

GUGULETHU MY HUSBAND'S WIFEcontinuation

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“Don’t go”, he insisted as I made an attempt to take down my suitcase in the closet. I dropped both my hands and head, then exhaled. My back was facing him. Strength was in complete absentia.

“Rather I do. This is still your house at the end of the day”, he added. There was an echoing ache in my heart. Not quite sure of its primary source but something hurt. Something was broken. A marriage with Muzikayise is nothing short of war. He also knows this, hence the need to track my each and every move. Someone is always out to get him, to settle a score with him, to prove a point. I’ll always be caught in unexpected crossfires.

“When did you find out?”, I asked and turned to face him. An elephant task. The pun is intended. I was tired. In every version and form of the word.

He was standing four size 9 steps away from me.
With his hands in his pockets.

“Find out what?”, the question rolled off his tongue followed by a clearing of the throat.

“That it’s possible for us to be spiritually detached and that you can still live that”, I ask and go to drop my weight on the foot stool. He sighs and purses his lips.

“Remember that time you had to get washed in the house by Bab’ Ngema’s wife and I stayed behind with him in the hut?”, he says and looks too me as if waiting for me to remember.

“That long ago? Why didn’t you tell me?”

“I don’t know Betso. I somehow got scared. In every relationship, there’s always the one who is more afraid of losing the other. Simply because they’re the ones who love more. I think I kinda got scared what you’d do with the information had I exposed it to you. I shouldn’t have kept it from you. That was bad decision-making on my side. I’m sorry”

I have no idea how to digest the words that came out of his mouth. How to break down the fact that he thinks I don’t value our relationship the same way he does. A sudden thought vibrates towards

the time I found out that he had a wife. I love him but lately, as I look back, I loved him more than I loved myself. There's a stranger in the mirror. I don't recognize myself anymore and it's nobody's fault but my own. Instead of the goal-driven business woman who has all her shxt together, I allowed myself to turn into a typical housewife stricken by an attention-deficiency disorder. A lot has changed. I've grown backwards, if that qualifies for any sense. I feel I need a break of some sort. Fresh air to clear out all the anxiety that pollutes and leaves residues in the cavity of my chest.

"How many more of your enemies should I expect to turn our lives upside down?", I look up and ask. He exhales. A bit dramatically according to me.

"There's really no way I can know", he says and I get up.

"Mphathi could have killed me", I blurt out and he looks at me like I've managed to coin the dumbest phrase in history.

"Can you honestly stand there and claim all of that to be my fault? You gambled with your life. I actually don't know what's more infuriating. The fact that you refuse to take accountability for your

actions or that you just love entertaining men who find it cute to disrespect me. I am sorry for being the reason that Mphathi was after you”, he says and leaves the closet. I am tired.

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My mom likes saying no amount of regret can push back the hands of time. Therefore, regret is pointless. I need a well-detailed manual on how to feel. It's the next day and Muzi is still not back. I zip up my navy suitcase and pull it off the bed using the side handle to place it on its wheels, on the floor. I then look around the room purposelessly in defeat. I am officially giving up on polygamy. It was never my slice to begin with. I love Muzi. I always will. It is just difficulty wearisome being with in this lifetime.

I then drag the case downstairs and head towards the door in the kitchen. My car is still outside. Where Mphathi left it. Before I could reach for the handle, I then remember. My hand reaches to my handbag and I pull the necklace out of the inner pocket. I look at it briefly before I can carefully place it on the top of the kitchen counter. Then leave.

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I first arrive at Tumi's place. On my teary way here, I called my mother and her phone rang till voicemail. I left it at that. She always says that calling a person more than once will never make the phone ring any louder than it already does. According to her, she's the only allowed to blow up one's phone in disarray. I switched off the car in the parking lot and fell back on my seat. I dialed his number and he answered at the third ring. "If it isn't the prodigal best friend", he says and laughs after sipping on something. "Don't be crazy. The last time we spoke was yesterday in the morning", I say and unbuckle myself out of the safety belt. "Exactly. How do you not see anything wrong with that?!", his dramatic self pounces on me via the phone. I don't have the energy to match his. "You're not okay. What's up?", he softly frets. I slowly breathe to gather myself. "Where are you?", I inquire. "On a date. Remember Marcus? Yeah him. Don't ask any further questions. Tell me what's going on with you", he rambles without pause. "Pay attention to your man. We'll speak once you're done there"

“He’s still at the loo. Bolela mosadi. Are you okay?” (Talk woman). One thing I hate about this question is that if you’re not emotionally stable it will expose you. I sniff and shut my eyes hoping the tears will somehow get lost behind my eyeballs or something.

“Do you honestly want me to drive all the way to Joburg to drag the truth out of you with a fish hook using a fresh mopane worm as bait?”, he firmly says and I somehow manage to laugh in between the sniffs.

“Eeuuww friend!”, I say in disgust as I take out my pocket tissues out of my pocket.

“What has he done? Tell me so I can marinate and deep fry his balls”, he impatiently states.

“I’ll tell you everything that’s happened face to face”

“Wait. Are you coming home?”

“I’m home”

“Then Marcus can wait. I’m on my way there”, he cuts the call before I can argue. I sigh and call him back knowing very well that he won’t answer. I then text him that I’m in his building’s parking lot. My heart almost stops when an unexpected knock hits my window. I was too focused on the Animal

Rescue game I was playing on my phone.

I open the door and scold at him for giving me a fright before hugging him desperately.

“You poor thing. Your eyes are even red and puffed up. Let’s go inside”, he says and we do exactly that.

He enters first and takes off his coat, subsequently throwing it on the couch. I do the same and go down to sit. We first go to the kitchen to make some hot beverages while he tells me about how Marc wishes that I’m okay and stuff. I’ve only ever met him once. I think he’s a great guy but Tumi insists that he lacks “something”. That’s the reason he broke up with him in the first place. Coffee for him and tea for me. We then walk back to the couch area.

“So, what happened?”, he impatiently states while throwing a cushion behind his back, cautiously holding on to his steaming mug. I felt a whole lot better than I did when I first arrived. I explained everything from Mphathi, the argument and tracker. Everything. Word for word on the argument part.

He had to first pick his jaw up from the floor before he could respond.

“Child! I thought I was the one with a highly colorful and eventful life around here”, he says and shakes his head. The jaw couldn’t help but fall back to the floor. No matter how gravely serious a situation may be, Tumi can never let go of this side of him.

“Yeah well. That’s what happened”, I say and sniff. “But friend I warned you about this Party guy”, he says and looks at me with a mildly disappointed face.

“I don’t know bes arg I enjoyed the attention I guess”

He looks at me and sighs. He then gets up, places the mug on the coffee table and kneels in front of it.

“Come”, he calmly states

“What are you doing?”, I ask after he places the palms sandwiches the palms of his hands together.

“You need a divine intervention of some sort”, he says with certainty and I laugh.

“And since when do you pray dear atheist?”, I mock with my neck pulled back.

“I wasn’t all along because society managed to convince me that God does not love me because of my sexual orientation. New information has

been brought forth and I have changed my mind as I'm allowed to. I know better", his newly learned self says and continues to close his eyes, with the exaggerated or rather fake calm he insisted on painting his face with. I laugh and get up to kneel beside him.

"Good afternoon daddy G", that's the first thing he says and I cannot help but explode in laughter. He did mention a new spiritual journey he about to partake 2 weeks back but begged for me not to interrogate him about but who on earth starts a prayer this way?

"What kind of a Christian starts a prayer with "Good afternoon, DADDY G?!", I say while utterly failing to contain my laughter. He wanted to laugh as well but insisted on maintaining a malformed straight face.

"I never said I was a Christian friend. There's a difference between religion and spirituality dear Mary. I'll school you after this. Now, back to me pleading for your intervention...", he says and I try my best to keep it together.

"Daddy, sorry for putting you on hold. As I was saying, whatever is messing with my best friend's love life this badly, today, I declare and decree it

dissolved. If it is too stubborn to dissolve then I am gladly sending it back to where it came from”, he was about to proceed before he was interrupted by a knock on the door. He irritably exhaled and shortly said “God, please hold on one minute” He placed his hands on the top of the table for support and then stood up. He opened the door and just looked at whoever was at the door for them to speak. More like state their case and go. “Hey you. I don’t know if this will be an inconvenience but can you please borrow me a few pegs? Promise to bring them back”, a male voice said and Tumi pulled the door further in and scanned it. What is he doing? “What are you doing?”, the voice inquired in obvious confusion. “Well EXCUSE ME. I am trying to see where in the gravy of this door it’s written “Peg Manufacturing Factory” or you can see the invisible through those glasses?”, he exclaims and I laugh internally. “Look I am sorry about yesterday I know I shouldn’t have...”, the voice’s statement is cut short by a door being closed in his face. “And that?!”, I inquisitively prod in his business with this question.

“Can you believe the nerve of this bxtch?”, I get up from the floor to go sit on the couch with him.

“I have a feeling this is beyond pegs and laundry. What is going on?”

“You know I don’t date closet residents right?”, that’s where he decides should be the starting point of his story time.

“Y-yes. And?”

“We hit it and had fxcked a couple of times. Okay. No problem. I strictly told him that if he is not out yet then we have no future. I said this because he was always ducking and diving whenever we had to go out eat and take walks in public. Okay cool. I decide to put him on parole watch and before I decide to completely red card him. So yesterday, I come back from my call and I find him making out with some girl right in the middle of the passage whereas where were texting 10 minutes prior and he told me he was at work?”

“No...”

“Hee did I not flip? And that’s not the reason why I’m mad. When I go off at him, he turns to the girl and says “Babe, this is the obsessed gay guy I’ve been telling you about” and tells me to chill the fxck out and that he doesn’t want me. I wiped the

floor with his fade when the girl left. Zanka ka tlwaelwa makaka so”, he says and downs the half full cup of coffee on the table which was now certainly cold.

“Block him. He’s not worth it”

“Excuse me block him for what good and charitable purpose? I am not done with him!”, he shots out vehemently and at that moment, I realize how good he is at making me forget about my problems. Even without realizing it nor intention. I also realized how much I missed my old life back which is something of the clear past now because 2 more people are now a part of me and this will forever be so. If I had to regret something, it definitely would not be baking these two.

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I left my car and Tumi drove me home. He didn’t want to come in before he was in a rush and late for his dxck appointment with Marcus. I waved him goodbye at the gate and he honked at me. When I turned, the lights in the house were off. I just concluded that mom was busy with her shenanigans and wasn’t home. I dragged my case in and took out my phone to call her. If she isn’t home then the door is locked and she has the key

with her. If I had told her, she would've left them in the pot plant. As I'm trying to unlock my phone, I hear giggles emanating from inside the house.

My surprised self tests to see if the door is locked and finds that it isn't. I walk to the living room and find the shock of my entire life!

"Ma!", I scream and she quickly lets go of Mr Moko's waist. I place my hand over my mouth and keep my popped eyes at them.

"Bloody hell Filwe did I not teach you knocking etiquette?!", he says and shoves the hanging corner of her towel into the thick fold. He was in his boxers. I immediately put my hand over my sore and cringing eyes and walked away to my room. How is it that there are people with unnecessary abilities like voluntarily moving their ears but I can't 'unsee' things when I desperately need to?

Muzi calls and I contemplate first on whether to let it ring or to answer it. I eventually answer because in as much as things are not working out between him and I, this is the man who plays the strings of my heart like an experienced guitarist.

"Hello?"

"Hey. You left?"

“Yeah I’m at my mom’s”

“Why?”, he asks and I keep quiet.

“So this is it? Are we going ahead with the ceremony?”, he adds. I sigh. Deeply

“I’m afraid so...”

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The sound of the car driving off and the knock on my bedroom door clashed in my ears. There was no vehicle outside when I walked in here so a huge part of me wondered about the reason for that. My mom let herself in when she finally realized I wasn't about the responding games. She first peeped in and said let out a soft "Hey".

"Hey", I said from where I was seated on the bed. She came to sit next to me.

"How long has this been going on ma?"

"A while now. It's quite serious", she informs and subsequently bites her lower lip.

"Quite se.. He has a wife!", I shot out and feel my eyes popped out at her.

"You're a fine to speak ngwanaka", she says and looks away.

"I don't want you to get hurt mama"

"No one is going to get hurt and besides, they're in the middle of a divorce so...", she shrugs.

"You do know that every married man uses that line right?"

"Oh dammit Filwe I am old enough to take care of myself", she snaps.

"When you say "serious", exactly how serious do you mean?", I ask, still staring. Brief silence.

"Getting married kind of serious", she states and my jaw drops.

"And when were you planning on telling me?"

"I was going to tell you when the time was right", she then places her hand on my shoulder.

"Shuuu. You sure as hell can keep a secret woman", I say and a light giggle escapes her lips.

"Anyway, what is a married woman doing back in my house?", my eyes immediately dodge hers after her question.

"Filwe?", she adds. I exhale.

"We're... going our separate ways mama", I say and an unintentional tear drops to my thigh.

"Who did what?", she questions further and I keep

my eyes on my slippers.

"Did he cheat on you?", I can't find the right answers

"Is it something you did?", she continues to investigate. She takes a deep breath and moves closer to him. She then gently pulls my head so that it lays on her shoulder, covering it's side with her skinny-fingered soft hand.

"Okay baby. Whatever it is we can always talk about it in the morning or whenever you're ready. Okay?", I nod.

"But if he was hitting you then I swear..."

"No it's not that. He'd never do that", I correct her before her threats get too far.

"Okay then. Let's go make you something to eat", she says and brushes my tummy lovingly.

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It's one of those morning today. Where my body insists on sleeping but my brain is having none of it. I pulled my phone from under the pillow. A part of me was hoping for some sort of a notification from Muzi but not betting on it. The phone vibrated slightly to show that there was indeed something. I unlocked it with speed only to find that the only notification I was very much blessed

with was a promotional SMS from Vodacom. I was a bit disappointed but that "This is for the best" thought that's usually there to console me through a break up came to my rescue. I read Tumi's WhatsApp message and laughed at his response to my status update. I posted a picture from Instagram and captioned it "What I would give for a chicken mayo sandwich and some guava juice right now".

"At midnight? Remind me never to get pregnant", that was his response. A stench of rotten eggs hit my nostrils and I immediately got up to run to the bathroom. I threw up twice and balanced myself on the cold toilet seat to gather the strength to get up. I washed my mouth and went to fetch my toiletry bag so I can brush my teeth while I was at it. When I was done, I threw a warm robe on and headed to the kitchen. The smell wasn't that bad anymore.

"Morning baby. I heard you vomiting and instantly remembered that you no longer mix with eggs. Askies I threw them outside", she said as she dished up the sausages from her red pan. The plates already had brown bread on them.

"It's okay", I assured and took my seat. She pushed

the blue container towards me and asked me to butter the bread so long.

"So... What happened?", she sipped on her tea waiting for me to spill the beans. I exhaled and stopped stirring mine, which looked more like milk than tea.

"It wasn't working mama. I wasn't getting any attention from him and another man started being a part of the equation", I explained in half truths because I couldn't afford to tell her that my life was in danger. She doesn't even know I was once kidnapped.

