pulse, it's weak but as

long as it's still there, he can save his son. With great difficulty, he lifts him up and carries him to the car.

"Baba, I'm -", blood starts oozing out of Ndu's mouth as he tries to speak.

"Save your breath boy, we'll get you to the hospital.", he doesn't seem to care about the tears shamelessly staining his face.

Tear drops fall on the sides of little Ndu's face, "I...love...you."

"You'll tell me later boy

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when you're all better. Okay?", he grits his teeth.

Ndu nods lightly with the tears still streaming down his face. Mayenziwe places him in the backseat with his head on top of Veronica's lap. Londi gets into the front seat and puts on her seatbelt. Mayenziwe rushes to his side of the car but he stops on his tracks and looks into the restaurant. People are still screaming and crying, guilt eats him up as he watches everyone lose their minds.

A part of him wants to go back inside to help but his son needs immediate attention or else he might lose him. With a heavy sigh and guilt eating him up, he gets into the car and brings the engine to life. He drives out of the parking lot in high speed

taking one last look at the restaurant through the rearview mirror.

"Drive faster Mayenziwe!", Veronica snaps.

AZIV AISHE

My sister is not picking up my calls and I'm starting to get really worried. It's so unlike her to just not answer, especially after I've tried calling her more than once. No matter how busy she is, she always gets back to me and this is definitely a first. The only reason I'm calling her today is because I feel off for some reason, like something bad is going to happen.

I haven't even told dad about this because I know he'll immediately start stressing and I definitely don't want that. He'd have a heart attack, literally. That's why I have been cooped up in my room for hours now, I'm trying to avoid any questions from him. If he senses that I'm not being completely honest with him, he'll get angry.

"Azi, sewunesikhatsi lesidze kakhulu uhleti kulelo gumbi. Phuma mntfwanami. (Azi, you have been in that room for way too long now. Get out little girl.)", a knock on the door by my aunt snaps me out of my pool of thoughts.

"Ngicela unginike umzuzu MaAuntiza, ngiyeza. (Give me a minute aunt, I'm coming.)", I reply.

"Okay.", is all she says before I hear her footsteps receding.

My mind is still on my sister and no matter what I do, I won't be at ease until I get a call from her telling me she's okay. She checks in on me all the time and I often forget that she is not my mother but my sister. Her care for me has been keeping me going, through it all.

After that Sabelo saga, I was really tempted to commit suicide but then I thought of how Veronica and my father would deal with the news of my passing. Every outcome of my thoughts resulted in them taking their lives because of depression or something else. That's the only reason I'm still breathing to this date. I hate Sabelo and I'm glad I haven't seen him since then.

I take a deep breath in and exhale before straightening up my bed and making my way out to the living room. Aunt Nosibusiso has already cooked and I know that her and dad have already eaten, I don't have an appetite so I declined supper. The TV is on and I can hear the sound of the news playing as I make my way further go to the living room. eNCA is on and I can't help but shake my head at the sight.

No matter how bored I can get, I never watch the news. With my expert skills of sneaking out, I attempt to do exactly that so I don't watch the news. My father never pays attention to anything but what the news anchors are saying but I can't say

the same about my aunt. She snaps her head to my direction and her eyebrows crease as she looks at me as if I'm disgusting.

"Where are you going Azi? Buya utosijoyina kute ubukele tindzaba nababe wakho kanye nami. (Come and join us so you can watch the news with your father and I.)", she says a little louder than necessary.

I turn my back away from her and roll my eyes before heading back to the couch, "Yeah I was coming to join you guys aunty but I wanted a glass of juice first."

My father chuckles, "Sokunge! (As if!)"

"Hlala phansi. (Sit down.)", my aunt gestures to the couch with her head.

I can tell that my father is getting along with Detective Nosibusiso and that just annoys the hell out of me. For some reason, he entertains her and finds everything she does or says, funny. Since I'm outnumbered, I decide to sit my flat ass on the single couch.

"When last did you speak to your sister?", my father turns his attention away from the TV to me.

I gulp at his bulging eyes set on me, "In the afternoon baba. She mentioned that she's going to Isisa's surprise engagement party."

He nods, "Okay, text her and tell her to inform us when she's on her way back or if she won't be returning at all."

I smile timidly, "Let me text her right now."

I take out my phone from my pocket and quickly send a text to her telling her to get back to me. An incident about a shooting that took place at a restaurant playing on the news catches my attention. I listen to the news anchor explain what they think happened at this place and I immediately figure out how I know this place.

"Baba, sis Veronica went to that restaurant!", I say already on my feet.

"What?", my father gets up off his seat.

Oh Lord, this can't be happening to us once again. I pray that my sister is safe.

NARRATED

Chad and his guys just got back to their meeting venue. Things didn't go as planned as some of Chad's guys missed their targets, especially Mayenziwe. Chad is furious at all of them for being so incompetent. It was supposed to be a simple and easy job, now everything is a mess and for nothing.

"I didn't say you could shoot children. Are you stupid?", he asks angrily before slapping one of the guys.

"I'm sorry sir.", the guy responds shaking out of fear of his boss's anger.

"Sorry isn't going to fix this. I thought you guys said you were professionals!?", he huffs angrily.

"We are sir but-", another guy tries to defend their terrible work of execution.

"But nothing you stupid asshole! You have ruined everything. I'm still going to talk to you about this mess you created but for now, get the hell out!", he bangs his fists on the table.

The guys leave the room, each mumbling their apologies to him. He doesn't care for any of them and for this terrible performance, he will have all of them killed. Brutally so. Just as he's about to pour himself a glass of scotch whisky, Rosette bursts into the room already huffing from anger. He puts the bottle back on the table expecting Rosette's fire.

"You let those idiots shoot my son you dumb asshole!", she starts hitting him on the chest.

Chad takes hold of her hands and pins her against the wall, "This is your doing my precious Rose. We wouldn't have hurt the boy if you had let go of your anger."

Out of anger, Rose spits on his face, "Fuck you Chad! You are a useless man I tell you and I regret ever-"

A hot slap lands on Rosette's face shutting her up, "You ungrateful bitch! I'm going to teach you some manners.", Chad says

VERONICA

Mayenziwe parks the car roughly at the emergency entrance and walks out to open the back seat door. He's visibly shaking and it's obvious that he's freaking out. I don't care about him at the moment but about this young boy in my arms. On the way here he was finding it hard to breathe and I tried my best to help him get comfortable but I doubt I actually even helped him.

My biggest fear is that he took his last breath on my lap. I'm afraid to even feel his pulse lest I get the results I don't want. I'm choosing to have faith that maybe he lost a lot of blood and that's why he had his eyes closed. Yenziwe takes him from my lap and carries him to the entrance of the door, the nurses and doctors immediately surround him. I make my way out of the car with Londi hot on my tail.

She's a sobbing mess and I don't have the words to comfort her because I have no idea what's going on with her brother. I pull her towards me as we make our way inside the hospital where we see Ndu being put on a stretcher and being pushed to an operating room, I assume. Mayenziwe tries to follow the medical team but he's stopped before he can go any further. The receptionist gives him forms to fill in and we wait for him to finish.

We're all about to go to the waiting room when more people start being ushered into the hospital. Most of the people were with us at the restaurant and we see Thallente and Isisa being pushed in as well. My breath catches when I see the amount of blood covering their clothes. I quickly make my way towards Isisa's stretcher and scan for the bullet wounds while Mayenziwe goes to Thallente.

"Will she be okay?", I ask the paramedic.

"Are you her family member?", he asks looking at Isisa.

I nod, "I'm her sister, we were all at the restaurant that you found her at but I had to bring in my son here. Will she be okay?"

He hesitates for a few seconds before answering, "We hope so, she suffered a gunshot to the abdomen and we're going to try and save her from bleeding out. Excuse us ma'am, we need to get her medical attention as soon as possible."

"Okay.", I nod and watch them push her away.

I return back to Londi and hold her hand as we head to the waiting area. Shortly after, Mayenziwe joins us to tell us that he's going to get checked out for the bullet wounds then leaves. We then sit in silence waiting for the doctor to get back to us. Isisa's parents, both her adoptive parents and biological parents joining us as well. I don't really know either of them

that well so I don't try to make small talk. None of the parents are badly injured so less reasons to worry about more people.

Since we're still waiting, I allow my mind to wander. What was supposed to be a celebration of two people who love each other, turned into a bloodbath and tragedy. I honestly can't think of anyone who would do such a thing, especially to such lovely people. So many people were caught in the crossfire and only God knows how many were injured.

"Will Ndu be okay Ma?", Londi asks wide eyed.

Looking into her eyes, I'm tempted to lie and tell her that everything is going to be okay. That is comforting as well but, I just can't lie. Ndu's health is out of my hands at the moment and I don't really have a good feeling about it. I'm acting strong in front of her because I don't want to freak her out but I just don't feel good about his situation. I sigh and turn to face her properly.

"Honestly, I don't know baby but we can hope and pray that he will be. We just have to hope that all is well.", I say.

She starts crying even more and rests her head on my chest, "Can we pray please? I need my brother to be okay."

I gently squeeze her shoulder before exhaling deeply, "We can do that baby. Close your eyes."

We close our eyes and say a prayer which lasts for a few minutes and we say Amen. I offer to get her something to eat but she tells me that she isn't hungry but I offer to get her coffee instead. She drinks coffee and there's no stopping her so I decide to get it for her. I make my way to the cafeteria to buy her coffee as well as the parents who I also offered. And I get an iced tea for myself.

The journey to the waiting area is tedious as I keep smelling different pungent scents in this hospital, which is expected seeing as it's a hospital. I think this pregnancy has made my senses more aware because before, I never really cared about the smells but it's definitely a different story now. I get to the area and I see that Mayenziwe is back with bandages on his abdomen as well as shoulder. I know because he's shoulder.

"Here you go!", I say handing everyone their cup.

"Thank you.", they respond unanimously.

I nod and give Londi one before sitting next to her, "Sorry I didn't think you'd be back so soon.", I say to Mayenziwe.

He nods and weakly smiles at me, "It's okay, I need to lay off caffeine for a few more days, doctor's orders. And plus, he said I was lucky. None of the bullets did any damage and they both went in and out so there was no need for surgery. They stitched me up and told me to fetch medication before leaving."

"Oh okay, sorry.", is all I say and we stay in silence.

It carries on for approximately twenty more minutes, the silence that is, before a doctor makes his way to us. His shoulders are sagging and that's definitely not a good sign. Isn't he supposed to be wearing a smile on your face or something? We all get up from our seats and wait for him to get to where we're standing.

He heaves a deep sigh, "Greetings, I am Dr Andrews and I'm the one handling Ndumiso Bhembe's case."

"Yes Dr I'm his father. Is he okay?", Mayenziwe asks already agitated.

The doctor looks back at us and I can already tell that he's about to deliver sad news, "Mr Bhembe, your son experienced what we call Hypovolemic shock, which is a huge amount of blood loss. We tried to stop the bleeding but unfortunately, that didn't help. Your son had an exsanguination

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meaning he died from losing too much blood but not from the bullet itself. I'm really sorry for you loss."

It was hard for me to listen to all the things he just said but I did and the next thing I hear is a loud sob from Londiwe who is on the floor. I look to Mayenziwe to see if he is going to make any movements but he's just standing in one place like a statue. He

looks zoned out and I don't think there's anything I can do to help so I turn my focus back to Londi. I helped her up from the floor and put her on one of the chairs.

She keeps on wailing and I decide to get her father's attention who is still staring into space, "Mayenziwe! Snap out of it, Londi needs her father."

He still doesn't turn and I can tell that the parents who are standing around him have no idea how to help. This is all too much really.

AZIVASHE

After my dad saw all that mess happening on TV, he decided it was best he looked for Veronica himself. I don't think I've ever seen my father this spooked, he looked like he had been crying. That's why he took the first opportunity he had and made his way down to the restaurant. Of course like worried people that we are, my aunt and I joined him on his search for my sister.

The real panic for me started when we got to the restaurant and we were told that most of the people that were there, were either transferred to hospitals or that they were presumed dead on the scene. After waiting for a while to be told if any of those people were my sister, we left for the

hospital after we were told none of them matched her description.

I could tell that my father was already starting to lose hope and already thinking of the worst. He wouldn't survive another loss so when we were on our way to this hospital, I already told him to keep calm once we are here so we can check for her properly but instead, he's made it hard for us to do so. At this point, I'm just hoping we don't get kicked out of the hospital.

"Baby, are you okay!?", my father asks pulling Veronica into a tight hug once we get to the waiting area.

I look around and the mood is somber, I can't tell what's happening exactly because I'm focused on Veronica. My father pulls away from her and examines her face and body, she looks okay. I take a turn to hug her and so does my aunt who looks really relieved by her being okay. My father is still in disbelief so he pulls her to a seat and sits next to her.

"Are you okay my dear?", he asks once more.

Veronica starts shaking her head slightly, "No."

"What's wrong? Are you hurt?", he asks.

"Ndumiso akapfurwa baba achibva afa. (Ndumiso was shot baba, and he's dead.", she starts crying with her hand covering her mouth.

"Une chokwadi nezvauri kutaura Aneni?"

(Are you sure about what you're saying Aneni?)" , my father gasps.

Veronica nods for confirmation and I'm in shock as I start looking around the room for Mayenziwe. My eyes land on him seated in the corner with his daughter in his arms. He doesn't look like he even knows or cares that there's other people in the room. I can just tell that he's not okay.

"Nkulunkulu wami! Ungayivumela njani intfo lenjena kutsi yenteke? (Oh my God! How could you allow this to happen?)", Aunt Nosibusiso exclaims with her hands on top of her head.

Yeah I'm definitely with my aunt on this one, God allowed this to happen. Why? We'll never know. I sigh as I take a seat on one of the chairs feeling defeated. Loss is really hard, I know from experience. I can only wonder what Mayenziwe must be going through right now after losing his child. Sigh! This is going to be a long night, that's for sure.

NARRATED

Sticks and Jeffrey just got to the hospital since they were told that their friend would be here. Thalente's mother is in a hospice so he currently doesn't have any family of his own to be here to support him. This is what pisses Sticks off and why

he is here to get Mayenziwe as his closest friend, almost brother, to help him out with the suspects they caught.

With the help they got from the guys from their township, it wasn't hard tracking down people they suspect. So not only do they want to find out on Tholente's health but to know what steps to take from here onwards. There's no way this was some kind of robbery situation or anything like that. These people had a target and wanted to make sure that that person who was targeted, didn't survive.