"Let me get this straight. He was negligent towards you and you cheated?", she said and made purposeless demonstrations in the air with her teaspoon.

"I did not cheat. But something like that"

"Sounds like a two wrongs situation. So your first obstacle in marriage then you both run in opposite directions?"

"It's not the first. Plus, the secrecy mom it's just too much. I feel like I need a break to find myself again"

"Then have just that. A break. Not an entire divorce", she advises with her baffled frown on her

face.

"It's not working ma. I love him but I no longer want to be with him. I think he feels the same"

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My mom spent the whole day with me today. She isn't saying it but I know she missed me. I missed her too. She washed my hair and braided it into thick cornrows. Muzi should be here any minute from now. She asked me for the second time if I was sure and I said yes. My bag is already packed. It was really unpacked in the first place. Just had a few things taken out. I was wearing a black tight dress, just long enough to cover my knees.

Leggings and purple socks on top then brown sleeper boots to cover the mess. My mom walked into the room as I was folding the black and brown doek in a way that will allow me to wrap it properly on my head.

"He's here", she reports from behind me and I nod without turning to face her.

"You sure you don't want me to come with you?"

"I am sure mama", I say and continue to wrap the doek around my head.

"I still maintain that the two of you can just talk things through and..."

"Let's not do this mom"

"When are you going to stop being so stubborn?",
I grab my coat and ignore her.

"How do I look?", this is what I prefer to say
instead. She sighs.

"Beautiful. As always"

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We get to the living room and find Muzi there,
with his thumbs on his phone. He quickly stands
up when he realizes our presence and asks if I'm
ready to go. I get lost in his eyes for a split second.
This man is gorgeous but that is not going to derail
me from my decision. Love is not enough to
maintain a lifelong relationship. There's no
common ground. The foundation of our
relationship is shaky.

"Yes. Let's go", I lowly say and he turns to look at
my mom before he could say his goodbyes. They
hug and it lasts longer than it should. Giving me
ample time to question whether I'm making the
right choice. We walked to the car in grave silence,
got in and strapped on our safety belts.

"So for you to admit and acknowledge your
wrongdoings you would rather we break up?", he
finally says.

"I thought this is what you wanted as well", I say and keep my eyes at the Mr Sithole's car which just parked a near distance from us. He waves at us with a smile and Muzi honks at him.

"You know what? Let's just go", he says then starts the car.

While on the road, his phone rings and he gets it.

"Manqoba?"

"So you finally found it?"

"Beyibiza for sure"(It was surely expensive)

"No problem. Find a way to restrain it but don't take it home. I haven't told them yet"

"I'll tell them when the time is right. You know how they can get"

"Yeah she's with me"

"Can you give me this pep talk another time?"

"Sharp"

He cut the call and put the phone down, driving into a mall at the same time. He parked the car and told me that he will be back. He came back 20 minutes later with a chicken mayo sandwich, a litre of guava juice and some snacks. I smiled and thanked him for them. He gave me a faint smile back and said "Eat. You must be hungry". I did just that and dozed off afterwards.

"Betso, wake up. We're here", he gently shook me as he unbuckled his safety belt. I lazily opened my eyes and looked around. It was dark but I could establish that we were at bab'Ngema's place. I saw Manqoba's car but the owner was nowhere in sight. The goat was tied to a tree and from the noise it was making, one could tell that it probably knew that it tied for slaughter. I checked for time on my phone and it was 01h23. The main road wasn't that close but I could hear the passing cars from a distance when I made my way out of the car. It was deep freezingly cold. Manqoba and bab'Ngema made their way out of his main house and greeted Muzi first. They greeted me afterwards and baba said the ceremony can begin. Bab Ngema went to his hut to fetch a few things and came back. He instructed Manqoba to go fetch a clean bucket from his wife in the house. He began making those "Hiyeyyy" sounds that freak me out when begins shivering and moving his shoulders up and down. He instructed that we should all kneel down when he placed the metal plate with incense in it. He handed Muzi the match box, told him to recite his full clan names before he could speak and he raised his eyes to me before

he could take it. He took it and set the incense alight. He then sighed before saying anything.
"Mntungwa,
Mbulaz'omnyama,
Nina bakaBhej' eseNgome,
Nin' enadl'umuntu nimyenga ngendaba,
Nin' enadl' izimf'ezimbili ikhambi laphuma lilinye,
Lobengula kaMzilikazi, Mzilikazi kaMashobana
Shobana noGasa kaZikode..."

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Muzi stated and pleaded all that he needed to, under the instruction of bab'Ngema. Bab'Ngema began making the chants and sounds he usually does when communicating with the ancestors. We all looked at him anxiously waiting for him to let us in on whatever was being communicated to him, including Manqoba. I wondered for a brief moment why Muzi preferred not to tell his family about what is really going on. Once bab'Ngema managed to come back to earth, as dark as it was,

the sky began moving, doubling the brutal cold that penetrated and pricked into my skin. The vault of the heavens began roaring then out of nowhere, a thundering lightning descended down and then disappeared. If I did not pee on myself then, then my bladder deserves an endurance award.

“That can’t be a good sign”, Manqoba said with his eyes still fixed to the sky.

“Dedela le mbuzi ihambe” (Untie the goal so it can go), baba said to Muzi with his one hand on his knee. He reeked of exhaustion. Muzi did not protest. He did as instructed while I on the other hand, was trying to piece and stitch some sense together. Does this mean the ceremony is off? I wondered to myself. Bab ‘Ngema went on to explain the very same thing he did before.

“Nginichazele kahle ukuthi angeke nje iz’isebenze lento uma nisathandana nina nobabili. Nihlushwa yinkani. Yileyo nkani enilethe la ukuthi nizongi moshela isikhathi. Ngin’ khuza nje ngomzali manje, abaphansi akuyona into eninga dlala ngayo.

Lungisani umshado wenu nje ngabantu abadala” (I thoroughly explained to you that this will never work if you’re still in love. Your only problem is stubbornness, which is what propelled you here to

come waste my time. I'm now warning you as a parent, ancestors are not something you can play with. Fix your marriage like the adults that you are), he reprimanded then got up to leave with his stuff. A part of me felt like he knew but just wanted to prove a point. "Ningibiza nithi nifun' usizo kanti nifuna ukungishayisha ngezulu"(You called me here saying you need help whereas you wanted to strike me with lightning), Manqoba jokingly said and Muzi laughed. I didn't.

"Hayi cha. Shuthi lento yenu e serious"(This means this union of yours is quite serious), he went on and on while walking to his van. We went to ours and got in.

"I thought we were on the same page", I say when we both get settled on our seats. He exhaled ngand placed his hands on the steering wheel.

"I don't want this relationship to seem to you like you're being held hostage, by me. What I did was to give you what you asked for. What happens after that is beyond my control", he defended and fell back on his back rest.

"In other words, you just wanted to prove a point? Is that why you didn't bother to tell your parents?"

"Yes"

“I am tired of arguing. Tired of fighting. A lot has happened. I just...”, he expresses then sighs.

“Let’s just go home and rest. It’s been a long drive”, he states then starts the car.

“Mind taking me to a hotel? I am not in the mood to be answering questions”, I humbly request and he nods without turning to face me.

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Our hearts get to make the decisions for us and decide our fate, disregarding what my mind feels is right. I’m saying mine because at this point, I have not idea of what’s in his. He’s not fighting it neither does it sound like he wants it either. The break he once mentioned will do us both some good. He ordered some room service and asked for extra blanket. They brought the blanket and I prepared the bed, all this in complete silence. He took off his clothes and I tried my best to get my eyes to avoid the sight of him. He walked to the bathroom in his black briefs. I could hear he was talking to Gugu. From what I’ve heard, she also has no idea what’s going on. Secrecy.

He came back and went straight to bed. I kept switching in between social media apps waiting for the food to arrive. It was evident he had no plans

of eating. The food finally arrived and I dug in. Saying I was famished would be putting a lot of disrespect to the hunger that had me by my non-existent nuts. Muzi was already gone in sleep when I was done eating. The suitcase was left in the car. For reasons only known to forced silence and exhaustion. I wasn't about to sleep in underwear only because I know what's good for me. And my genitals. I walked over to the chair he had carefully placed his clothes on and pulled his t-shirt to be used as a nightie then also slid into bed, making sure to keep the required distance between our bodies. I folded my arms across my chest and tried to get some sleep. A lot was going through my mind, including my mother's escapades and shenanigans . Instead of retiring for the day, my brain decided to be busy and over think. My train of thought then ventured onto submission. I began questioning whether or not I was submissive enough. Is Gugu the same? I extinguished those thoughts before they could mold me into the type that submits to bullshxt in order to be applauded as what patriarchy coined as wife material.

Just when I was busy putting out the fires in my

head so I can also get some sleep, I felt his warm hand wrapping itself around me, resting on the space between my tummy and my breasts. He pulled me closer and snuggled up against me in his sleep. A random thought of how he never mixes up my name and Gugu's whenever he fucks or makes love to me let itself into my mind, unsolicited. Does his brain manage to also compartmentalize the right moans and groans when he is with her? I genuinely bit off more than I can chew with this sharing-a-man business. Bull. The excess was bitten off on my behalf, without my permission. When I finally put a full-stop to my over-thinking, I realized I had placed my hand over his.

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When I woke, we were still in the same position. I turned back to see if he was awake and found that he was. Wide awake.

"Good morning", the greeting came from me.

"Morning", he coarsely said and planted a kiss on my neck. I closed my eyes because it wasn't a good idea but I received it anyway.

"How did you sleep?", he added.

"I slept well. How did you sleep?"

“Sleeping next to you has a calming effect on me, I can’t say the same about about another particular part of me though”, he said and I laughed out loud.

“Stop it”, I reprimanded and moved my behind slightly away from his erected front. He laughed as well.

“I’m sorry”, he confessed. I kept my silence. Not out of spite but simply because I had no idea what to say.

“I know I should’ve given you more attention and found a way to afford you more of my time. I slacked and there’s no excuse for it. I also shouldn’t have invaded your privacy and tracked your movements without your permission. I just needed you to be safe. I’m deeply sorry mommy”, he added.

“I’m sorry to. I’m sorry for being the gateway for other men to disrespect you”, I let out and he sighed.

"But we can't be together for now. That break we once spoke about? I think we both need it now", I further my statement. There's silence for a shortlived moment.

"You sure?", he asks and rubs my shoulder over his

t-shirt with his chin and places it there.

"Yeah. I'm sure. I need to find myself again so I can be an adequately healthy partner for you"

"You do know that I only want the best for you right?", he says in a tone that suggests that he's hoping this is something I already know and am certain of.

"I know. I've just been neglecting a lot that has to do with my personal growth lately, including my business"

"Whatever you decide to do and whichever boundaries you decide to introduce, I will try my best to support you", he lowly says with his arms still wrapped round me and his chin on the shoulder.

"Thank you", I appreciate and rubs his arm.

"Let's get out of bed now and go get you something to eat"

"I'm in desperate need for some chicken mayo sandwich right now", I mimic a cry and he laughs.

"Even if you were craving for a freshly slaughtered elephant you know I'd get it for you right?", he says and I laugh.

...

[Hours later]

The drive home was not as bad as when we were travelling to KZN. It had an element of awkwardness because well our relationship is hanging lightly in the middle of separation and a place of finding our way back to one another. He dropped me off and said he's headed to his usual hotel to get some rest before he could drive to Johannesburg. He then pecked me on the lips and promised to call. I got into the house and explained to my mother the whole ordeal and she didn't know from which angle she was supposed to grasp it from. All I needed was a proper nap so I resorted to that instead of staying to make her understand something I do not understand myself. We all know what they say about the blind leading the blind.

My nap was disrupted by the altercation that was boisterously taking place somewhere between the kitchen and the living room. It took only a few seconds to listen for me to establish that my father was in the house and as per usual, the owner wasn't happy. I dragged my self out of bed and allowed my feet to fall into my slippers.

"Ya bela ketele kana. Immediately e tima mo, otloba mpyeng! In the dog!"(The kettle is boiling.

You're gonna be in deep shxt once it's off), my mother lashed out to a pleading Sam.

"Ntswele motse. Gawa planta ngwana kamo!"(Get out of my house. You didn't plant a child in here!)

"Just one minute. 60 seconds fela then...", he continued to beg.

"You can convert time but you couldn't convert yourself from being a deadbeat to a responsible father?!"

"Violet please...", he was about to go on his knees before he could see me approaching from the passage.

"What's going on?", my half-asleep self questioned.

"Nothing worth waking up for. This one was just leaving", my mother statement was borderline calm and threatening.

"Can we talk nnana? Please it's important"

"What language do you understand mara wena? Whiplash first additional language?!", mom interjected as I was about to respond.

"Violet please calm down", he calmly requested and my mother looked at him like she was one second away from spitting venom straight into his eyes.

"It's okay mama. I'll speak to him", I try to be the calm to the storm only to earn the same furious look from my mother.

"What harm can it do?", I say and raises her chest only to drop it a second later.

"Okay then. Your choice. I'll be in my room. Scream if he tries anything funny", she instructs and walks. A part of me wanted to laugh but the intensity of the moment was not allowing me to. We walked over to the living room and took our seats on opposing couches. He swallowed hard before he could speak.

"First of all, let me apologize for only showing up now. I was trying to get in touch with you and your mother wouldn't let me", and that's how he ruined his apology.

"Your apology comes with blameshifting papa. It's null and void", I state and look away. He squashes the blue washed-out Nike cap in his hands.

"Also, you only tried when I no longer needed you. I was already a grown woman when you tried", I say and shoot an unwavering stare at him.

"I can't erase the past baby girl. What I can do is to fix the future"

"And if I told you that my future is fine without

you?"

"We are both not getting younger Tsotso. I don't want to die and leave you with regret", he says and I scoff.

"Regret? Papa you made the decision to keep yourself out of my life, unprovoked. Now you're trying to insert yourself back into my life, unprovoked. I am sorry but a caring parent would wish and speak peace into their child's life and that's exactly what I have without you, peace"

"Every child needs a male figure ngwanaka. I know I..."

"With all due respect, how are you only realizing that now?", I ask and he sighs. Evidently speechless.

"I was doing just fine without you. Even where I stumbled I managed to dust myself and get up, without you. You have no idea what pain came with listening to my then friends saying all sorts of things from "Papa onlata ka koloi afterschool", "Papa onreketse 123", "Papa ore ABC". It wasn't the material things I yearned for. I just needed your presence. I would've been fine and happy with you walking me home but no, you chose women and booze over me!"

"I was irresponsible and no where ready for a child. I wasn't going to be a good father even if I had stayed"

"Lehumo and I are almost the same age but you raised her. WHY?", I shot out and he dropped his eyes.

"It was nice seeing you papa", I calmly say and get up to leave, leaving him there.

I get to my room and dial Tumi's number to vent. He answers but only to let me know that he can't talk and promises to come see me in the evening.

...

"I'm outside. Please come so we can talk?"-

Kgokagano. The SMS reads and I empty out my lungs in exhaustion. I drop the phone on the couch and insert my hands into the pockets of my night gown. Mom is out again with her not-so-hidden anymore sweetheart. The phone rings minutes later and I decline the call. "Stil at the gas station", another message came through but from Tumi. I switched off and changed the channel. Moments later, the front door receives a knock. I ignore hoping he will go away but he begins shouting how he won't leave till he has spoken to me. I began regretting the update I uploaded on Instagram

praising my mom's homecooked samp and tribe. That's what definitely let him know about my whereabouts. I get up before the neighbor's start questioning and stamping their own conclusions. "What do you want?", I make sure to say this in the most irritated way possible.

"Muzi is not who you think he is", he reports with certainty and I push the door to close it. He pushes it back and says "Please listen to me Betso I would never forgive myself if something was to happen to you", his tongue rolls out all these words I wish he could take with and leave my mother's doorstep.

"Is this the revenge you were talking about?", I ask with my one hand in my pocket and the other steadfast and ready to close the door.

"No. Well sort of. The point is, you're married to a murderer. I have proof", he says and I freeze. How much does he know?

"KG please go home and sleep", I say and try to close the door. He pushes it back once again.

"Betso please let me in so I can explain to you what I'm talking about?", he begs and my eyes drop to my rabbit shoes. What proof is he even talking about? I let go of the door and he comes in,

rubbing his hands together as if he just came out of a refrigerator.

"Aren't you gonna offer me some coffee?", he says and walks to the living room where the consistent back-to-school PEP advert was playing.

"Get to the point will you?", I say and he settles down on the couch.

"Remember when I said he sent his brother to do his dirty work for him?"

"Yes and?"

"Well, I did a bit of digging and found that, that very same brother had a twin", he explains and I feel the blood in my heart clotting and freezing.

"Okay?"

"That twin was murdered by his own brother. Your own husband", he states as if he just cracked and solved an ancient mathematics equation.

"Where do you get this?"

"I told you. I did some digging and this what I happened to stumble upon. He beat him to death and the case disappeared into thin air", he continues and I feel my temples starting to itch. That's not what Muzi told me.

"That can't be right...", I say and he looks at me funny. Before I can confirm or deny to anything,

another knock sounds from the front door. That should be Tumi. Saved by the bell! I quickly get up to go get the door. I could literally feel a bit of hot pee slowly letting itself out when my eyes landed on his face.

"I'm sorry to ambush you like this. I know I said I'll respect your boundaries and stuff but your phone was off and I needed to talk to you before I could leave. Sthandwasami I honestly fxcked up by suggesting we take a break. It's never gonna work for me. You're all I think about and after everything that's happened I'm ready to start afresh. I don't know, we'll take baby steps or some shxt but I can't allow us to grow apart even further", he rambles without blinking and all I'm thinking and even praying about is that Kgokagano does not come out of that living room. He takes my hands into his when I start to tear up.

"I'm sorry. Okay. I'm deeply sorry. I'll try to fxck up less and YOU'VE GOT TO BE KIDDING ME?!"

Insert 99.

Kgokagano appeared from behind me and Muzi looked as though a ghost had thrashed him with a boiling slap across his face. For the confounding reason that my invited guest was now barechested. What on earth is he trying to achieve?

"Oh. It's you...", he said and gave Muzi a provocative smile. I bit my lower lip so hard I began tasting blood.

"Baby, I swear. I didn't... he arrived here announced claiming to have proof that..."

"Umtheth'wakho awulaleli ne boy?" (You don't listen do you?), Muzi shoved his frustrated sentence into mine. Tumi arrived with a bottle of gin in one hand, Chicken Licken takeouts in the other and a dropped jaw.

"If it's true that I don't whatchu gonn do? Beat me to a dead pulp just like you did to your brother?", Kgokagano sneers from behind me and I bury my face in my hands. Muzi had his eyes widened when I raised my head to look at him. He probably thinks I'm the one who told him about Mbuso whereas it's the other brother that's being spoken about

here. If any of what Kgokagano is saying is true then it would mean Muzi killed both brothers by hand? Muzi took careful steps into the house and went to stand in front of Kgokagano.

"Warrishephening?", Tumi finally asks, nonplussed. I ignore him and walk over to the two before a volcano could erupt in my mother's kitchen.

"Baby, I swear. Kgokagano arrived here announced and said he..."

"Are you going to be able to finish whatever it is that you want to start?", Muzi interrupts me again and hisses at Kagano, at close range, eyes on lock.

"You belong behind bars. I'd be damned if I allow you one more second in Betso's life so you can harm her too", KG hisses back.

"I don't need your supposed protection. Take a hint and leave me alone. Please. You're ruining my life", I say to Kgokagano whose immediate hurt becomes evident through the mirror of his eyes. Muzi was still steadily standing there. The whole scene felt like the realized *deja vu* that it was. Kgokagano scoffed and went back into the living and came back with his head sliding down his white t-shirt.

"For your sake, I hope you won't be the one he

slaughters next", he warns to me and walks out, gets to the door and grabs the gin bottle from Tumi's hand before he could march to his car.

"Hey you can't just...!", he tried defending his abducted alcoholic companion but I shook my head so he lets him go.

"Arg he needs it more than I do anyway!", his irritated self walks while my impatient self waits for Muzi to get done on his phone so we can talk. Who is he calling?

"Bafo, we have a problem", he reports and raises his eyes to a curious Tumi then walks out of the house till on call. I try to follow him but Tumi pulls me back.

"Are you going to explain what the hell is going on or should I take my half of the wings and wait for you to call?"

"Emanyana tuu!", I snap and go out to Muzi who was still on the phone. I step on the moist lawn and approach him. The call was over when I got to him.

"Can we talk? Kgokagano said something I think you should know"

"Not now", his impatient self says and shoots off.

"Where are you going?!", I scream to his back and

scurry behind him. He does not reply. He instead climbs into his car and speeds off. A huge part of me is almost sure of his state of mind but another refuses to believe he would.

...

I walk back to the house and find Tumi still in the kitchen.

"I made you some chamomile tea", he says and lifts the cup and its saucer in the air. I close the door in defeat and stand against it. I raise my brow at the bottle of red wine on the table.

"Where did that come from?", I inquisitively ask.

"In one of these cupboards", he says and walks to the living room with the wine and the tea plus the huge and wide wine his finger had curled around. Wine in my mother's cupboard? Plus wine glasses? My mother doesn't drink. He put everything on the carpet and disappeared down the corridor. He came the came back with one of my high heels. I guessed to be used as a cockscrew and I guessed correctly. I couldn't stop pacing up and down. My hand was moving to different parts of my face while the other held on to my fat waist.

"Sit down you're making me dizzy", he said from the floor with his legs crossed and his heels

underneath his butt, carefully beating the cork stopper with the back of the shoe.

I exhaled and dropped myself buttflat on the floor. He pushed the tea towards me and I took a sip. It was already cold so I spewed it back into the cup. Tumi was really playing with hell fire. He used my mom's respected tea cup and is helping himself to her wine. I dread her arrival. He pushed the bag of wings towards me when I did not budge with the tea.

"Food is not going to help me right now friend", I say and take out of my phone to dial Muzi's number. The phone was off. I tried my best to cover all the bad thoughts in my head with a large black garbage bag. Tumi finally managed to get access to the liquid treasure. He made sure to pour himself a generous amount of it into the glass.

"If I tell you, promise you won't tell?", I clutch on tightly to my cellphone.

"Name one secret of yours out of the millions I keep in my chest that has ever slipped out. Just one", he says and looks at me with a bored face.

"Kgakagano was here to tell me that Muzi killed his brother with his bare hands", I explain and he

explodes in laughter.

"Out of all the stunts he's ever pulled this takes the cup", he says and continues laughing.

"No the thing is, that's not the version that Muzi gave me after he killed the one that had kidnapped me a while ago", I say and Tumi freezes with his lips on his tilted glass. He grabs the remove from the couch, presses and points it at me.

"I was rewinding. Come again?!", he says and empties the glass down his throat.

"It's a long story. Right now I'm worried that he might be after Kgokagano because he's some sort of a loose end now", I say and grab my upper lip with my teeth. This involuntarily happens when I'm nervous.

"You cannot be worried about Kgokagano right now when your own life was in danger and YOU FUCKING DID NOT TELL ME BXTCH?!", he yells and I shut my eyes.

"I didn't because it is something I want to forget and never revisit. Ever again", I emotionally explain and he stands up to come sit next to me, draws me into a hug.

"This is no way to deal with trauma. I don't care

what you say. You have to see a professional", he empathizes while rubbing my shoulder with his chin on my head.

...

Mom sent a text and notified that I shouldn't wait up. Tumi and I cleaned up the remnants of the wings and the dishes then went to bed. I kept tossing, turning, grabbing my phone, dialing and forcing myself to do breathing exercises. Both Muzi and Kgokagano's phones were off. I had one option left to exhaust and I was going to use it. I did not care whether it was midnight or not. It rang and I crossed fingers.

"Manqoba hi"

"Makoti. You should be asleep"

"Ukuphi uMuzi?"(Where's Muzi?)

"Don't stress yourself about that. Go to sleep okay? Ngiphelelwa yibattery la we'll talk", he calmly said and shortly cut the call. I felt like screaming my ribs out!

The sun set and invaded the privacy of the night. I was still wide awake. I resorted to grabbing a polar fleece and wrapping it around my shoulders so I could sit on the edge of the bed. Lying on my back made it feel as though I couldn't think properly.

The phones were still off. This was now weighing heavily on my heart. Tumi on the bed and exhaled deeply.

"How long have you been sitting there?", he says and I wipe the subtle tear that befell my cheek and sniffled.

"I couldn't sleep. What if they...? What if he's dead...?", I turn in his direction and yelp

"Tumi what if my man is dead?!"

"Which one?", he asks in what looks like concern.

"I'm kidding. I'm kidding. Surely he's fine"

"This is not the time for jokes. Kgokagano is not much of good samaritan either. He has a gun!", I exclaim and he gets out of bed, dragging all the blankets with him. He comes to sit next to me and says "Look, even if he is dead, I'M NOT SAYING HE IS, but even if he is, sitting here calling and driving yourself nuts is not going to resurrect him. Get some rest. You're pregnant. Stop behaving like this body is still yours to wreck without consequences. You can't lose 3 people at once...", he says and we hear the front door unlock.

"Quick. Get into bed before you have to answer to madam detective because you know she will instantly see that something is up", he says and

spreads the blankets on the bed. We both get into bed and he cuddles me from behind. The door shortly opens for a few seconds and closes afterwards. Where is he?

...

The progressed into the afternoon and there was still no sign from Muzi nor Kgokagano. My stomach repelled heavily against food and hugged on tightly to this cold unpleasant feeling that just wouldn't leave my core. I called Thando hoping she would be of some kind of help.

"Hey sis"

"Hey. Are you still in Joburg?"

"Yeah but I'm leaving for Cape Town in a few hours. If only this husband of yours would arrive. He promised he'd be back by now to take me to the airport"

"Surely he's on the way. I was just wondering if we could catch some lunch sometime this week but it's okay. Next time"

"Ncaaa. That's the first thing we'll do when I get back. I promise", she said and I forced a polite laugh which came out very weakly. We ended the call and by now the blood in my heart was freezing.

...

It was now dark and Muzi's phone was still off.

Thando was online on WhatsApp.

"How was your flight?", I pressed send and she immediately blueticked then started typing. Then stopped. This can't be good. She started typing again 3 minutes later.

"It was okay. I almost missed it though", she replied with a laughing emoji.

"Why? Was Muzi late?"

"No I almost overslept. If he didn't wake me up then it was tickets", she replied and just that simple text felt cathartic for me. I sighed in relief and we continued with the frivolous chat. I tried calling him but his phone was still off. Maybe nothing happened between him and Kgokagano. Maybe he just sped off to cool his head.

I plugged in my phone on the charger and grabbed my laptop and modem for distraction. I hopped every social media absentmindedly till I landed in my emails. I drew my head closer to the screen at an email I received yesterday in the afternoon.

With attachments. It was a scanned document of what looked like an old and delapidated docket.

Plus a recording. I tried reading the document but

it was too faded and old for me to see clearly. I played the recording instead. There were two voices on it. An interrogative male voice and one of a female, who was very emotional.

Him: You still maintain that this is a common rape case although your facts don't correlate, ma'am?

Her: (Sobbing and sniffing), YES!

Him: When I questioned you earlier you said he came in through the back door and found you cooking then violated you. Now you're saying he was ALREADY in the house and found you cleaning. Which one is it?

Her: (Still sniffing with a tremble in her voice), This was a traumatic experience for me. I don't quite remember what happened!

Him: Well, I'm gonna put it to you that, you were sleeping with this man under full consent and now that he's dead you want to cry sexual assault!

Insert 100

I paused the recording and took a deep breath. I ravaged through my laptop bag looking for

earphones so I can hear it well. The female voice really sounded familiar. After plugging them in I rushed to press 'Play'.

"I'm going to ask you one more time to come out with the truth. Just save the both of us the time and the trouble for yourself", the man sternly commanded and the lady continued sobbing and crying.

"Keep doing this and you'll stay in jail longer than you're supposed to. There's nothing that can spare you unnecessarily jail time than cooperating with the police. Work with me", the man continued trying to haul the truth he so much believed the lady was hiding. I could hear her exhaling. It took a while for her to hear an utterance from either.

"Okay. I was. I was sleeping with him", she lowly said.

"Come again? Louder this time?", he prodded.

"I said I was sleeping with him!", she snapped.

Gugu?

"Okay. Start from the beginning...", the man I assumed to be the detective said.

"Are you gonna let him go?", she sniffed and asked

"Depends", he said.

"I think I need a lawyer", she said and the

detective scoffed and muttered an indistinct statement. Quite a cocky man.

"Sure", he said and the recording reached the end, with my hand on my mouth. I don't know what's more shocking. The fact that Muzi lied to me or the fact that Gugu is capable of cheating. If that is her in the recording.

"You're married to a monster. I can't possibly make all of this up. But knowing you'll probably think all this is fabricated when it's clearly not. Get out of that marriage before it is too late.

071 456 3386(Detective Themba). That's the number to dial if you don't believe me. Be warned though. There's a hefty price to pay for his truth. If you'd rather waste your cash than just plainly believe me then knock yourself out. I love you.

Always will.", the email read. So couldn't just wait for me to read the email he'd to rock up on my mother's doorstep like that? Impatience. A tool of satan. I listened to the recording one more time trying to establish if it is really Gugu in it. The woman was way too emotional, beyond voice recognition.

...

"Oya kae? Nna waitse gake bone boroko kadi up

and down tse tsago? O senkana le eng gone?!"(Where are you now going? I'm not comfortable with all these ups and downs that you're doing? What is it that you're searching for with these to and fro's?), my worrisome mother said standing at my door as I packed my suitcase. "There's something important I really need to attend to", I say and pull the case down from the bed and exhale in exhaustion.

"Mnk!", he exclaimed and shook her head.

"I'll be back. I promise", I say and kiss her cheek. She pulls me into a tight warm hug and says "I'm really not comfortable with you leaving but because you never listen to me... Just, drive safely", she said and sighed.

"I will mama", I say my goodbyes and drag the case out. I got to the car and then drove off.

...