Sticks gets to the receptionist and asks her for Tholente's details. Of course she has to find out whether or not they are related to the patient in any way. Once they've confirmed that, they are directed to the waiting room. A lot of crying is taking place when they get there so they stand at the door for a moment scanning the room.

Sticks sees Mayenziwe so they both make their way to where he's seated and stand in front of him. This makes Mayenziwe snap out of his thoughts and look at the people in front of him. He soon recognises Sticks and immediately gets up off his chair, places Londi on it. They shake hands, before they move to the hallway.

"Unjani die man? (How is the man?)", Jeffrey asks.

Mayenziwe sighs, "It's not looking good. He was shot three times and one of the bullets that penetrated him, damaged his liver. I am not sure what the doctor said exactly but he's still going to be here for a while."

"What about his woman? Is she okay?", Sticks asks.

"Yes she's going to be okay. Apparently she was pregnant so when the bullet hit her in the abdomen, there was no chance the baby could survive.", he says.

Jeffrey whistles, "Eh kushubile mos, manje sizonyenza njani? Lezinja eziyenze lento sizitholile. (Eh it's really bad, so what are we going to do now? We have the dogs that did this.)"

"Really?", Mayenziwe asks wide-eyed.

Sticks nods, "Sho bozza. Manje sizi khayitise noma? (Sure boss. So should we kill them or?)"

"Not yet, I need to know who sent them. This was definitely planned. Leyonja isukele inyoka emgodini. (That dog disturbed a snake in its hole.)", Mayenziwe says seething in anger.

NARRATED

Two days later and Mayenziwe still hasn't come to terms with the loss of his son. He is still in denial and thinks that maybe there's a chance his son will pop out of somewhere and tell him that this was nothing but a nightmare. That's why he's been keeping himself occupied by checking in on Thalente as well as Isisa.

The hospital isn't busy as he makes his way to Thalente's ward first, since he's critical, it's crucial that he is always surrounded by people. Mayenziwe greets some of the staff as he passes by and nods at some of the greetings from the flirty members. His heart is just not into anything at the moment, especially since his brother is lying on what could be his death bed while his son's body is freezing in the mortuary.

He takes a deep breath before making his way inside the ward. In his mind, he had hoped to find his best friend awake and already requesting the doctors to discharge him. This was his wish, but unfortunately, none of that had become reality.

Thalente is still connected to a number of pipes that are helping him breathe. The doctors said that he is experiencing a cerebral edema which means that a lot of fluid has accumulated in his brain.

What makes Mayenziwe even more furious is that his blood type doesn't match with that of Thacente. Not only that but, the structure of his liver doesn't match with Thacente's so, it's impossible for him to be a donor even though he'd like to be one. He walks closer to him and looks at his pale face, losing him would break him even further. If they don't find a donor for him soon, it will be too late for a transplant meaning he'll die.

"I'm sorry I am failing you brother. I know that if the roles were reversed, you would go above and beyond to find me the help I'd need. But that's how you've always been, always putting other people's needs ahead of yours.", Mayenziwe releases a shaky breath and squeezes his hand.

He looks up at the roof of the room, "This has to be the most trying time of my life. uNdumiso was shot... he's dead now and I have no idea how to react or feel since he's gone. I keep hoping that this is some kind of nightmare and that I'll be woken up any minute now. That's not the case though, I'm still in disbelief but slowly it's starting to sink in. Oh brother, that's why I need you to get back to me."

He continues to talk to his friend who is laying still on the bed, without as much as a flutter of eyelids. A nurse walks into the ward ready to inspect if there is any change going on in Thacente's body so Mayenziwe steps away from him for a bit.

The nurse checks Thallente then leaves after discovering that he is still doing the same way.

"I'm about to leave now ndoda and I really hope that the next time I come back here, there's a difference. Your mother is waiting for you to be better and I can't go anywhere until you see her. I don't have any answers for the questions she'll have, so come back to us man. Goodbye.", Mayenziwe squeezes his shoulder once before making his way out.

He wipes the lone tear that's on his cheek before making his way to Isisa's bedroom. She is always surrounded by people, especially her biological mother who always has something to say. He makes a silent prayer to God asking him to make sure that she's not in the room when he gets there. Indeed she's not in the room when he walks in so he plans on making this visit as quick as possible.

"Hey you.", he offers Isisa a gentle smile as he makes his way in.

Isisa follows the sound of the voice and she forces a smile, "Hi Maye, how are you?"

"I should be asking you that. Do you feel any pain?", he changes the focus of the conversation.

She shakes her head, "Not yet, but maybe once the medication wears off I'll start feeling some pain. I'm really sorry about Ndu Maye, he was-"

"Thalente is still not looking too good but hopefully we will find a donor for him soon.", he interjects.

A frown settles on her face, "I was still talking about your son Mayenziwe. You can't just act as if this is not happening, you need to deal with your loss."

"I have a few people in mind for the transplant but I need to get them checked out first before this can be carried out.", he says totally ignoring her previous statement.

Isisa has no choice but to sigh as she accepts defeat. There is no getting through to Mayenziwe when he's like this, so she relaxes back on the bed and listens to him update her about her fiance's health. Thalente being in hospital makes it hard for her to start mourning their unborn baby. All this is getting a bit too much for her and she can only hope that she survives through all this.

Mayenziwe's cellphone rings disturbing him from his conversation with Isisa. He pulls it out of his jacket and talks for a while with the other person on the line. A few seconds later, the call is over and a grin pulls at his lips. This means he has good news.

"Listen Isisa, I have to go. I might have found a perfect match for Thalente.", he cheerfully says.

"Alright go, don't waste anymore second here. We need to find the people that did this.", Isisa says feeling slightly better than before.

Mayenziwe nods and kisses her cheek goodbye as he hurries out of the hospital. Sticks just informed him that one of those bastards is ready to talk and it's then when it hit him that he could have these guys blood types checked as well as their livers. Maybe one of them will be a match to that of Thalente's.

VERONICA

I'm at my father's house and I've been trying to get as much needed rest as per doctor's orders. He said my blood pressure was way too high and that I needed to get it down before I lose the baby in my womb. I don't want to quickly bond with the foetus lest I lose him or her once again, leaving me vulnerable and even more depressed.

My father has been checking up on me like crazy since I told him as well as my sister and aunt that I am pregnant. I couldn't hide it from them seeing that I had a death scare and none of them would have known about the precious life growing in my womb. It's really sad that I can't be all that happy about this baby since Ndu just passed.

Speaking of Ndu

Advertisement

I haven't seen or heard from Mayenziwe ever since that day of the news being delivered to us. Not that I want him to call me but I really thought that he would need help with the funeral arrangements. When I spoke to Londi yesterday, she said her father is still not willing to believe that his son is gone and that he will never be back. I won't lie, even thinking about this breaks my heart.

Ndumiso was such a precious young boy, he always had my back and not once did he ever complain when he had to do things for me. To think that he was still in my arms when that gun went off and a bullet landed in his chest. It hurts thinking that he didn't want me to leave just yet that night but I had insisted on going since I was feeling a little sick. Who knew that I would be talking about Ndu in the past tense today.

"You're not eating enough food Veronica. Do you want to hurt the baby you're carrying? Hmm?", my aunt asks with her lips pouted.

I chuckle, "I'm just not that hungry MaAuntiza. The food you dished up for me was just too much, I couldn't finish all of it."