I finally got to Joburg and drove straight to Muzi's house. I rang the intercom in hopes that he was inside the house. If he wasn't then I was going to wait until he came back. He wasn't about to ignore me forever. I rang it again and the gate slid open. I got into the car and drove in. I was about to knock when he opened the door so my bent index finger

was left hanging in the air till common sense alerted that I should drop it. He was barefoot and topless in grey sweatpants with the white rubberband of his briefs exposed.

"Hi?", I finally said.

"If you've come to fight then I am not in the mood", he states and I notice his black eye and ripped lip. I breathe out, anxiously.

"I'm not. I've come to apologize and set things straight", I say and he keeps his eyes on me for about 10 seconds before gesturing with his hand that I can come in, which I did.

"You shouldn't have driven all the way here. Can I make you something to eat?", he says and stops in front of me.

"No I'm fine. I really needed to talk to you and you were avoiding me", I say and he keeps walking. We get to the couch area and he drops his whole weight on one black leather couch and sniffs like a flu-stricken patient. I also take my seat.

"Kgokagano came to my house and said he has proof that you're not who I think you are and..."

"You ever respected me you wouldn't have given him then time of day to perpetuate his nonsense", he says with and sneezes.

"You should dress more warmly", I suggest.

"Do you feel safe here?", he asks and I frown in confusion.

"What do you mean?"

"Do you feel safe being here, with me?", he reiterates with emphasis.

"I've never felt unsafe with you", I assure. He sighs. Then silence.

"I don't know why he appeared topless. We didn't do anything. I never touched him", I feel the need to say.

"I know", he says and stands up to fetch his phone from the glass stand next to the TV where he was charging it.

"You know?"

"Yeah. He confessed", he raises his eyes to mine after saying this and goes back to typing whatever he was before I asked, still on his barefeet. At this point, the curiosity in me is dying to know what went down between the door of them.

"Did you...?", I can't bring myself to finish the sentence. He raises his eyes to mine once again and keeps them there this time.

"Beat him to death?", he feels this is the missing piece to my sentence. Which it was. I nod meekly.

"No", he says and I feel something drop down from my heart down to my stomach.

"I drowned him", he confidently said and waited for my reaction. I blinked a few times before my brain could reset to normal functioning.

"Whh.. Why is taking a life so easily doable for you?", I manage to piece together the question that has been ringing at the back of my head.

"It's not "easily doable". If it was I would've been a serial killer but if it needs to be done I do it", he says and goes to sit back on his couch.

"Your brother? What happened there?", I ask and pray for a different answer to the one I was expecting.

"Stop digging. I'm trying to be up front as I can with you but that's too far", he says and Manqoba walks in.

"Yikes! What happened to you?!Sawubona koti", he says to Muzi then turns towards me to greet.

"Stop clowning. She knows", Muzi says, picks up his phone and stands up.

"I'm really not in a good space to do this right now so this one will take you home. Leave the car and drive in his. I'll bring it later or tomorrow", he says and walks out.

"Let's go", Manqoba says and I follow him out. We first take out my bag out of my car before we can leave.

[In the car...]

The silence was awkward. Luckily I was seated at the back.

"He's not a monster you know?", he says and my mind trails off. Both my heart and mind know that he's not. He can't be. He is kind. Loving. Generous. Caring. Compassionate. Responsible. That's the him that I know. But the truth can wrap up a heap of lies and vice versa. He might not be one but one thing for sure, there is one that lives inside of him.

"Yeah. I know", I respond and as he steals glances of me on the rear view mirror. We finally arrive at my house and he walks me in.

"If you need anything, I'm a phonecall away. Only if it's serious though. Cravings and all, you can send your people around", he says and I laugh. By my people he's surely referring to Nombi and my hired driver. She appeared from upstairs and greeted us both.

"Ube right", Manqoba said and walked out.

"Are you sick?", Nombi curiously asked, from Manqoba's parting statement.

"I think I'm coming down on flu or something. Are you okay? How have you been?", I opened the fridge to get some water waiting for her to respond.

"I've been alright. Except, I've been buying groceries with my own money so you need to reimburse me", she says and I almost choke on the bottled water due to laughter.

"Haibo! Who's been eating those groceries?", I ask and she shakes her head to indicate to intent to negotiate.

"It is your house I've been taking care of"

"But I sent you an SMS giving you the permission to go home"

"And I decided to stay and take care of your house. Now you owe me", she defends and I continue laughing.

"In fact I should be the one charging you for rent", I jokingly say and she comes down from the rest of the stairs to hug me, laughing.

"I missed you", she says and I tell her the feeling is mutual. My mind travels back to everything I shouldn't be thinking about mid-hug. We break and she offers to make me something to eat. I agree and pull out the handle of my case. She

offers to take it and I allow that too.

I get to my bedroom and take out my cellphone. My fingers pave the way straight to the dialler and I stop for some reason. I start pacing up and down hitting the back of the phone continuously on my palm. Fxck it. I dial and it rings. It counts seconds to show that it's answered but there's no sound coming from the other end.

"Hello?", I go unresponded. There's not even a static to show that the network is completely fine.

"Hello is this detective Themba?", I persist.

"Who's asking?"

Something about his voice shoots spiky shivers down my spine.

Insert 101[

My voice suddenly went on an impromptu strike.

"Can I help you Ms?", he impatiently asks. My gut screams "This is not a good idea!"

"I need to ask you about an old case involving the murder of Mr Khumalo", I go on, nervously.

"Mr Khumalo?", there was a sudden peculiar

interest tangled around his question.

“Yes. He was apparently murdered by his brother?”, I ask and he clears his throat.

“Who are you?”, he asks.

“I’m afraid I cannot disclose that. Can you help me or not?”

“I don’t speak to ghosts”, he sharply says and I start sweating. What was I thinking?

“It’s okay sir thank yo... hello? Hello?”, he had dropped the phone in my ear. How rude. I suck my teeth out of irritation and throw the phone on the bed and it bounces once. I need a hot shower!

...

The shower managed to put a leash around the violent neck of my nerves and irritation. I called my mother and we spoke for a couple of minutes before I could head downstairs to have something to eat in my fresh pajamas. Nombi’s hand is rather too strong when it comes to the fabric softener. She literally drowns the clothes in it. The only thing on my mind was frozen, mixed fruit yogurt. The craving was very distracting. I got to the kitchen and found Nombi seated on the table having a sandwich with her eyes glued on her phone screen.

“Is that supposed to be my sandwich?”, I ask playfully and she laughs till she chokes.

“You were taking forever nawe”, she tried justifying and I shook my head while searching the fridge for my desired delights. There was no yogurt. I felt my heart crack slowly before it could crumble into forty seven pieces. My eyes began wetting up and I quickly wiped them.

“Hawu. Kwenze njan?” (What’s wrong?), Nombi asked as with a mouth fully occupied by bread. I quickly shook my head to falsely indicate that nothing was wrong but I was hurt. She took a sip from her glass of orange juice before she could come stand behind me. I closed the fridge and put my palms against it for support. She placed her hand on my shoulder and gently squeezed trying to comfort me.

“Did I say something wrong?”, she asked in concern and I shook my head and sniffed.

“Is it because I ate your sandwich? I’ll make you another one?”, she suggested and I shook my head once more. The tears fell to the floor and at that very instant, a patient knock sounded from the door. Nombi yelled for them to enter and I quickly wiped my tears and sniffed away the blockage in

my nose.

Muzi pushed the door open and the wayward Nombi started rambling about how he made it in time and that I was crying “hysterically” over a sandwich that she ate.

“Huh?”, Muzi was beyond confused when he placed my car keys on the table. He then let out a smile-infused sigh and told Nombi “He’ll take it from here”. She picked up the plate that I was apparently hysterical over with her juice and left. He then pulled me into a hug and brushed my arms.

“Siphelile isinkwa yin kant?” (Is the bread finished?), he lowly asked.

“I don’t know”, I said and sniffed.

“Ngiyothenga esinye?” (Should I go buy some?), he asked and I shook my head.

“I always have yogurt in the fridge but now it’s not there”, the more I speak the more ridiculous I sound to myself. I was more calmer than a few moments ago. The heartbreak was there. I felt it. Every del of it.

“Okay. Lemme drive to the garage and go get you a couple of tubs. Is that okay?”, the manner in which he asked almost made my heart melt.

Almost. For some reason, it also somehow triggered all the reasons why it shouldn't. I pulled away, wiped the corners of my eyes and cleared my throat.

"Thank you for bringing the car", I manage to say but the statement made sure to come out as awkwardly as it could, to the very best of its ability. He sighed and asked me to come with him upstairs. "After everything all you're thinking about is fxxking me?", I take major offense.

"You know very well that if I was serious about fxxking you I would've. Right on this table counter", he states and points at it with his eyes. My ladybits do everything but behave. I suck my teeth and look away. He takes my hand and starts walking with me.

When we get to the bedroom, he makes sure to allow me to walk in first and closes the door shut. We walk to the bed and get seated a few centimeters apart. He rubs his hand together and blows heavy air out his mouth.

"After you left, I got to do a lot of thinking. All I do lately is fxxk up with you and I am not proud. Everything I'm doing misaligns with everything I said at the alter. Ever since we got married, it's

always one drama after the next. Sthandwasami I have failed you, okay? I have failed you and I need you to forgive me so we can start afresh”, he expresses before slightly shifting his body in my direction and taking my left hand in both of his very cold ones.

“Please tell me the truth about yourself?”, I say and insist on looking him in the eye.

“I am not a cold-hearted murderer. I just...”, he sighs.

“Did you really drown him?”, I had to ask. He purses his lips together and nods a few times. Wow. Something about this hurts. I wonder what his little sister must be feeling right now. They were really close. Really, really close. Same way him and Thando are if not more. Which is the most baffling part because I know how much he values family. Why is it so easy for him to take away people from theirs? His smile flashes in my mind. His laughter distantly rings in my ears. It’s my fault that he is dead. In all honesty, I did not know how to feel. I cared about him. Inevitably. His love for me ultimately equated in his demise. I look up to the roof as if it was whispering the answers that I needed. I love Muzi. With all my heart. But being

tied to who and what he is? Will I even know him? Completely? I bring my eyes down and they fall to my fluffy grey shoes.

“Say something”, he pleads and I raise my eyes to him.

“Your brother? What happened there?”, I ask.

“I don’t know what to tell you baby but he was a sick-minded pervert”

“What do you mean?”

“Can we not go there? Please. Ask me anything. Just not that”, he softly says and I drop my chest.

“How many more people have you killed? And why?”

“Only the ones you know”

“Someone is always going to be after you. For one reason if not the other. People who live like you do eventually die by the same corrupt principles you believe in”, I say and he drops his eyes.

“I don’t want to be caught in the crossfire. WE don’t want to be caught in the crossfire”, I add and rub my tummy. He was still silent as the graves he had prematurely paved way for.

“I’ve been afraid of the consequences of our break up for too long but I can’t be with you anymore. If only the ceremony had worked this would be a lot

easier”, I said and he frowned

“What would be a lot easier? You accepting that I’m gonna die? Look I don’t mind death. I’ve shaken hands with it a lot more than you think. What scares me is... Betso did you even love me?”, he asks with his eyes half-shut.

“No body deserves to die in the hands of another. Kgokagano didn’t deserve to die like that”

“You saw me kill Mbuso and you stayed. I am not proud of this but I have to ask. This is more about your important ex than it is about me actually killing people isn’t it?”, he says and I run low on strength to argue. He lets go of my hand and scoffs before he could find his way out. I am tired. In every sense of the word. Emotionally. Physically. Mentally! I am tired! Whatever decision I take will count against me somehow so maybe this is for the best. Maybe him believing that I still love KG will untie this spiritual knot between us and make his ancestors understand that he can live without me. I don’t want him to die. Hell that would tear me apart. Beyond repair even. I can’t live with him. At the same time, I can’t live without him.

...

After Muzi left, I climbed into bed and cried my

eyes out. I love him. Badly. I really do. Wrethat I felt was a combination of regret and the feeling one usually gets after doing what's right.

The next morning, I woke up and ran to the bathroom to throw up. I was feeling hot and cold at the same time. After rinsing my mouth, I dashed to the bedroom and picked up my phone. I changed my mind when my fast scrolling reached his name.

“No. No. We can do this. By ourselves”, I said to the babies trying to calm myself down. I then I called Dr Masingita instead and she scolded me first for missing my appointment. She eventually agreed to squeeze me but said I should be at her practice in the next 45 minutes. I did as instructed and was driven there. She said everything looks normal and reiterated the do's and don'ts that she always makes sure to bombard me with through text. I have never seen such a hands on doctor before. We have a beautiful relationship. Saying I am comfortable around her would be the biggest understatement.

While on the way home, the top thing on my list of short term priorities was taking off my bra. It was squeezing and suffocating me. What vexes me

most is that it's one of the new ones. Meaning, I've put on more weight. That didn't stop me from getting home and stuffing my face even further. My scale is the last thing I am worried about. Nombi and I got into a mini altercation because I was insisting on cleaning the whole house myself. I had to do something to get Muzi out of my mind otherwise I was going to watch myself drown in a thick pit of insanity.

He called the next day and I rejected the calls. It is better this way. He called again and I threatened to move out and change my number if he persisted. He then stopped. From there, I slowly metastasized into a professional couch potato, well versed in the science of being a homebody.

...

[SOME TIME LATER]

I finally managed to carry my heavy self to the outdoors today. I hadn't seen the sun in almost a week. I might've given birth at any point but I bravely decided to risk it. I had to speak to speak to him. It couldn't wait any longer. None of my shoes fit me anymore except for these other white slides I got in a bigger size because the store was out of them and I really liked them. My luck with

them rests in the elastic band they have on the sides so they stretch and my heel does not overlap because as I said, they're one size bigger. The dress I was wearing made me look like a hippo but I decided on it because it made me feel comfortable. It's a knee-length flare dress that only hugs me from my boobs upwards.

I got to Malocon and greeted Samantha. She excitedly greeted me back and paid me a compliment on my skin. Everything else is a mess but ever since I fell pregnant, my skin has been progressively improving with time. I just hope I will get to keep it postpartum. I proceeded to the elevator and made my way to his office. The door was open. I suddenly began developing intense nerves. What am I going to say to him? How is he going to react? I haven't spoken to this man for a heavy while now. I exhaled and proceeded walking. I got to the door and there he was. His office is always spotless and clean. Just like it's owner. I watched him play with the silver pen in his left hand, perfectly matching his shiny wedding band. His eyes were buried into his laptop with his other hand cruising the touchpad. Only he can rock a basic black and white suit the way only he

does. He slowly allowed himself to fall on the backrest of his chair and only then did he raise his eyes to see. I held on tightly to the handles of my bag with both my hands and swallowed. His face was plain blank. I couldn't fathom from it whether to come in and run back to my place while I still had the chance.

"Hh... hi", I said as I carefully walked in.

"Hh... hey", he responded.

"Can I come in?" I asked as I stood a few centimeters away from the door frame.

"You're technically in already but sure", he said as he got up from his chair.

"You... you look...", he said before giving me a hug that I certainly wouldn't have received should he have given himself a minute to think about it. He had changed his cologne. I tried taking it in but he broke the hug and led me to the couch with his left hand, with his other hand on his neck. We both took a seat. I was still clutching onto my handbag.

"Uyaphila?"(Are you good?), he asked.

"Yeah I'm fine. How are you?". I asked and he opened his mouth to speak but whatever he wanted to say found a way to return back.

"How are the babies?", he asked and then somberly bit his lower lip.

"I went to a scan yesterday. They're healthy". He gave me a faint smile and nodded. A slender young man walked and said "Sorry to interrupt sir but your meeting starts in 6 minutes. Hello Mrs K". He speaks so fast. I just figured he is the P.A. I was not even going to ask where he knows me from. Muzi briefly inspected his watch and said "7 minutes. Thank you". The lad then walked out. He brushed his lower thighs before he could hold on to them for balance before standing up.

"Aw...", I said and held my tummy.

"Are you okay?", he asked, looking worried.

"I'm fine. It's just, they kick too hard sometimes", I said and tried to stand up. A total fail. He held out his hands for hippo to balance. I stood up and he said "Can I feel them?", with half a teaspoon of eagerness. My eyes lit up for sure.

"Yeah sure", I said. He softly placed his hand on my huge tummy and asked if they kick at the same time. I said "barely" and he continued trying to trace for a kick. The one on the left always kicks like it's trying to break open my tummy. He felt it and I saw an inevitable smile grow on his face.

After it stopped, he said "Thanks for stopping by". I nodded because I didn't know what to say.

He grabbed his jacket and buttoned it up once with one hand and had the other grab his cellphone to place it in his pocket.

He grabbed his desk phone and dialled.

"Yeah Duke, please make sure a chicken mayo sandwich and guava juice are delivered to my office this instant? Thanks", he said and grabbed a two files from his desk. He still remembers my most intense cravings?

"After you're done eating, please close the door for me?", he said and then walked out.

Insert 102

Muzi left the office and I felt myself experience a

temporary emotional paralysis. I suffered a mini stroke and saw it best to pull his chair so I can sit. He's probably fed up. I would be too. Last night when I was in I had a sudden change of mind. I want him and everything that comes with him. I'm willing to ride it through. If I die, I die. I love this man and every particle of air he breathes. I still want to spend the rest of my life with him. There's no formulae for this life thing. I could stay away from thinking in fear of death then get shot in a bank robbery gone wrong. Death is always unerring. If you're the target, then you're the target for that day, moment and second. Well, I'm hoping it is not too late.

A lady in a white suit and royal blue stilettos walks in with a tray in her hands and a file balanced on it's wooden side. Beautiful women make sick these days. Especially these ones with Instagram bodies. I've never been one to be insecure about myself but recently, the mirror has succeeded in becoming my worst enemy. The beauty of another woman is not the absence of your own. My mother raised me with these words and my confidence stood firm balanced against them. "Oh hello?", she warmly says before putting the

tray on the table.

"Hi how are you?", I greet back and we exchange pleasantries.

"You work in the cafeteria?", I had to ask. The outfit raised a couple of question marks in my head. She immediately laughed.

"Oh no. I bumped into Duke in the hallway and he asked that I come in with this because he's needed in the boardroom. I was actually looking for Mr Khumalo", she explains and I nod.

"Bongiwe by the way, head of marketing?", she extends her hand for a shake and I stand up to return it.

"Boikokobetso, Mrs Khumalo", I say and the smile on her face widens. She has really beautiful hair.

"Alright then. I'm gonna leave this here. Please tell him to have a look at it and then get back to me before end of business today", she says and I nod in approval. She then leaves. Her legs? The perfect pair for that type of a high heel. Even her energy is warm and attractive. A roach of jealousy creeps up from between the folds of my brain, the brand ambassador of insecurity. I squash it quickly before it could cause further damage. I do not want to be that woman. I've never been and I am not gonna

start today. I pull one yellow sticky note from the block pile that was innocently placed on his shiny desk and pen Bongiwe's message down. I stick it down on the black file she left and grab my bag. I suddenly felt like I was overstaying my welcome. I got to the door and turned back to get my food. It was screaming for my salivating taste buds.

...

I got home and found Nombi feather-dusting the tv area. There was a cool breeze coming in and I felt like the curtains weren't open enough. The afternoon darkness in the living room was the cause of this.

"Sawubona", she said when I dumped my weight on the couch.

"Hey", saying this felt like a task and a half. I was too tired to even speak.

"Belunjani usuku lwakho?"(How was your day?), she persisted and I just told her it was fine. She nodded and continued humming, carrying on with her job.

"Please do me a favour and call in the masseur. I am not coping", I said to her and she nodded with urgency, stepping closer to the house phone. The intercom rang and Nombi attended to it. My ears

were also tired to even function.

"Your friends are here. Should I let them in?", she asked and i frown. "Friends?", I asked who and she explained. I wasn't in the mood to entertain any guests but I had to let them in. I told her to cancel the massage while she was at it.

Bridgette, Tlhogi, Tumi and Agnes walked in. With silver and transparent heart balloons written "Hot momma to be". They also had drinks, boxes of cake and tons of snacks.

"SURPRISE!"

"Oh my God you u guys?!", I said in disbelief and tried to stand up. Tlhogi helped me up before I could deplete all of my strength. I walked like a penguin, hugging each and every one of them. They were all excited and speaking at the same time.

"So sorry we couldn't plan a proper shower for you doll our schedules kept clashing and and and", Tumi explained and my emotional self nodded.

"Enhle and Gugu couldn't make it, kids. But they both said I must get you this voucher in the WhatsApp group", Tumi handed me the envelope and I thanked him . "We wanted to get you some gifts because your mom was against it and said it's

better we send you money instead", Tumi said and opened the cider bottle in his hand with his teeth. "So indecorously ratchet of you", I say and her replies with a quick and dismissive "Bxtch please". We all laugh as Bridgette places the drinks in the fridge. Agnes was the HOD of the snacks.

"It's nothing much but we just wanted to come spend time with you before the water broke", Tlhogi says and hugs me amidst the indistinct chattering combined with laughs behind us.

"This is fine. Thank you guys. I'm realizing now how much I need this. I missed y'all", I say while still holding on to him. Since the wedding, our relationship slowly manifested into a friendship through WhatsApp statuses and random video calls. I like him. He has a sane, wise head on his shoulders.

"Hey. Get your own bestfriend!", Tumi says and we all laugh.

I silently search around for Nombi with my eyes but she was no where to be found. I was hoping she could join us. She didn't strike me as the shy type.

"Le eyakho"(This one is yours), Bridget says and displays the orange carton of milk she found in my

fridge. She says and the whole house laughs. I smile at her in defeat.

"Ndiyadlala. Ndiyadlala. Andithi awuseli wena at the moment baba? I've got you mna. Ina. Nantsi eyakho"(Because you can't drink at the moment, here. I've got you),she says and hands me a bottle of Appletiser. I take it, unable to resist laughing.

"It tastes a bit like wine. I had to improvise kalok", she says before and puts the last bottle of the brutal fruit of the pack in the fridge.

"Thank you boo"

"Do you have an ice bucket?", Tumi says and I shake my head. He raids my cupboards to find a container huge another to accommodate their drinks. I asked to be excused to go invite Nombi but she insisted she didn't want to intrude no matter how many times I said she wasn't.

...

Bridgette was already drunk an hour later after their arrival. She dashed her gin with the Appletiser that was meant for me. She's a special breed of human. We spent the whole afternoon whiling away and playing 30 seconds. Bridgette had her head on Tlhogi's thighs. Everyone was now either barefoot or in their half socks. Their

company was appreciated. It was all calm and chilled vibes and thats how I liked it.

"Have you packed your hospital bag yet babes? Tell me you have", Agnes asks and they all gawk at me.

"I wasn't even thinking about it to be honest", I reply.

"What do you mean? You could pop at any moment from now?", Tlhogi exclaims and I realise my recklessness.

"I'll get to it. Tomorrow"

"Oh forget it. I'll do it. I can't trust you with anything", Tumi says and we all laugh.

"But a part of me wants a water birth yaz"

"Why?", Bridgette asks.

"Water is calming for me. I think it'll help a great deal with the labour pains"

"I feel for you. I never want to go through that hell called giving birth in my life. It's a near death experience. I remember when...", Agness rambles innocently before Bridgette can interrupt with a "Cima Cima Cima!"(Stop stop stop).

"Why are you scaring her?", Bridgette adds and I laugh.

"CO-ASK. Like what the hell?", Tlhogi foots in to my

defense as well. I am very sure Agnes meant no harm.

...

Evening darkness crept in and everyone packed their own farewell snack and alcohol package. Nombi came down and dinner prepared by the chef. They took some of that too and tried to scam me of my Tupperware containers. I shoved the ice cream ones in their faces. My instinct told me to keep them and that they'll come in handy some day. People don't return Tupperware. They just don't. Bridgette pulled me aside and asked about Mbuso's whereabouts. She had 2 cups of coffee which managed to sober her up a bit. I tried my best to remain as natural as I could and asked why she is looking for him.

"The fxcker is ghosting me. He legit disappeared. I don't know if he changed his simcard or what but I don't think so. If it was me he was avoiding then he would've simply blocked me", she explained "Him and I were... we're not close. He probably went back overseas and moved on with his life. Do the same"

"Move on from a fire dxck? Gurl?!", she exclaims in almost a whisper. I manage to force a laugh and

brush her off. The conversation then fortunately evaporates into the air.

Tumi and I stood outside the gate bidding goodbye to the squad as they hooted and drove off.

Bridgette had to be fetched. Her husband has his hands full with her.

"Thanking for sleeping over", I hug him with one hand as we walked side by side to the house.

"I wasn't about to pay for a hotel when my rich housewife of a bestfriend lives in a such a mansion", he says and I laugh.

"Tsek don't call me that", I say and he laughs. My mind somehow wanders off to Muzi.

"You okay?", he nudges gently and asks.

"I need you to take me somewhere", I say and he rolls his eyes.

"You mean now?"

"Yes. But first I need to take a bath", I say and rush upstairs.

Insert 103

I got into the shower and quickly made myself clean and put some warm clothes over white and lacy underwear. He loves seeing me in it so anything to score me extra points, that's if he will listen till that point. I spritzed on my favourite cologne and moisturized my lips with some Blistex. Make up was going to waste my time. I optimistically packed an overnight bag and made my way downstairs.

"Areye"(Let's go), I said to Tumi, hyperventilating because the stairs do take their toll on me.

"Mm. You smell like, a good combination of roses and berries", Tumi says and stands up with a plate in hand white chewing. His lips were oily from chicken. He went into the kitchen and washed his hands. After we were done, we walked to the car which was parked outside.

"Are you sure about this?", Tumi asked before he started the car.

"Yeah. Life is too short to not wake up in my man's bed", I say and strap on the safety belt. He gives a naughty smile and says "When you get there, please tell him I am getting a certificate laminated and a trophy for his dxck", he says and claps once.

I couldn't help but laugh out loud. We drove to Muzi's and he parked outside the gate.

"Should I wait for you or ?", Tumi asks.

"I don't know what to expect so I'll uber back if it blows up in my face"

"Call him and tell him to open before I can leave", he commands and I smile at his concern. I take my phone and dial his number.

"Hey", a lazily says as if he just got woken up from deep sleep.

"I'm outside. Please open for me?", I say and squeeze my buttcheeks together hoping that he doesn't turn me away. He goes silent for a very brief moment and says "Okay". The gate shortly slides open and I say my goodbyes to Tumi through the window.

"I hope you're not wearing full panties under there?", he gravely says and points at my privates. I explode in laughter.

"Please go away", I say, still laughing.

I get and walk to the front door. I take a calculated and deep breath in before knocking. He opens the door before I could knock.

"Can we talk?", I ask and he looks at me before his eyes fall on my overnight. I dart my eyes around in

slight embarrassment. He nods then presses the remote for the gate to close. I walk and close the door.

"You good?", he asks and turns to look at me briefly.

"I'm fine. O sharp wena?", I ask and he says he's fine.

"Are you hungry?"

"No I just ate"

"Okay. Mind coming with me upstairs? I was kinda in the middle of something", he says and takes out his phone from the pocket of his black jeans to see who was texting. He then places it back and looks to me for an answer.

"No problem"

"Can I take that?", he points at my bag. I nod and he does. We walk up the stairs and I follow from behind. His steps were subtle and undetected as he was walking barefoot. We get into the bedroom and he says "I just need to send a couple of emails then I'll be all yours okay?", then tucks his lower lip beneath his upper teeth. Trust me when I say he wasn't even trying to be seductive at all but something about that moment made me wanna throw myself to him so he can do whatever he

wished to me. I nod and he placed the bag down.

...

I was lying on my back on the bed, playing games on my phone while he was busy. The silence wasn't awkward at all. Contrary to what I expected. He then unexpectedly closed the laptop, got up to pull the ottoman and came to sit in front of me. I got the message, got up and sat upright with my legs in between his. He looked me straight in the eye and said

"What are we doing?"

"What do you mean?"

"Actually shh..", I added. I took his hands and let my chest rip.

"I don't care. I don't care anymore about your past, what you've done and everything else that has to do with it. I love you. Mntungwa, Mbulazi, Mzilikazi kaMashobana, Zikode...", he tried concealing a smile but I could see it.

"Ngiyak'thanda baba. Kego rata ka pelo yame yotlhe. Please forgive me. As much as you said you failed me as a husband, I also equally failed you as a wife. I should've stood by you and trusted you as the head of the house. I have a terrible way of showing it but I respect you. Dearly. There's no

other man for me. This fact is written in my heart and also in the stars. I'm thankful for you. I am here to stay. Even if it takes 500 thousand apologies for you to forgive me. I just need you to promise me one thing. No more killings", I say and look him dead straight in the eye. We share mutual stare till he nods. He stands and pulls me up by my hands. He places his hands on my tummy and his forehead against mine.

"I love you woman. So much it hurts sometimes", he whispers and I shut my eyes when he plants kiss on my forehead.

[REMOVED]

...

"Good morning", I giggle it out and he laughs too.

"Hawu. Uhlekan manje?"(What are you laughing at now?), he asks.

"Didn't I tell you it's rude to stare at someone in the sleep?", I ask with my neck slightly twisted so I can look at him because he was behind me, with his hand wrapped around my tummy.

"You're my woman. I'll stare whenever I feel I need to stare. Whether it is in a restroom, in church, in bed or during a family meeting", he says and I laugh. I was about to reply when we both felt two

kicks.

"Did you feel that?", he says in awe. I give a closed smile and nod in agreement.

"Are they gonna do it again?", he asks while trying to trace another one.

"Yeah. Hopefully. Give it a moment", I say and it happens again

"These are some violent kicks. I'd say we're having soccer stars in cliché but I'm convinced you're carrying rugby players baby", he says and I laugh hysterically.

"Pregnancy suits you. You should always be pregnant", he unexpectedly says and I tell him not to get any ideas.

"The only time I'm getting pregnant again is when these ones are 13 years old", I add. He laughs arrogantly and says "We'll see". He continues to nibble on my neck and I know exactly what he's thinking.