"Aii wena, you're just scared of eating. That baby needs enough room to grow and you have to make sure you provide that space for her. Are we clear?", she asks in a reprimanding tone.

"Of course aunty.", I inwardly rolled my eyes.

"You don't know how excited I am for you to have this baby. At least now I won't spend most of my day sitting here at home doing nothing but watching TV. I was getting tired of that same old boring routine.", she smiles happily.

I nod and force a smile, "Yeah I'm happy as well."

She frowns as she looks at me, "Have you told the baby's father that you are pregnant?"

Oh man...how could I forget that she doesn't know how to mind her own business, "Not yet aunty but I'll tell him."

"Hawu! Why haven't you told him yet? Are you trying to keep this baby away from him? He deserves to know about his baby.", she says sounding pissed off.

I sigh, "I will tell him aunty but he just lost a child. We haven't even got the chance to bury his son so I am waiting for the right moment to tell him all this."

I would be inconsiderate and unsympathetic to just drop all this on him now when he just lost a child. Maybe after the funeral I can tell him about the baby but for now, I am choosing to keep this to myself and my family of course. Hopefully my aunt here won't go over my head and do something I am not yet ready to do.

"Asetsembe kutsi nguloko kanye lotawukwenta ngobe nakungasinjalo, ngitakusita. (I hope that's the case because if not, I am going to help you do it.)", she says already getting off the couch.

I don't respond as she catwalks her way out of the living room. I release a sigh of relief once she's out of sight. There is no way I would let her do that. For now, my main concern is making sure that Ndu gets a proper burial. I'll have to go and check on how far things are going in terms of the funeral and everything.

NARRATED

Mayenziwe just arrived at the warehouse where two of the guys who shot at him, his friends as well as family, are being kept. He thought this through, one of these guys will have to do something and donate a part of their liver to his best friend. It's not as if they have been doing any good with the time they were given.

When he gets to the area they are being held captive in, he can't help but smile at the state they are in. Blood is oozing from their faces and they are already missing a few teeth. They are both drenched in water, that's probably why they even decided to speak up after a long two days of silence. He's glad that they are willing to speak up.

"Zithini lezinja ndoda? (What are these dogs saying man?)", he asks looking at Sticks.

Sticks chuckles, "You won't believe this bozza. These two clowns said they had received payment in advance so that they could do the job perfectly."

"Did they say who that person is?", he asks through gritted teeth.

Jeffrey shakes his head, "Not yet bozza. We were about to ask them exactly that. Who gave you that order?"

The guys refuse to say one more word which makes Sticks and Jeffrey angry. They get up off their chairs and start beating up the guys. Once they are both even worse than before with the bruises, one of them starts to cough.

"It was...it was a white man. I don't really know him but he was adamant on making you pay." he coughs blood on the blood.

"Me? Do I know this man? What is his name?", Mayenziwe asks suddenly confused by this revelation.

"Chad I think... that's what the woman called him", the other adds.

"The name of the woman as well, sdwanyamphuphu!! (.you fool!!)", Sticks kicks the one of the snitches.

"Rose, he called her Rose. Please can you let us go now man... we just want to go home.", the other cries.

For a minute there, Mayenziwe is lost trying to think of any Chad or Rose that he might know. It takes a while for him to piece together the puzzle but then it clicks. The mother of his children had been promising to do something drastic and this is definitely drastic as well. How could she do this to them? Their son?

"Is her full name Rosette?", he ignores their plea.

The man shrugs, "I think so but most of the time he called her Rose."

Mayenziwe nods and signals to Sticks, "Get me those two immediately. They will know that they messed with the wrong one."

MAYENZIWE

Sticks has already informed me that he has Rosette and her supposed partner at the warehouse. I am currently at a crossed roads, my son's body is coming from the funeral home later today and I don't know if going to see Rosette is a good choice for me. My anger towards her is indescribable, I fear I won't be able to control myself the minute I set my eyes on her.

I feel shattered, spiritually. She took my only son and I don't think I'll ever recover from that. I will never get the chance to see him grow and become a better man than I ever was. Never will I get the opportunity to see the amount of potential he possessed, nor will I ever get to share any experiences with him.

Yesterday Ndu's classmates came to pay their respects and sang a gospel song for us. It was beautiful and yet very emotional. This morning I had to go with my father and uncles to wash my son's corpse. That has to be one of the hardest things I have ever done. Seeing his lifeless body laying on that embalming table, a piece of my soul shattered. That's why I want to be here when the hearse brings him home.

I know that I have to do this, I have to face Rosette and get it over and done with so I can entirely focus on my son's funeral.

He deserves a father who will pay his last respects to him even though he's not dealing with this situation all that well. My parents have been really supportive and of course, their support comes with clinginess. They are worried that I might harm myself or do something that would make me land in jail.

Honestly, I would do all those things if I didn't have any other children depending on me. They need a stable parent in their lives and I am planning on being exactly that for them...as soon as I get rid of the obstacles in my way. I'm just sad I didn't think of this sooner, but then again, I never thought I'd be in a situation like this.

"Uyaphi ndodana? (Where are you going son?)", my father asks before I can even touch the door handle.

I sigh without turning to face him, "Ngiyaphuma nje baba. (I am just going out dad.)"

The frown on his face makes me want to take back the tone I just used to answer him with, "Bheka indlela okhuluma ngayo uma ukhuluma nami. (Watch the way you speak when you're talking to me.) I know you're hurting right now but we are all concerned about you as your family. You've been shutting all of us out and we are only trying to help."

"Myeni wami kwenzakalani la? Mayenziwe uyaphi? (My husband, what's happening here? Mayenziwe where are you

going?)", my mother's high pitched voice is heard by almost everyone in this house I'm sure.

My father shakes his head disappointedly, "Indodana yakho lapha izophuma futhi ayizange inginike impendulo eqondile lapho ngibuza ukuthi ibhekephi. (Your son here is going out and he didn't give me a straight answer when I asked where he was headed.)"

A stunned expression rests on my mother's face as she sizes me up and down, "Wenzani mfana? Isidumbu sendodana yakho siyeza namuhla futhi usufuna ukuhamba ngaphandle kwencazelo. Phezu kwalokho udelela ubaba wakho. Yini inkinga yakho? (What are you doing boy? Your son's corpse is coming later today and you want to leave without any explanation. On top of that, you are disrespecting your father. What is your problem?)"

A part of me is begging me to keep my mouth shut and just do whatever they want me to do. But the hurt part of me wants me to vent and at least let out what I feel inside. The latter part wins as I turn to face them with my eyebrow cocked and a chuckle of disbelief leaving my mouth.

"My problem is that my son is dead mama and you guys aren't giving me a chance to be by myself. Ever since you guys arrived, I haven't been able to take a minute to just process the loss of

my son. I've been deprived of space these past few days. Give me some space will you!?", I snap at the end.

"Mayenziwe don't you dare-", my mother is surprised by my response and I know it's because I have never acted this way towards them. Not even during puberty.

"Cha mama! Ngiyaphuma, ngizobuya ngaphambi komlindelo wasebusuku. Ngizonibona nonke uma ngibuya. (No mom! I'm going out, I'll be back before the night vigil. I'll see you all when I get back.)", I say before banging the door on my way out.