Insert 104

Nothing fills my heart than the mere fact that I'm in my man's presence. Even when he's not speaking to as he would be busy with his own stuff, the fact that he is there, with me, is enough to single-handedly paint all the inner walls of my heart with a specific kind of red. Every one who is madly in love with a man would attest to the fact that even running his simple errands is exciting for you. We spent the whole day indoors and we obviously couldn't keep our hands off each other. After a joint shower, we headed downstairs to make food. The initial agreement was that we'll make it together but my lazy bums ended up just keeping him company as he made uphuthu. I killed time with some ice cream.

I had doubts about telling him but I went ahead and said arg what the heck.

"Bridgette was asking about Mbuso's whereabouts", I informed and he didn't turn to look at me but the hand managing the spoon stopped moving.

"What did she say?", he asked and carried on stirring.

"That he ghosted her but she didn't sound

convinced"

"What did you say?"

"That he probably moved back to his place and moved on with his life", I explained and I heard him sigh. He closed the pot and came to stand in front of me. He turned the chair so that I can face him and then placed both his hands on my cheeks.

"Sthandwasami, I don't want you getting involved in my mess. I'm sorry you had to lie like that"

"It's okay. I just want us to put everything behind us and move on"

"I know", he sullenly said and dropped his eyes. A part of me wanted to ask him about the recording but I knew it'd be no different to be throwing the whole mood into a sewage dump, so I let it go.

...

The love sick puppy that goes by the name of Violet called and I was so happy to hear her voice. I'm happy with Muzi but I'll forever be my mother's baby.

"Mpotsise ngwanaka"(Guess what?), she exclaimed as though she had something shocking to tell me.

"What?"

"The real reason why Sam was here. He owes

people money. He came clean today", she says and clicks her tongue. Muzi was massaging my feet concentrating on the television.

"So it had nothing to do with making amends with me?", I don't know why this chipped off a piece of my heart.

"He's a bloody skelema otseba ke nna aker"(He's a crook. Ask me I know), she sounded like she was cooking because something was boiling in the background.

"So, did you give him the money?", I ask.

"Ke tsuba matekwane nare?"(Since when do I smoke weed?), she asked and a light laugh escaped my lips.

"Droppa droppa. Ke yo wa founa Robert"(Cut the call this instant. Robert is calling), she hastingly said, rushing me to cut the call.

"Kana wa jola", I said and shook my head.

"Go jola ke hlogo ya mmago wautwa?", she said and I bursted an immediate laughter.

...

I couldn't resist Muzi's fine structure after lunch. I was feeling full and heavy but I still rode him on the couch. I played myself because after that, he wanted more and homegirl was tired. I'm always

tired. I actually cannot wait to give birth. We ended up upstairs and I fell asleep at the end of it all. I got woken up by a call from Tumi saying he has to go back to work and that he's leaving. I felt bad because it felt like I neglected him.

"I'm sorry friend. I meant to come back and..."

"Oh stop it. I don't mind. It's not like I would choose you over dxck so all's fair in love and men", he nonchalantly says and I laugh.

"But you do owe all the details though. Kere le the angle in which you had those legs raised wankwa? I need to hear you say obtuse", he adds and I chuckle.

"Mmm I can ever feel your wireless blushing", he continues to mock me.

"Oh stop it", I say and laugh some more.

"Look, Nombi and I organized your hospital bag today. There's everything you need in there unless if I left some at the counter", he states and my heart melts. I love him.

"Thank you babes"

"Cool let me get going. It's getting dark"

"Sharp. Drive safely"

"Will do. A trillion kisses"

"I love you bxtch", I say and we end the call. I lift

my legs off the bed and into Muzi's slippers. I switched on the side lamp and went into the ensuite to pee. A text came in on my phone. I had left it in the bedroom. I wiped and went to attend to it.

"There's a fire starting downstairs. Please don't come down till I have it sorted", Muzi's message read and my brain didn't know which panic button to press because I have many. I grabbed his robe, put it on and rushed downstairs. My subconscious mind kept expecting to smell some smoke but there was nothing. I still proceeded with my trip and I found the indoor picnic he had set up. There were candles on the floor and the lights were off. A red velvety throw was laid out in place of the coffee table that's supposed to be in the living room. He walked in and said "Aha! I hope now you see my point"

"What point? When did you...? Baby?!", I was getting emotional, like the emotional mess that I was recently.

He gave me a bunch of freshly cut and tied roses from the garden and I smelt them.

"Is this the fire?"

"Yes. This is the fire that I specifically warned you

against and as usual ngoba awuzwa, you still disobeyed a clear and direct instruction", he said, shook his head and kissed me on my forehead. I couldn't stop laughing.

"But that's not fair. What if it engulfed you or something? I should just sit upstairs while you're down here getting injured?", I defend.

"Awuzwa. Finish and klaar. No discussion. No mphikisano", he said and I laughed.

"Something smells nice"

"I made you some lamb curry. And, there's dessert also"

"Mmm. And that is?"

"2 loafs of bread and 4 big tubs of yogurt", he teases about the emotional breakdown I had at the house and I explode in laughter and playfully hit his chest. I smelt my roses again and...

"Muzi?", I said and hung my mouth open.

"Yes mommy?", he lovingly said.

"MUZIKAYISE!", I say and immediately get him alarmed.

"Yin baby?", he says and puts his hands on my waist. I rapidly shake my head and say "Something is wrong..."

Insert 105

A sharp, quick but stabbing pain travelled down my spine then stopped. I held my tummy and bent forward, keeping balance by holding on to Muzi's hand.

"Baby what's going on?", he said with obvious apprehension.

"Do you need to sit down?", he queried. I robustly shook my head when the pain travelled to my lower abdomen and settled there.

"Woza, can you walk?"(Come...)

"Where are we going?", I asked, still bent.

"I'm taking you to the hospital", he firmly stated and I shook my head again.

"I'm fine now. It stopped. I'm only due somewhere next week. That's what Masingita said. Dr Masingita said I'm due next week", I reiterate.

"That's fine. I am still taking you to the hospital"

"No no no. I can't give birth now. I can't AHH!!!", I yelled in extreme anguish. This can't be happening.

"Baby ngenzen manje cause you're in pain and you don't want to go to the hospital?", he was slowly slipping into panic mode.

"Mm-mm! Shhh!! ", I commanded for him to shut the fxck up.

"This is normal. It's just false labour pains. I just need a minute. It'll pass. Relax Filwe. Breathe innn... and out", I made myself take breathing exercises. It's the only thing that made sense.

"Oh my God I think I am peeing", I said and placed my legs apart. He took out his phone with his right hand. I was still tightly holding on to the left. I wondered who he was calling but had absolutely no desire to ask.

"Enhle? How do I know if Betso is in labour or not but I think she is. What do... What?"

"How do I know if it's not discharge?"

"Of course I know what discharge looks like but..."

"Okay fine. I'll check"

He ended the call and held on to both my hands. He slowly started walked towards the couch with me and asked me to sit down. He undid the robe and pulled down my pyjama pants.

"What are you doing?", he didn't answer me. He proceeded to pull down my panties and inspected it. The liquid was still slowly sipping out and down my thighs. I placed my hands on my tummy hoping to somehow nullify the pain and threw my head back.

"It looks like gel. It's also a bit pink. Pinkish red", he

was on the phone again.

"So it's time?"

"Okay", he said and cut the call. He then searched around and picked up his car keys. He fixed my clothes and picked me up. I am not ready.

...

The pains were still there but a bit calmer than when we left the house. It was grimly cold outside but I began feeling like I have a fever. We got to the hospital parking and I was wheeled in. Muzi went to book to me in and I was allocated a room. Nothing was cute. Nothing was adorable. Nothing elegant at that point. I thought the contractions were joking but they gradually intensified. Muzi came in with the doctor and she greeted me.

"How are we feeling?", she asked and I shook my head and looked the opposite way. A nurse walked in shortly.

"I understand", she sympathized and asked when the contractions began. Muzi explained. The nurse handed me a hospital gown and asked that I change into it. The doctor left and promised to be back. Muzi gently helped me out of the pyjamas I came in and into the gown. It was warm inside the hospital, unlike outside.

"Did you call my mom?", I asked him and he said he called them both. The doctor came back and placed the arm cuff around my lazy and slothful hand. After she was done,

"Okay. Right now I am going to gauge how far dilated you are before we can proceed with anything okay?, she explained.

"I'm gonna need you to raise you legs like thiiiiis", she patiently exolained while she slid my legs up and apart. She insert two fingers in my opening, took them and took out some tissue from the box on the side to wipe her hands.

"You're not ready for birth yet. I'll come check on you later", she informed and left. Muzi came to the side my head was faced and pulled the chair to sit. He held my arm and asked how I was feeling.

"I'm in pain. It's getting worse and I am apparently not ready to give birth", he was there when the doctor explained but I somehow felt the need to say it so he understands what I'm going through. He looked heartbroken that I was in that state.

"Can't you organize a water birth?", I asked him and he bit his lower lip thoughtfully.

"I don't know baby let's see", he said and pressed the nurse call button. The nurse came back and

asked what was wrong.

"Do you give water births at this hospitals?", Muzi asked.

"Nope. People who prefer those normally do them at home. Theyre quite risky. Just hang in there kuzodlula okay? We've all been here", she said and squeezed my shoulder. I just laid there unresponsive. Kgantsho said labour feel like menstrual cramps multiplied by 10. She lied. The pain is exponentially worse. A 100 would almost cut it. It would give half a mark. Muzi stayed with me in the room, brushing my back and tummy in alternation. He was feeling helpless and couldn't hide it.

...

The doctor came back an hour later to check on me.

"How are we feeling now?", she asked and fixed her stethoscope around her neck.

"I can't take it anymore", I said and Muzi asked if there isn't anything they can give me.

"For now I wouldn't suggest any drugs and epidurals", she said as she inserted her fingers in me again.

"Still not dilated", she said.

"I need you to be a bit active. Couple that with breathing exercises. It works for some patients. Daddy, we're going to need your help. Please walk her down the corridor and down the stairs twice. Encourage her to breathe and come back", she instructed and Muzi nodded multiple times. She left and he helped me into my slippers. He then put the robe over the hospital gown. He held my hand and we walked down the corridor slowly. We got to the stairs and did what the doctor suggested. I got tired after the first trial and wanted to go back. He listened and we walked back. I asked him to call Nombi so she brings my hospital bag.

...

04h25

The doctor came back to check my dilation. The look on her face gave the fact that she was unsatisfied away. I was now sweating and exhausted.

"Your contractions are getting worse, your amniotic sac broke but I'm not happy with how slowly you're dilating. I'm going to have to induce you", she says with her eyes moving from me to Muzi.

"Is that another name for a C-section?", Muzi asks in great concern.

"No. What I am going to do is, insert a pill in her vagina in order to ripen the cervix", she says and waits for him to digest the information.

"Is it dangerous?"

"It has worked for many women. If it doesn't work, we'll have to go the Cesarean route". She explained and we agreed to the induction. The pain was now unbearable I regretted ever opening up my legs to Muzi.

The doctor inserted the pill and said now we wait for it to work. It was uncomfortable having it down there. I was now crying real tears. Muzi tried everything from massages and jokes but nothing was working. He was also physically tired.

06h14

My mom finally arrived. The very moment she walked in through the door made me realise the severity of the pain. I wasn't happy to see her. I was actually very indifferent about her presence. About everything. I just wanted the two terrorists to exit my body. After this, I am having my womb removed. I kept thinking to myself.

Insert 106

Mom suggested to Muzi that he goes home and gets some rest. He said he's fine when he was obviously tired. My hand has been in his the whole time.

"By tradition you're not even supposed to witness any of this waseba?", my mom said to Muzi.

"Ma stop. I need him here. Times have changed and..."

"It's okay. I just want to support my wife. I can't leave her here knowing she's in pain ma", Muzi interrupted me in his humble self before I could snap any further. Mom had no choice but to allow. Evelyn later walked in with Thando.

"Oh my dear darling", she said as she rushed to my bed. I was now wet from my own sweat.

"How are you?", Thando asked. I just gave her a weak smile, trying to mask my irritation towards her stupid question. The pangs of childbirth had me like pliers on nipples. The crowd was also beginning to irritate me.

"How long have you been in labour now?", Evelyn asked.

"Since 8", Muzi says from a place of borderline exhaustion and heartbreak.

"What is the doctor saying?", my mom asked.
"They're inducing cervical dilation", Muzi, my spokesperson replied. The doctor came back and said "Whoa, this is full house" and laughed before greeting everyone. Their reciprocal greetings came with smiles.

"I'm going to need everyone to leave the room so I can check on her progress", she politely said and Thando asked if Muzi is included in "everyone". The doctor laughed.

"No he can stay", she said and they left. She inspected me again with her two fingers and said there's progress. "Progress? I don't want progress. I want to give birth now!", I snapped and Muzi tightened his hold on my hand.

"I know. Let's just give it a couple more hours then we can decide what to do from there depending on the outcome. Okay?", she gently tapped my thighs twice and left the room before I could respond.

"Did I hear her say hours or my ears are also labour?", I coarsely asked and he kissed the back of my hand.

"I wish there was something I could do to make this easier", he expressed and I shut my eyes in

pain. I felt wanting to breathe another word and I immediately said "Please keep quiet", with my eyes still closed. I then heard him sigh.

...

08h44

The doctor came for another inspection and said I'm close. She promised that I'll be giving birth the next time she came. The contractions were now breathing hell fire. Muzi went to wash his face in the bathroom and came back looking better. He washes his face each time he is stressed. Water is calming for me too. I saw water in my dream with him. We both have our own set of sins but our love is pure. I feel like clean water symbolizes purity. Or it could be that the vaginal pill probably found it's way into my brain and poisoned my ability to think sensibly. My eyes were now heavy and painful in a stinging manner. Manqoba called and notified us that he was also in the premises. Muzi went to him because he didn't want to come into the room. I wonder what he thought he will see. My vagina hanging from the ceiling? Everything and everyone was pissing me off. Even the ones with noisy footsteps passing on the corridor. Scraping the floor with their certainly

ugly shoes and dragging their feet. I felt like screaming "You are a fcking adult. Walk like you mean it!". Muzi came back with takeaways from Doppio Zero and two bottles of water. As much as I love the food from that place, I felt like all it's franchises should go up in flames in that instant. "I'm fine. Eja wena"(You eat), I said with my heavy head still carelessly placed on the pillow.

"Take two bites ke sthandwasami. Just two?", he pleaded.

"I don't feel like food right now. If I force it I'm going to throw up", I said and he pursed his lips together. He had no idea what to do. He then placed the paper bag on the side table and drank some of the water.

"Aren't you going to eat?", I asked. Maybe he should go home and sleep. He had exhaustion written in a bold Arial size 16 on his forehead.

09h33

The doctor came back to complete silence in the room. Muzi had his head bowed on the edge of the bed with my hand still in his. I had no idea if he was sleeping, praying or both. He raised it when the doctor came and sniffed.

"Alright. Let's see", she said in her purple scrubs

with a black long sleeve vest underneath. Amidst all the anguish and agony, I managed to notice that her yellow hands looked a bit hairy but soft since she had pulled the sleeves halfway on her arm. I wouldn't have noticed such a trivial and insignificant thing hours ago. Maybe it's a good sign or maybe the drug really is invading important parts of my brain.

"Ohhh-kayy. Now we can move to the labour room", she said after checking how dilated I was and my heart did a halfway somersault because this meant two things. It meant that we were finally getting somewhere but at the same time, it betrayingly meant more pain. These were the semi finals and I was no where near ready to push an entire head out of my vagina. Do these people know how relatively tiny my hole is compared to a human head? Lord I hate kids.

They wheeled my bed out of that room and took me to another one. Muzi came with. We finally got to the chambers of prenatal hell. I laid there on my back and I was told to raise my legs and keep them apart. Muzi was asked to put on a set of scrubs and a mop cap.

"How many?", the nurse asked and the doctor said

"10 centimeters". She placed a blue sheet on my raised which then went ahead and looked like a tent unprovoked. My vagina was exposed and very much out in the open. If this was any other random day I would've been fussy about being so naked and having another person have a full view of it apart from you-know-who. Today? Today I didn't care. I just wanted it to be over and done with. He was still holding my hand. The doctor was standing in front of me. The contractions at this point were now too strong and regular. My back felt like it was rented from faulty backdoor dealer. "Now push mommy", the ObGyn commanded and I tried once then felt like I needed the bathroom. "No I need to poop", I said and tried to get up. The nurse restrained me by my shoulders. "That's okay. It's totally normal. It's not pop keep pushing", she said. "Hey fokof I've been pooping all my life I know what pop feels like!" , I erupted then shortly screamed my lungs out. Is this what it's really supposed to feel like or is nature playing tennis with me? "Puuuush!!!", they both compelled me to keep at it. I pushed and it took all the nerves and strength

in my temples.

"I can't do this baby", I cried to Muzi.

"Of course you can. Please try harder"

"Why didn't you use a condom?", I asked and was asked to push again. I screamed and pushed once more.

"Push sthandwasami. It'll be over soon", he pleaded and I gritted my teeth hoping to draw some calcium strength from there then pushed.

...

Forty minutes later and I was still pushing. I was now holding on to Muzi's hand for dear life. I surely killed all the nerves in it and I did not regret it.

"I can see the head. Give me one strong push!", the doctor directed and I sighed from deep fatigue. I pushed from my core and felt like I was tearing into two.

"One last one baby ngiyak'cela", Muzi begged.

"I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for your overactive sperm!", I yelled in between the push and an immediate laugh left his lips. This exacerbated the anger I had towards him and I squashed his hand even more.

"Ouch Ngiyaxolisa baby!"(I'm sorry), he flinched in

pain and I continued pushing with my teeth gritted, drenched in a flood of sweat. The first one came out and I couldn't stop taking exhausted heavy breaths.

"Yay!", they clamped and cut the umbilical cord. The nurse held and wrapped him in a blue sheet and I was asked to push out the last one. Which wasn't as bad as the first one. My legs were already numb from all the pain. They were all cheering and congratulating me. The doctor's voice faded as she asked if Muzi wanted to hold them. I could hear the sound of both cries slowly becoming faint as well. I had certainly depleted all my strength. I began seeing a growing black as my eyelids reunited.

Insert 107

The first thing that met my eyes were the blinding lights in my hospital room. I scanned the room with squinted eyes and noticed Muzi was sleeping by my bedside. He had changed clothes. Which made me wonder how long I was asleep. My head

hurt. My throat was as dry as dust. I tried getting up but the drip needle plastered to my hand was quick to reprimand me against it. I shook Muzi with my left hand and he woke up.

"Hey baby", he said in a whisper. An elated whisper. I breathed out loudly through my nose.

"How are you feeling?", he asked as he got up to pour me some water.

"Like tragedy warmed up. Where are my babies? How have I been asleep for?", he positions the straw so I can be able to drink.

"About 27 hours now. I was worried about you", he explains while carefully holding the glass and straw to my mouth.

"The doctor said you lost a lot of blood", he adds.

"Where are my babies?", I ask after immediately swallowing. The doctor walks in just in time. Do these people ever rest?

"Hey, mommy of 2. How are we feeling? You scared us. Thanks to hubby over here for being a match otherwise...", she says and takes out my file somewhere behind the footboard.

"I'm okay. I feel fine. What happened? Where are my babies?"

"Don't worry. The babies are perfectly fine. Your

body suffered what we call a hypervolemic shock. Meaning, you lost a lot of blood than your body can normally replace for proper functioning. Right now I'm gonna check your vitals then you can see them aight?", she said and I nodded. I wanted her to get it over and done with so she could bring them. I've heard a lot of blood-curdling stories about babies that either go missing or switched at birth in hospitals. She walked out when she was done and promised to come back with them. I was anxious. Muzi kissed the back of my hand and told me how much I scared him. I gave him a comforting but awkward smile.

"So you're the one who donated blood?", I asked with the smile widening.

"I did not "donate". I paid back my loan. You once saved me so now we're square. I don't owe you shxt", he says arrogantly and I laugh.

"Thank you baby", I say and squeeze his hand. He squeezes back.

"For what? You know I'd give you my heart should the need arise right?", he asserts. My heart breaks at the reception of this. I wonder how it'd be waking up to discover that he is no more and that I am still alive because of his heart. I'd rather not be

saved at all.

"I wouldn't want it"

"Why?"

"Let's just stop talking about this. The thought alone of living life without you hurts enough. Thinking about it feels like I am attracting it into manifestation", I say and he tucks his lips in.

"Have you seen them?", I change the topic since morosity was beginning to spread in the atmosphere. An immediate smile graces his face.

"They're so perfect. So small. So identical", he explains and I laugh. I wanted to ask him about the gender but I felt like the suspense could be worth it. I already knew one was a boy. I don't know why I never wanted Dr. Masingita to tell me before birth but I just wanted it to be a surprise for no reason in particular. They got wheeled in by the doctor with a wide smile on her face. I

immediately sat up in impatience and Muzi stood up to help her. He asked me which one I wanted to hold first and I laughed and said all two. Both of them carefully placed the babies in my hands and I began feeling emotional. I finally get to meet the people who have been inhabiting my body for so long. All those back pains, swollen feet, random

vomiting, and sleeplessness instantly felt worth every second.

"Hello, nina. Hello, nunus. Sampona? Sampona sampona", I softly greeted them and I heard the doctor go "Awwww". The smile on Muzi's face deserved a frame.

"Let me leave you two to it then. I told the family they couldn't come in because I didn't want them to crowd you in your critical state. Should I go let them in?", she asked. In all my life, I've never met such a warm-hearted doctor. Masingita is amazing but this one is on a lane of her own. She pours her heart into her patients' health, with a smile. I've never felt so prioritized and important at a hospital before.

"Not yet. Give her a couple of minutes before you can let them know", Muzi says and I keep my eyes on my babies. I genuinely created duplicates of the symbol of our love. They have Muzi's nose, forehead, hairline, and ears. The eyes and lips were definitely from my own genome. One was asleep and the other had his eyes wide open.

"Thank you sthandwasami. I'd find an Oxford dictionary for all the big words suited for the gratitude I feel right now but I won't because

there's none. It's unexplainable. Thank you for toughening it out to bring my children on earth. It wasn't easy but you did it", he said and took a book from the side table titled 'Deep breaths' for new moms. I laughed.

"Hawu. Why are you laughing at my push gift?", he laughs with me. One baby starts crying and I gently shush him and Muzi offers to take him. I suggest he takes the sleeping one. He does.

"I don't need a push gift Mbulazi. I know I didn't want this pregnancy before but now, I'd do it all over again", I say as I continue to shush the baby. He was growing quiet. He smiled and kissed my forehead.

"I'm happy you're happy to be the mother of my kids", he says and I realize we've been kidding, babying, and childrening since they got here. I haven't named them.

"I haven't named them?!", I exclaim. He laughs at my panic.

"I have", he says and I look at him so he can tell me what he decided.

"Lwandile no Mxolisi", he points at who is who with his head and locks eyes with his son who was now awake. I take a moment to process the

names.

"I want him to bring and symbolize peace in our marriage. I no longer want to fight with you sthandwasami. I am hopeful that this officializes our clean slate", he says and points to Mxolisi. The one I had in my arms. A smile grows on my face.

"And Lwandile?"

"Lwandile means it has intensified. Referring to uthando lwethu", he says and I melt.

"I love you", I subvocalize.

"I love you t...". The family barges in before he could finish his sentence. If I was unconscious for that long, chances are everyone in here saw them before I did. Which declares absolutely no need for this drama.

...

[1 day later]

The doctor refused to discharge me yesterday no matter the number of times I stated that I was fine. Today I'm finally going home. Mom bullied Manqoba into taking her to my house to prepare it for my arrival. Evelyn was with me at the hospital the whole time. She couldn't stop yawning. I had expected quarrels between her and my mother but the same to have merged into a formidable

team. Good because I left all my referee energy in the labor room. I had only 2 maternity pads left in the pack so Muzi went out to buy more. Didn't the man come back with 6 packs? I laughed at this when I found him in my room after my shower.

"Hleka uz'ukhale kodwa angisabuyeli mina estolo"(You can laugh till you cry but I'm no longer going back to the store), he says and puts the Clicks plastic bag on the bed.

I kiss him on the cheek and continue laughing.

"What if the babies and I need something?", I ask provocatively.

"I can always send Bangizwe for that", he replies and pulls me by my waist and bites his lower lip.

"Why couldn't you send him for this as well?", I give a pouted smile. He immediately looks at me like I just drained all my marbles in the shower.

"Are you asking me why I didn't send another man to go buy the pads that you're going to use?", he asks with his brow raised and I explode. Laughing.

"Hawu. They're clean mara baby"

"I might as well say to him "Ntwana, ungidlele uMadam mangise msebenzin yezwa? Ayikho inkinga"("You can fxck my wife when I'm at work. There's absolutely no problem"), he states and my

cheeks begin to burn from all the laughing.

...

We drove home after I got discharged with the babies. Muzi was carrying Mxolisi and I Lwandle. I had to breastfeed them before we left. Luckily, I did not have any problems with producing milk as the internet had threatened. Evelyn had to drive. She tried negotiating that she be the one to sit at the back with me and the babies but Muzi had none of it. My mom welcomed us home when we got there. She had even cooked lunch. Samp and hearty beef stew. The aroma filled the house because you know, when my mom cooks, she makes sure. We went upstairs with the babies and I found my bedroom full of baby stuff. From blankets to disposable nappies. A monitor was part of the glorious mess on my bed. My mom shortly walked in to clear it. She walked out with a few of the stuff and I asked where she was going.

"The nursery!", she yelled. What nursery? I asked Muzi. He carefully sat on the bed with the baby in his arms.

"I asked a couple of gents to come set it up yesterday. Cots and everything. Your mom was here to oversee everything. ", he informed without

making any eye contact with me. I just smiled at the marvelous man I get to call mine but disappointed in myself for all the neglect I projected towards my babies' prepartum. Lwandile is so peaceful. He sleeps. A lot! Mxolisi on the other does not miss a chance to drive one crazy. He grabs with both tiny hands and hogs onto it. He began being cranky and Muzi stood up to calm him down.

"Let me take him?", I suggested. He paid no attention to me.

"Baby?"

"Hm?", he responded.

"Let me?"

"I've got him. He'll be fine in a few", he said with certainty and he indeed managed to get through to him. I've noticed he's quite fluent in the language Mxolisi speaks. I on the other hand just hear mandarin when he cries. I don't think he likes me much.

"I think we must wait for the paint to dry before moving them in there. I'm afraid it might get intoxicating for their little lungs", I raise my concern.

"I specifically told them not to use any paint. It's

just wallpaper", he assured and still kept his eyes on his son, who was now falling asleep.

...

After lunch, Muzi asked that we put the babies down and go outside because I apparently needed some fresh air. I tried to argue but never won because, in his head, he is the chairperson of my whole body. He grabbed the baby monitor and walked downstairs. There was no need for him to take it because Evelyn was there with the babies but he did. No one tried to waste their energy on him. Evelyn and I just looked at each other and shook our heads. Mom was downstairs washing the dishes. She and Evelyn somehow got rid of Nombi because they felt "The less energy around the babies the better" since she isn't family. Well in their eyes. She's grown to be a sister to me. Muzi and I walked out and he held my hand. We were walking slowly because sis had just pushed out two human heads. We innocently walked around the house and walked out since the gate was open. When we turned to join the gravel, I screamed my lungs out to tears when I saw a royal maroon G63 parked out my yard with a "MrsK" personalized registration plate. I threw my arms

around him in jubilation. He was laughing on my shoulder at the mix in emotions I was experiencing. I wiped my tears and playfully hit him on his hard chest.

"But I told you I didn't need a push gift", I said in between tears.

"You were late. And besides, even if you had said it 6 months back I wouldn't have listened". I pouted in defeat and he handed me my car keys. I grabbed them and ran to the car. He laughed immediately.

...

It's 21h39 and this is the third shower I am taking today. The pads get so full quickly it causes me nose irritation. My nostrils get irritated when I get unbearably impatient with something. I use them in combination with feminine wipes but I just don't feel clean enough. I breastfed the babies they slept before my shower. I left them in the nursery with Muzi. I suggested sleeping with them in my bed but my mom says I might squash and suffocate them in my sleep. After I was done lotioning up and putting on my pajamas, I went out to go tell Muzi to bring the cot in the bedroom. This baby monitor business was not

going to work for me. The anxiety of not having them in the same room with me was going to protest against my sleep.

...

I got to the nursery and he was on the phone looking out the window.

"Did you have to go?", Muzi asked.

"Baby I know you love shopping overseas but what was the rush? ICanada ayibaleki mkami"(Canada is not going anywhere my wife"

"You like stressing me konje wena. For no reason",

"Have you thought about what I said?"

"About you moving permanently back to Joburg? This to and fro is exhausting for me. Kukude Natal"(KZN is too far)

"Of course I care about your mental health but..."

"Okay, now you want to fight. I'll speak to you when you calm down", he says and cuts the call. He exhales and pinches his nose bridge with his back facing me. I decide to walk away.

Insert 108

The babies were sleeping. Mom and Evelyn gave them a bath before I took my shower. I'm scared I'll drown them or something. Water and soap are quite a slippery combination. I don't even know if I'll ever get over this fear. I went back into my room and sat on the bed. I should have listened to that conversation. This marriage is exclusive and inclusive at the same. There's two unions in one and a point where they meet. I crossed that and went beyond the boundary just as she did when she read my text to Muzi. Is that the reason why she went away? She's still mad? I couldn't wrap my head around the real reason why she went away. Maybe it is just an innocent trip. If I had my phone I'd have probably texted her by now. I am that impulsive so it not being here works in my favour. Muzi promised to bring it along with my overnight bag from his house. He came into the room and asked me if I was okay.

"I'm fine baby. Just hungry", I lied.

"What do you wanna eat?"

"Arg I'll eat tomorrow. I'm not feeling well I think I'll throw up", I said and he approached me to put his hand on my forehead, checking my

temperature. I was fine. I knew I was fine but he didn't. I felt bad for doing that to him because I knew he was going to worry.

"It's nothing hectic. I heard it's normal to feel all blue and stuff after birth", I assure. He was still standing in front of me.

"Okay if it gets out of hand you'll tell me right?", he says and I nod.

"Alright ithi ngiyogeza 2 minutes ngiyabuya manje"(Gimme two minutes to bath I'll be right back.