I don't even turn to look at them as I get into my car, which was parked not far from the house. As I drive out of the house, my heart tells me to drive to Veronica's father's house just so I can get a few seconds to talk to her. I decide not to follow my heart because I know how much I've hurt that woman. Nothing I do or say will ever make her take me back, that I know for sure. So I'm going to have to respect the boundaries she has set for me.

Now that I think about it, maybe all of this is karma running its course. When we lost our baby, I didn't grieve or play the role a father should have played. Today I'm in pain grieving the loss of another child as if the one she was carrying didn't matter. I really wish there was something I could do. I wish I could reverse time and do a lot of things differently. Maybe I wouldn't be going through all of this and maybe, I'd still be with the woman who loved me with all of my flaws.

I loved Veronica, there's no doubt about that. In fact, I still love her, very much so but now there's just no chance of us ever getting back together. If only I had been vocal about my feelings before and not allow matters of the past interfere with the woman I had chosen to settle down with. I did this to myself so there's no use crying over spilt milk.

My mind must have really zoned out as I find myself outside of the warehouse. I guess I was so caught up with my thoughts I didn't pay attention to how fast I was driving. I turn off the engine as I take a deep breath relaxing on my seat. This is it and I'm not willing to turn back now. I have to face this devil of an ex wife and her lousy boyfriend.

I get out of the car and lock it before making my way inside. There are a few guys inside, Sticks's guys, so I greet them as I walk further inside the building. I'm told Sticks and Jeffrey are in the usual room with the lady and the white man. I feel my heart rate pick up as I take one step closer to the room. To avoid second-guessing, I open the door so that I don't chicken out of this at the last minute.

"Sho bafethu!", I greet the two guys already covered in drops of bloods.

"Sho bozza.", both guys respond to my greeting.

The couple is placed next to each other with their eyes blindfolded and mouths gagged with cloths. One would think that I'd be happy seeing them like this but anger is the only emotion controlling me right now. I want to slit their throats open but first...I need to know why they did this.

"Take off their blindfolds.", I gesture to Jeffrey.

He immediately takes off their blindfolds and gags, the first thing they both do is to look around the room. Rosette's eyes widen in astonishment as she realises that I'm the one who is holding them captive. I like this reaction because it proves that they weren't expecting it to be me. The boyfriend included.

"Hello Rose.", I say in a mocking tone, "Surprised to see me baby mama?", I smile devilishly.

ISISA

I have been walking down these hallways for the past few days and I don't mind. For Thalente I would do anything, including giving him a piece of my liver. I wanted so badly to donate to him a piece of mine but unfortunately I wasn't a match.

Somehow, Mayenziwe was able to make things happen and quickly found a donor for my future husband. I don't know how but I was really grateful to him.

The doctors said that Tholente is responding well to the transplant and that he should have been awake by now. Yes, he still isn't up yet even with everything being okay. They said I should give him some time because this might just be his body taking some much needed rest or the body getting used to the new liver. Either way, he should be up any day from now.

I walk into his ward with a cup of coffee in my hands and two chocolate chip muffins. There isn't anybody here which I'm grateful for. I don't want to fake any smiles at the moment. I take a seat beside him and start eating the muffins and drinking coffee. My doctor said that I have to eat in order for me to take my medication and since she knows a lot more than I do, I follow her instructions. After eating, I drink my pills before holding Tholente's hand.

"Things aren't going well mntu wam. Ndumiso is being laid to rest tomorrow and I am sure that Mayenziwe needs your support. He needs you to be there with him as he lays his son to rest.", I sigh.

This is proving to be harder than I thought

"We lost our baby mntu wam, and I am sad that I never even got the chance to tell you all about it. I was just too afraid of the kind of woman I'd become once I was a mother. Not once did I think that I'd lose our baby in such a horrific manner, and for that I'm really sorry my love. It's my fault I lost our baby. If I

had been honest with you, we would have stayed home that night and sorted things out."

The tears I've been trying to hold back drop down my cheeks, "At this moment, I don't want anything else but for you to wake up. I miss your gentle smile and the love you always show me. Just come back to me mntu wam so we can grieve for our baby together. Just..."

I start sobbing as I abandon my chair to lay next to him on the hospital bed with my head on his chest. Even with him being unresponsive like this, I still find peace and comfort just being close to him. He is truly the love of my life and I don't see myself being with anyone else but him. That's why he needs to come back to me.

"Ndiyathemba ukuba awuzange undise nje kulaa ndawo yokutyela uyokucela ukuba ndikutshate kuphela ukuba ufele kum. Ndizothini kumamakho huh? (I hope that you didn't just take me to that restaurant to ask me to marry you only for you to die on me. What will I say to your mother huh?)", I look at his peaceful face and place a peck on his lips.

NARRATED

Rosette can't believe her eyes, how the hell did Mayenziwe manage to pull this off? That is a question she won't even

bother asking him, the look on his face says it all. He doesn't want to do any talking but a lot of killing, this means he knows about her involvement in getting her son hurt. Hopefully he's healing well now and there won't be any need for all this.

"Why did you do it Rosette?", Mayenziwe asks getting off his seat and starts pacing around.

"I don't know what you are talking about.", she answers in a shaky voice.

"Don't lie to me Rosette, I know everything you did but I want to hear you say it.", he says.

Rosette decides to stick to her lies, "I really don't know"

Sticks interjects, "Why don't you cut off her fingers bozza? That way she has no reason to lie to you."

"Ah yes Sticks, that's a good idea.", Mayenziwe smirks evilly.

He reaches inside a tool box and takes out a pair of pliers.

"No no no....please don't do this Mayenziwe. I really don't know what you're on about. Please!", she begs crying.

"Don't beg, it doesn't look good on you.", he says standing beside Rosette.

He doesn't say anything else as he takes the locking pliers and puts her forefinger in first and presses on it. Her piercing

scream is heard from outside the room and it immediately makes the men outside quiet down. Just when she thought he was done, he takes her middle finger followed by her ring finger and does the same thing. She's in excruciating pain, and she can barely think.

Mayenziwe leaves her there and attends to her boyfriend who has a fearful facial expression. He takes out the cloth that was gagging his mouth and only then does Chad gasp for breath. When he hired those men, he didn't think any of them would be snitches. But here he is now, all thanks to trusting amateurs.

"You son of a bi-", a punch lands on Chad's face before he can finish his statement.

He doesn't get the chance to recover as Mayenziwe throws blow after blow of punches on his face as well as torso. It feels good...doing this, he thinks to himself. When he feels like he's had enough of punching, he grabs Chad and pulls him up. He leads him to a table where Jeffrey and Sticks tie his legs and arms to each end. Jeffrey leaves the room for a few seconds and comes back with a box and bucket

"What are you doing?", Chad asks in a trembling voice.

"Giving you the death you deserve.", Mayenziwe says and starts tearing Chad's T-shirt.

The box in Jeffrey's hands starts moving which causes Chad to be even more terrified of the unknown. Mayenziwe takes the box and bucket from Jeff and walks closer to Chad. He opens the box and two huge rats are moving about, he then puts the rats in the bucket and turns it over Chad's stomach. A tickling sensation is what Chad feels as the rats move around inside the bucket over his stomach.

"See you in hell motherfucker.", Mayenziwe says looking into his eyes, "Give me the blowtorch Sticks!"

Sticks does as told and they watch as Mayenziwe turns it on. He moves it around the outside of the bucket causing the rats to get agitated. Since the rats can't stand the heat, they try to find an escape by chewing their way through Chad's flesh, who then starts screaming and yelling in pain. The entire scene is gruesome and at some point, Jeffrey leaves because it's too much for him to handle.

The screaming and yelling for help dies down as the rats have done their job. Mayenziwe peels off the bucket exposing the damaged intestines that are now beyond recognition. The rats scatter as they have now found their freedom. A smile of satisfaction pulls at Mayenziwe's lips as he looks at Chad's damaged organs and the amount of blood he's lost.

Sticks vomits right there and then, as much as he loves violence, this is just another level of cruelty. He doesn't say that to Mayenziwe though who has now turned to Rosette.

"I will tell Londiwe that you died from a terrible accident. You have ruined me Rosette, you killed my one and only son. And for that, I will never forgive you.", he spits.

Shock settles on her chest, "Mayenziwe you have to believe me, I didn't mean for this to happen. I wanted you and your little PA wife to die, not my son. Please.", she cries with mucus running down her nose and tears staining her face.

"What's done is done. Sticks, take care of her. I never want to see this woman ever again, understand me?", he says.

"Sho bozza.", Sticks says still trying to catch his breath.

"Tell the guys to pleasure themselves with her, then kill her. I want you to make her death slow and painful.", he says and walks out leaving Rosette begging for mercy.

VERONICA

"Push sisi!", a nurse violently taps my thigh.

I am not sure if this old woman can tell that I'm struggling to push or what but, I am honestly a second away from giving her a hot slap. This room is starting to get a little suffocating and I'm just trying to get in as much air in my lungs as possible. I've been in labour for almost eleven hours now and I don't think I can continue doing this. I should have opted for a C-section when I still had the chance but no, I wanted to "embrace" the pain.

"Oh my God!! I don't think I can continue doing this.", I huffed as the tears shamelessly rolled down my face.

"You need to keep on pushing sisi or else this child will die from lack of oxygen. Keep pushing!", the old nurse says once more.

I take deep breaths before I resume my process of pushing. My cervix is stretching, that I know for sure and I can only pray that this baby doesn't have a big head. I'm in enough pain as it is. This is the last I'm ever going through this ever again. The women at my pregnancy classes weren't joking when they said the pain is extreme. It's like getting period pains but multiplied by ten.

"I can see the baby's head, a few more pushes and the baby is out. Come on, you can do this.", the younger nurse says.

"I'm tired! I'm really tired.", the sweat is not making things any easier.

"Ma'am, I'm going to need you to push. The baby is in distress and if you don't push right now, we are going to lose both of you.", the doctor says after listening to the baby's heartbeat through the foetal scalp monitor.

"Okay...okay. I can do this.", I try to encourage myself.

"Yes you can, now I need you to give me one big push. You can do this.", she gives me an encouraging smile.

I force a smile as well and nod indicating that I'm ready to do this. I take deep breaths as I summon the last ounce of strength I have and push as hard as I can. This experience isn't great but I'd do anything to see my baby girl. A few seconds later, I hear a piercing little cry and I immediately feel my heart explode in happiness.

"Is that her?", I manage to ask after yelling in pain.

A nurse that was busy wrapping her in a towel nods and brings her to me, "Yes. Here is your healthy baby girl."

I only manage to smile as she hands her over to me. As soon as she's laying on my chest, I can immediately spot her father's

features. She definitely has his nose and the ears as well, I honestly feel betrayed. After nine months of carrying her and eleven hours of intense labour pains, she chose to look like him. The nurse takes her back and I feel like I've been robbed of something.

"Doc...nurse...I don't feel too goo-", is what I say as I feel myself getting drowsy.

"Doctor, she's losing consciousness!", I hear the nurse say before I feel myself slowly slipping into darkness.

ISISA

Life has a way of working itself out, without us putting in as much effort to make things go well. I don't even know where to start. Losing my child was hard and it made me reevaluate everything that I thought I was okay with. Starting with my biological parents, I had to express to them how I felt about what they put me through as a child. Everything they did almost turned me into a toxic human being, just like them.

They were both always drunk and every single time they were, they would take their frustrations out on me. Especially my so-called father who didn't miss a chance to whip me for no reason at all. That's why I didn't reach out to them for years and when I got that call about my mom, I was so sure that

maybe that experience would change things. It's unfortunate that I fooled myself into thinking that.

My father was the first one to lapse back into drinking, and shortly after my mother followed. They are back to their old selves again and this time around, I've decided to not give them anymore chances. Penelope broke my trust after repeatedly begging for my forgiveness. I was a fool to forgive her but an even bigger fool for believing that she would finally choose me, her child, over her husband.

Anything Penelope does shouldn't surprise me anymore but I did feel sad when she did what she did. I have decided to no longer focus on the past but rather, focus on the present and the people who make an effort to be a part of my life. Like my family and friends who have been there for me every step of the way, even when I tried pushing them away. They are my people.

The Jacksons did and still do so much for me, and I know I wouldn't have made it in life if it weren't for them. Jane is the mother I know and will always regard as a mother, regardless of not coming from her womb. She taught me the fundamentals of womanhood, which I didn't even think I needed to know. I realised that blood doesn't make people family, but loyalty, love and consistency make people family.

"Baby, you've been picking at your food for a while now. Are you okay?", Tholente's voice draws me out of my haze.

I snap my eyes in his direction, "Say what mntu wam?"

He smiles and takes my hand in his making me drop the fork, "See? You didn't even hear what I was saying. I said you have been picking at your food for a long time now, are you okay?"

I sigh and shake my head, "Not really, I've just been feeling a bit off these past few days. It must be the recent change of environment, I think the place we've relocated our offices to is a bit dense. There's a pond not far from our offices so maybe I'm not reacting well to it."

"Ah yes my love

that's probably why you've been feeling this way. I'm sure you'll soon get used to the place.", he says chirpily.

I smile as I change the conversation so that we're now talking about how he's doing at work. Tholente doesn't like resting, when he woke up three days after Ndumiso's funeral, it was like a dream come true. He spent only a month on bed rest before he was up and running again. There's nothing the doctor or even I, could say to stop him from going back to work.

Ever since he woke up, I have started attending church. It's been a few months now but I can already tell that I'm going to go far in my belief. God helped me at my lowest moment, even

though I lost my baby, he still gave me back my fiancé and I can't thank him enough for that. My aim now is to solidify my relationship with God Almighty and always turn to him when things are beyond my control.

Thalente tells me that work has been doing great and that he has saved enough to open shop at a different venue. I can tell that this excites him by the way he speaks and the little gestures he does when he describes what the new place looks like. He goes on and on about the things he plans on doing there and I can't hide how proud I am of him.

"When do you think we should get married?", he asks.

"I think I'd like a Winter wedding so I'll have to look at different dates before I present them to you.", I say excitedly.

He nods and pulls me to him, "I can't wait to get married to you."

"And I you, mntu wam.", I wrap my arms around his neck.

He sighs and bends his head further into the nape of my neck and inhales sharply, "You still smell exactly the same way you did when we first kissed...and when we first made love."

I giggle, "How about we recreate the first time we made love to each other then?"

"Sounds like a good idea to me.", he says planting kisses up my neck and gently sucking on it.

My breath hitches, "I love you so so much mntu wam and I can't imagine living without you."

"The feeling is mutual sthandwa sam. You mean the world to me and I promise to be by your side whenever you need me.", he catches his breath as his lips pop after making a love bite.

"We won't make it to the bedroom Thalente, have me right here, right now.", I say already unbuttoning my dress.

He chuckles, "You don't have to say it twice."

MAYENZIWE

"Calm down Mayenziwe, they are probably done by now.", Veronica's father says.

"Then why haven't they come out yet. Maybe something went wrong.", I scratch my head frustratedly.

"You have to calm down. Getting agitated won't help you in any way, instead it will only make you end up getting a cardiac arrest. Just stay put.", he says.

I stop pacing and take a deep breath before sitting down. I'm just worried, Veronica has been in that operating room for over

an hour now. We have been in this hospital for over ten hours and if I didn't have any children prior to this, I would have thought something was wrong with Veronica. It took a long time for her to be fully dilated so that's why we even spent so much time here.

When she called me to let me know that she was on her way to the hospital because her water broke, I was happy. Not only because she was going to give birth to another addition of my family but, also because she didn't hide my child from me. She had every reason to do that but she didn't and I'm so grateful for it.

That's why I wanted to be inside with her when she was giving birth, but I understood when she said she wanted to be alone. I am about to start pacing again when I see the doctor make his way to us. He has a big smile on his face which eases my tense self, I let out a breath I didn't even know I was holding.

"Good afternoon, are you all related to Ms Veronica Sibanda?", he asks.

Hearing him use her maiden name makes my heart ache but I brush it off, "Yes we are. Is she okay?"

"Yes she is, and so is the baby. We had a complication after she gave birth and Ms Sibanda's blood pressure dropped almost making her experience a heart attack. We managed to stabilize

her blood pressure and everything is okay now.", he smiles reassuringly.

I let out a sigh of relief and Mr Sibanda and I shook hands. He congratulates me for having another daughter and I thank him. The doctor tells us that he'll send a nurse to escort us to her room once they have ensured that everything with both her and the baby are okay. He leaves us and we both celebrate by letting our respective family members know about the great news.

My parents are overexcited about meeting the newborn and so am I. I bid them farewell once the nurse comes to fetch us and promise to take pictures for them. We walk to the room and I immediately feel my heart swell. The sound of my baby girl crying evokes a lot of different feelings in me and happiness is the dominant feeling. We walk in and greet her as she's laying on the bed with the baby in her arms.

"She looks beautiful.", I say to Veronica looking at the little angel sucking on her breast.

She giggles a little, "Yeah you only say that because she looks like you. I feel betrayed."

"Well my genes are pretty strong.", I chuckle, "Have you given her a name yet?"

She shakes her head, "No. I thought maybe you'd like to give her a name."

I nod and smile, "Nobuhle. It suits her well and I'm sure Busisiwe will be happy to be a big sister to someone as well. Thank you MaSibanda, thank you for giving me such a beautiful gift."

"You're welcome.", she smiles.

My heart is at peace now that I've seen my daughter, I feel like everything is going to be okay. Life will get better one day and I'll get to a point where I think about Ndumiso and not shed a tear. For now, I will continue loving my daughters, all three of them and make sure that they have everything they need and want. Relationships are things I've decided to put on hold for now since I'm not the greatest decision maker any time I'm in one.

"Awusemuhle ntombazanyane ka baba. (You are so beautiful daddy's little girl.)", I say placing kisses all over Nobuhle's face.

Epilogue

THALENTE

Today is a big day for me. I am finally getting married after months and months of planning. I'd be lying if I said I wasn't nervous, because I feel a lot more than just nervousness. My heart is racing and my palms are sweating profusely, not to mention my armpits which are at least hidden by the jacket of the tuxedo I'm wearing.

This has been something I've been wanting to do for a long time now and now that it's finally happening, I can't help but feel anxious. I might be rushing into marriage only for me to fail along the way which is something I definitely don't want. At least I have my mother here on this special occasion to help me get through this without any hesitation. She is happy for me that much I can tell by just looking at her but, hearing her tell me that herself is even better.

"Don't stress too much ndoda. Everything is going to go well.", Mayenziwe says handing me a glass of scotch whisky.

I take it from him and sigh, "Thank you. I can't help it ntwana, this is one of the biggest moments of my life. I'm having doubts about the kind of husband I'll be in the future. The honeymoon phase will end at some point and I just-

"Hayi ndoda, you have to relax. Take a deep breath.", he pats my shoulder and smiles at me encouragingly.

I take deep breaths and try to pace my breathing while chugging down my drink, "Thank you."

"No problem. Now listen to me, as a person who has been married twice before, all I can say is that you shouldn't try to predict the future. As long as you and Isisa are together, you will have lots of time to figure things out as one. Having expectations or trying to predict the future will destroy your marriage before it even starts. Take each day as it comes but make sure you never stop loving her. That's the only way you'll be able to stick with her no matter what.", he says.

In all my years of being friends with this man, I don't think I've ever heard him say something so wise about relationships. No matter how many times he is unlucky in relationships, he never stops being a hopeless romantic. As much as I know that he has fucked up many of times, I hope he can still find someone to love and who will love him for eternity. Even if that someone isn't Veronica.

"Dlala njayami! Ngiyacala ukuzwa uringa njenge groot man elidenkayo. (That's what's up man! It's the first Time I've ever heard you speak like an old wise man.)", I chuckle trying to avoid getting emotional.

He laughs, "Yeah, I'm growing each day. Take a moment and you'll come down when you're ready. Okay?"

"Okay.", I nod.

He returns the gesture before he walks out of the room. Once the door is shut, I take a moment to breath in and out just to shake off the nerves. As I look into the mirror, I can't help but be grateful of the man I have become. Not once did I ever see myself getting married but here I am today. My business is thriving, my mother is doing better and not to mention, I've found a beautiful loving woman who is prepedated to become my wife.

I might not be a prayer warrior but I believe God is the reason I am where I am today. If it weren't for his love and mercy, I would have died on that hospital bed after being shot and had a destroyed liver. I wouldn't have had a chance to say goodbye to my mother who would have probably lost her mind if I had died. There's just a lot to be grateful for and God is the only one to show appreciation to.

"Uh Thalente, the ceremony is about to start in the next fifteen minutes!", Kamo, Isisa's best friend as well as our wedding planner says knocking on my door.

"I'm coming.", I respond brushing away the invisible dirt on my suit.

I hear his footsteps recede and I know that he's gone. He can be a bit too much sometimes so I'm glad he didn't say anything else as he left. I take multiple deep breaths before getting enough courage to leave the room. As soon as I step out of the room, I see a number of staff members going up and down doing last minute touchups to the decor.

The space for the matrimonial ceremony has already been taken care of, now only the reception area is being touched up. Luckily we chose to do everything at one venue to avoid all the unnecessary traveling that will waste precious time that we don't have. The sooner I'm a married man, the better.

"You look good.", Mayenziwe says as we stood at the entrance of the door leading to the matrimonial ceremony.

I chuckle, "Thanks man."

"Let me go take my seat, I'll see you in there.", he says.

I nod and watch him walk away. Even though my mother is in a wheelchair, I asked her to walk me down the aisle. A few minutes later, Kamo pushes my mother and leaves her beside me. The smile on her face speaks volumes even without an explanation.

"You look so handsome my son.", she says looking at me from head to toe.

"Thank you ma oledi. I'm excited and nervous.", I say squeezing her hand.

"It's going to...go...well. I am proud...of you...son.", she says.

Her speaking still isn't that great but we're slowly getting there and I'm positive she's going to master speaking with troubles in no time. I know she can.

I smile at her, "Thank you once again ma oledi. Let's walk down the aisle, shall we."

She nods as I stand behind her wheelchair to push her down the aisle. Maybe one day she'll be able to use a remote control wheelchair. The doors to the garden open and I think both my mother and I are in awe of this place's beauty.

"Wow!", my mother and I say at the same time.

I chuckle, "Ziyakhala ma oledi. (It's going down mom.) Let's do this shall we?", I see her nod and start pushing her outside.

VERONICA

"You look so beautiful sisi.", Azi says with the baby in her arms.

"Thank you little sis.", I say.

I smile looking at myself in the mirror admiring the dress I am wearing. It's a black dress with a longer hem, and long sleeves

with a high neckline. I settled for black because it's not loud and doesn't attract any attraction, it's subtle. It goes perfectly for the winter weather since it can get very cold. Since it's also very windy, I put on my army green jacket and my short black boot.

"Can you take pictures of the wedding? I want to see what the couple was wearing and just how the venue looks.", she says excitedly.

I chuckle at her excitement, "Okay Azi but I swear, one would think you're the one getting married."

"Maybe I am planning on getting married."

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she wiggles her eyebrows.

I frowned and put my hands on my waist while looking at her, "You're way too young for marriage Azi. You still need to go back to school and get your qualifications before even thinking of marriage."

She tilts her head back and a soft laugh leaves her mouth, "I know sisi, I was just teasing you. Baba would kill me before I even finished telling him I was joking."

I joined her in laughter, "I can excuse baba but imagine what Aunt Nosibusiso would do. She'd freak out and be the one to

beat you up. Okay... I'm done.", I finish applying lipstick on my lips. "You really look amazing hey!", she says.

"Thank you. Please make sure to feed her around two in the afternoon, a small portion though. I know Aunt Nosibusiso might want to overfeed her but please don't let her or else my baby will end up bloated.", I say making my way to her and take the baby from her.

My little girl has grown so much and I still can't believe that she came from my womb. She's so cute and I can't get enough of her chubby cheeks. If someone didn't know, they'd mistake her for Busisiwe or maybe her twin. They look so alike but then the skin tone gives them away, Busi is still light skinned while Buhle's skin is darker like mine.

"I will make sure that she's not overfed, I promise.", Azi says.

I nod while looking at my little angel, "I'm going to miss you Buhleza ka make. I'll be back as soon as possible."

I can't believe my baby is already four months old, she's such a sweetheart. I give her multiple kisses on her face making her giggle and once I'm satisfied, I hand her back to Azi. Everything I'll need or might need is already in purse. I walked out of my room and bid my aunt farewell. She's roaming around my house as if it were hers, if it weren't for the fact that she's

helping me with the baby, I definitely would have sent her back to my father's house.

The drive to the Garden Venue Hotel is smooth and I have no trouble locating it. It's pretty straightforward so I find parking with the valet's help of course and head to the reception. I am then directed to the area where the wedding is taking place which is the garden and I'm surprised to find the ceremony already in progress.

I already know the seat assigned to me which is in the second row so I try to avoid the mini stares and hurry to it. Mayenziwe is placed next to my chair so I immediately take a seat next to him and whisper my greeting to him. The lovely couple is already saying vows to each other and I am sad that I almost missed it. "You're late.", Mayenziwe whispers to me.

"I know, I got delayed by Nobuhle. She didn't want to let go of my breast so I bathed quite late.", I whisper.

He nods and smiles, "That's my girl. You look stunning by the way."

I can't help but blush, "Thank you. Stop staring and let's focus in our friends' wedding."

He lets out a soft chuckle, "Yeah let's do that."

We watch them finish saying their vows to each before they are pronounced husband and wife. They seal it off with a kiss and

we all cheer in happiness as they walk out of the garden. A hug from Mayenziwe catches me off guard but I return it nonetheless. From the garden we are all escorted to where the reception will be taking place.

Mayenziwe takes my hand in his and leads the way with his other arm around my waist. Regardless of our divorce, we were able to find common ground for the baby as well as for Londi and Busi. I am used to them so they visit me from time to time. I must say that the divorce wasn't such a bad idea after all, we've managed to stay as good co-parents.

"You smell good.", he says with a naughty smile.

"No, you better behave Mayenziwe.", I chuckle.

MAYENZIWE

It's late in the evening and Thalente and Isisa are on the dancefloor having a slow dance. Seeing them so in love makes me wish for something similar but I know that right now isn't exactly the best of time. I'm a second time divorcée and I don't think there's a woman out there who wants to be with a man who looks like he can't commit.

Being at a wedding after my divorce with Vee is okay which is good because I was so worried that I'd feel sad at such a joyous occasion. My best friend who has become a brother to me is finally getting married and all I should feel is happy, happy for

him and Isisa. They deserve each other and their love inspires me. Maybe the next time around I'll be a better partner to whoever I'll find, and that is if I do find someone else.

They do say that the third time's a charm. I am happy that I am where I am right now, I've realised my mistakes and I know what not to do in the future. Rosette was an epic fail from the start but I chose to ignore the signs so when things ended between us, I had a hard time moving on properly. I'm glad the bitch is dead now, she deserved for causing my son's death.

Then there was Nikiwe who was a short-term thing but still managed to capture my heart. She then ended things before they even really began and that was that. That was until that fateful trip to Swaziland with Veronica and I saw her as more than just my PA. That jolt of electricity I felt surge through my body was... different and amazing. Too bad I was the one who fucked up this time around and now I'm as single as they come.

"May I have this dance?", I ask Veronica with my arm stretched out to her.

She giggles looking at it before placing her hand in mine, "Yes you may." "Thank you mi'lady.", I fake an English accent.

We walk to the dancefloor and start dancing with everyone else, including the newlyweds. I place my right hand around her waist and the other captures her hand. We dance to 'If I Ain't

Got You' by Alicia Keys and the smile on her face tells me she's enjoying it.

"Are you missing Buhle yet?", I ask to get rid of the awkward silence.

She nods, "Yes, almost all the time. Even when I'm at work."

"Yeah I can understand. But you have to admit, I do make cute babies though.", I say.

She bursts into laughter, "Oh please, get over yourself Mr."

I smile, "You know it's true."

She rolls her eyes at me, "Whatever. I wouldn't mind having another baby with you. And before you say anything.... it's just that I'd prefer my kids only have one father. Not that you're special and all."

"Alright, I don't mind us getting freaky one more time.", I tease her.

"You know it won't be the traditional way this time around, we'll have to go the medical route.", she shrugs.

I nod and sigh with a smile still on my face, "I want to thank you MaSibanda for always being you. Hopefully one day, things will be okay between us." Tears fill her eyes, "Mayenziwe I don't kno-"

I place my index finger on her lips, "You don't have to say anything. Let's just dance for now MaSibanda."

She nods and we continue dancing, to a different song this time around. 'Thinking Out Loud' by Ed Sheeran. I twirl her around a few times and we continue to move around the dancefloor. Hearing her laugh this much fills me up with so much joy and hope that things will be okay between us some day. I take a deep sigh as I pull her closer to me and place a chaste kiss on her forehead. My only wish now is that this night would never end.

.....**The End**.....

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