"Haa. 2 minutes?", I laugh

"Yes. Two minutes. I said I'm going to bath. I didn't say I'm going to scrub a pig", he says and we both laugh. He then walks into the ensuite and I go downstairs. I get to the kitchen and pour myself a cold glass of orange juice. My throat my demanding it. I gulped it down and my mom walked down the stairs.

"Tshela tse pedi"(Pour two of those), she ordered and walked in the direction of the living room. I poured her a glass and followed her.

"Sit", she said as I cautiously handed her her glass. I sat beside her on the couch.

"How are you?", she asked.

"I'm fine. How are you?", I replied and she angled her face downwards to show doubt.

"How are YOU Remofilwe?", she reiterated. I took a heavy breath out.

"I looked towards the entrance arch to see if anybody was coming.

"I don't know mama. I'm scared. I don't know. I'm trying to avoid it but I have this feeling on top of my head. I feel like I'll somehow mess up. I want to be a good mother to my boys but the pressure of now being responsible for two lives makes me anxious. Today, when I refused that you teach me how to bath them and I opted to just watch instead, I felt like..."

"Shhhhhh", she interrupts my rambling, puts the juice on the coffee table and takes my hand.

"O ngwanaka wena o tseba ke nna. I saw that you almost panicked but you masked it well. This was your first pregnancy, Filwe. You don't have experience. Especially for double the pressure. Stop being hard on yourself. Breathe...", she says and I inhale and keep it in.

"And out", she instructs and I empty out my lungs.

"Everytime you feel like you're drowning, remember to breathe. Mistakes will happen. You

need to try your best to avoid them as much as you can but when they do, focus on fixing it than beating yourself up about it. Focus on the solution, not the problem. You will need to take out boogies out of their tiny noses using the back of safety pin so they can breathe properly. You'll need to cut their nails at some point"

"Yoh imagine. What if I cut their small delicate skin and they bleed?"

"For now, you can use breastmilk to remove the nails so they don't scratch themselves. They'll fall off. But after a month, you'll need to use a nail clipper. This is not the point. The point I'm trying to make here is, there's a lot that can go wrong with babies. You need to keep a well aerated and same head on those shoulders for them. Hence the breathing exercises. You're bound to mess up when you panic. I don't want you to slip into postpartum depression on my watch. Nobody expects you to have it together. Ask for help. If you don't understand something don't do it. We are here for you. Okay baby?", she said and I felt a squeeze on my shoulder.

"Yes we are. Even when we leave, you can always call. At any time of day", Evelyn adds. I felt my

tight chest collapse into relaxation and the knots in it slowly untangling.

...

I left them there after a couple of laughs and went to check on the babies. I opened the door to the nursery and the cot wasn't there. My heart almost stopped. I immediately marched to our bedroom and found it there. I exhaled with my hand on the door handle and Muzi turned to look at me. He was busy on his phone prior to my abrupt opening of the door. Where did I even think they went? It didn't even make sense. He dropped his hands and raised them so I come to him for a hug. I slowly walked towards him and drew comfort from his chest. I wrapped my hands around him and he placed his hands at the back of my head.

"You need to rest", he said in an undertone. I just kept quiet.

"I'm gonna be working all night so I'll watch them when I come back. Relax and sleep. Okay?"

"Come back from where? I still need to wake up and feed them"

"I'll give them the bottle. They don't mind it. I need to fetch some files and my laptop from the house"

"What if it's too hot? Please bring my stuff. My

cellphone too. I think it's in the living room"

"Ma taught me how to test it using my wrist. I'll be fine. You won't be of any use to them if you're worn out", he suggests and I nod. I love feeding them. Plus breastmilk is more healthier than baby formula in terms of antibodies and fighting off infections. However, he was right. I was tired. The aftermath of labour is feeling like you've been hit by a truck. A truck driven by a madman. We broke the hug and I felt to kiss my boys goodnight. He took his car keys and assured that he'll be back in a few minutes. I got in bed only to toss and turn, alternating between lying on my back and my stomach like a full chicken roasting in an oven. I got up to check if they were still breathing. They were. I then went back to bed.

Muzi did come back with all the stuff and kissed me on the forehead. He thought I was sleeping. "Yerr your nose is cold", I exclaimed and he laughed.

"Mi"(Here), he said and handed me my phone. He threw the laptop and files on his side of the bed and got in, in his hoodie and sweatpants. I unlocked my phone and found a couple of messages. I notified Tumi about the boys through

my mother's phone so he didn't bombard my phone like he would've if I hadn't told him why I disappeared. I found a message from Mabuyi congratulating me on my babies with tons of heart emojis. So we're cool? I replied and put the phone under my cellphone. Muzi was already buried in his work. The room was dark so I found the light coming from his laptop screen too bright. I pulled the blanket over my head and tried to get some sleep. A cry broke out from the cot and I already knew who it was. Lwandile doesn't cry aggressively. His cry is just a call for attention while some commander in chief on the other hand cries like he's the head of the house. Mxolisi cries like he expects you to have already attended to him before he even thought about making a sound. I tried to get up to go get Lwandile and Muzi gently pushed me back to the back and said "Lala"(Sleep). He put the laptop aside and got up. He picked and cuddled him up and began shushing him. "Hey boy? Kwenze njan' ngoba nidlile fano? Ufun' elinye ibhodlela? Hm? Hm Mbulazi?"(What's wrong because you just ate? You want another bottle?), I smiled at how he was communicating with him. He's a natural at this.

...

The density of my sleep was so light that I got woken up by the birds chirping outside. The sun was fully out and brightening up the room from all corners. Muzi was fast asleep. I got up to check on the babies and they were also still sleeping. I then walked over to the chair to get my robe and tightened it around my waist. I grabbed the monitor and slid my cellphone into my pocket. When I got downstairs, I grabbed a bottled of water and walked into the living room. I couldn't find the remote and this was driving me insane. The phone rang and it was an unsaved number. My gut was somehow skeptical about answering the call.

"He-llo?"

"Hi. It's Themba. I am in Joburg and I have the information that you need. I'll send you the location and you will meet me there"

"Huh? How do you know where I live? Look I no longer want to know..."

"This was not a request. And don't do anything stupid like telling your husband or anyone else about this"

"Are you threatening me?", my heart was

pounding.

"I don't make threats. They're a waste of time"

"I won't be bullied by you", I snap and cut the call.

My chest was tightening up.

"Okay breathe Betso. Breathe so you can be able to think", I say to myself while regrets heavily towers over my head. What was I thinking calling this person? A message came through on my phone from the number and I quickly opened it. He sent me pictures of my mom and the inside of her house. The pictures look like they were taken without her knowledge because on them, she was doing random stuff like locking the door and choosing veggies in the street. My heart. My heart was failing me. I couldn't breathe. I hit my chest a couple of times because I weakly say on the edge of the couch. I placed my hand on my stiff neck. This bastard!

Insert 109

If the floor could talk it would've long asked to speak to the manager. I've been pacing up and down trying to figure out a way forward from this mess I succeeded in shoving myself into. I heard the babies cry through the monitor and I rushed upstairs. Muzi was in the process of picking uLwandile when I walked in. I went to take Mxolisi. He kissed me on the cheek and said "Good morning mommy". I forced a smile and greeted him back. I went to sit on the bed to feed Mxo. Lwandile was now quiet, praise the Lord. He hungrily started suckling and my heart warmed up. There's nothing I wouldn't do for these two. If it means walking into an open fire, on flaming red coal then that's exactly what I'll do. I've experienced love before but they took the bar and threw in high into the sky.

"Sthandwasami, u right?", Muzi questioned with concern on his face. I nodded. I fed Lwa when Mxo was done feeding. Muzi went to place him back in the cot. I featherly brushed his small head. Muzi came to sit next to me.

"I'm thinking of giving them second names", I lowly said and kept eye contact with my son.

"Anything in mind?", he asked.

"Yeah. Kopano le Leago", I stated and he asked what they meant.

"Kopano, unity. Boikanyo, trustworthy. I don't know. I just love the names", I say and he sits thoughtfully.

"Which one is which?", he finally asks and I giggle.

"Lwandile-Boikanyo. Mxolisi-Kopano", I clear the confusion and he places his arm around my shoulders.

"I love them. They're all not that difficult to pronounce. Unlike somebody I know, love and married", he says and rolls his eyes. I laugh.

"Haibo. What's wrong with my name?!", I exclaim and place my hand on my chest in a show of possession.

"Your name qualifies as a tongue-twister baby", he states and shakes his head.

"Mciim I'm not doing this with you. Not today", I laugh and drop my eyes to my baby. He was now falling asleep with his lips slightly parted.

I could tell them apart at first sight. Mxo's face is a bit more rounder and Lwandile's ears are more erect and outward. Apart from that, they're living proof that my womb is a photocopy machine.

Themba's phonecall was still floating around in my head regardless of the effort I mentally took to lock it out. I really hope he is bluffing or something. But he wouldn't go to such lengths if he was. What do I tell Muzi? What if he does something that will result in Themba losing a grip on his marbles?

"Baby? What's wrong? There's clearly something on your mind?", the sound of Muzi's calm voice pulled me out of the inner gut of my own thoughts. I sighed. I saw it best to stand up so I can place Lwa next to his twinling. Muzi was behind me when I turned. He placed his hands on my shoulders.

"I can't fix it if I don't know what it is. What's going on?", he asked and almost brought me to tears. I allowed my head to fall on his chest and he embraced me, comforted me. Where do I even start? Telling him is risky. He might go on a killing spree. I want him to be done with that life. I made him promise and he did. I can't be the very one to take him back there.

"I don't know. I'm just... my emotions are all over the place. I can't exactly say what's wrong. My hormones are just in complete disarray. It's

normal", I lie.

"Is there anything I can do? Get you some snacks? Give you a massage? Run you a bath?"

Arg. This was so perfect. Why did I have to make that call? What does he even want? What sane person forces information down another's the throat?

"A massage sounds great", I try to sound as convincing as I possibly can. We break the hug and go brush our teeth together. I made that call by myself. I am not going to drag my family into this.

...

After breakfast, Lwandile couldn't stop crying. He was so crying so badly it broke my heart into several pieces. I fed him, changed his nappy and he did not have a rash. Evelyn suggested that when one cries we separate them so they don't cry at the same time for no reason so she took Mxo downstairs as I tried shushing Lwa to calm him down. My upper body was dancing up and down, hoping it will help. Muzi was out. I'd asked him to get me wings and some toiletries. We were also out on toilet paper. Mom came back with the bottle hoping that it will work. It didn't. She took him from me and I went to look for the pacifier I

saw amongst the baby stuff in the nursery. I found it in the plastic that Tumi and Nombi had brought home. Still sealed. I then took it out, grabbed a rattle toy, and went back into the room.

"Aowa Filwe. You can't give him that. Nthwe e affecta ngwana phogwana"(No Filwe... This thing will badly affect the baby's fontanelle), she scolded, referring to the pacifier. I exhaled heavily and threw it on the bed.

"Ska fela pelo"(Don't get impatient), she softly said and continued trying to calm him. She placed him on the bed and unbuttoned his grey fluffy onesie. He had a white baby vest and closed-toe pants underneath.

"Maybe he's feeling hot", she said as she got a screaming Lwa out of the romper.

I sat on the bed when we had exhausted every option there in negotiating with babies. I took him in my arms and rocked him back and forth. We were slowly finding common ground. After minutes of an aching arm, he was finally dozing off. I couldn't afford to move a muscle in a way that would've added any sort of foreign spice to the rhythm. And then, the mission was finally accomplished. I slowly, delicately and cautiously

got up to go place him on their bed. The very minute I moved my hands from him, he skipped 'on your marks, get set, ready, fire' and went straight to 'go'. My heart dropped. I was exhausted. I had to shut my eyes for 2 seconds to remind myself that motherhood has no refund slips. It's exhausting but I still wouldn't trade them for anything. My mom tried taking him and I told her that I have everything under control. I took him up again and Muzi walked in. He placed the plastic bags down and extended his hands to take him.

"Haibo Mntungwa. Konekephi? Hm? Mbulazi?", he softly tries reaching out to him. Boikanyo was like a loaf of bread relative to his large hands. He spoke to him in a civil, infant worthy manner and his son understood. He went back to sleep and Muzi placed him back in his cot with ease. What? You carry people that insist on breaking your back and making you eat things you wouldn't look at twice on a random day for 9 whole months in their entirety only for them to prefer their father over you? This needs a commission of inquiry. I praised Lwa too soon. There's no calm here. There's nepotism.

...

My peace was hanging by a dilapidated thread throughout the day. Themba said he will contact me. He hasn't. I still hope he was bluffing. Tumi promised to come during the weekend because he was trapped at work. I had the Chicken Lickin Muzi brought home while seated buttflat on the brow carpet in our room. I could hear the water in the shower hitting the tiles as he took a shower. A huge part of me wanted to tell him about Themba. Another was afraid. Not of how he would react but of the consequences of him thinking my life is threatened. I saw how he brutally beat all the life out of Mbuso's body. The rational part of his brain stopped working. It was like some wild animal took over. He always makes sure he has the upper hand in every situation but everyone has a match. I don't know this Themba guy or what he is capable of. I want to tell him. I deeply and really do but I feel like this will be less messier if I don't involve him. The solutions are scattered from the problem in my brain. Nothing is making sense...

...

He came out of the shower roughly drying his head with a white towel, and another around his waist.

He placed the one in hand and then prompted me to get up. I did without struggle and he turned me so he could hug me from behind.

"I love you. Okay? I love you with all your feistiness and every stubborn particle in you. I don't think you'd be my Betso if you were any other way. You don't take things lying down. You ask the whys. You're curious. You're strong. Which is why I don't doubt for a second that you'll make a good mother. You're not alone in this. I am here to carry this load with you. I'm not here to help you. I am here to equally share in the responsibilities that come with raising these boys and the many others to come after them", he expresses with his chin on my shoulder. I place my hands on top of his on my stomach.

"Allow me to be there for you. You don't have to do everything by yourself. Drop your shoulders", he said and I did.

"You're tensed up and stressed. Babies are very quick in picking up energy, especially coming from their mothers. Please relax? If you can't do it for me then do it for them?", he pleaded and I nodded. I needed to hear this. However, this is not all the load that's weighing my chest down.

...

[The next morning]

I woke up with an annoyingly dry and parched throat. I had to get up to go get some water. I got to the kitchen and found my mom there having coffee.

"Why are you up so early? Good morning", that was me as I opened the fridge. She released a sigh full of melancholy.

"Robert's daughter died last night", she says and clutches onto her cup with both hands. I stopped drinking and placed the blue lid back on the bottle. I suddenly felt like my body was operating in slow motion. I knew why. This was not about Robert nor his daughter. It was about Kgantsho. Her having to be there for Robert will somehow mean reliving the gruesome experience of losing Kgantsho. I pulled out a chair and joined her on the counter.

"What caus..."

"Asthma", she cut through my sentence before I could finish it. She kept her eyes on her white cup with black liquid content. I took both her hands. Her eyes didn't move from the cup. She kept them fixated there. This really had nothing to do with Robert's daughter but more what it triggers.

"Will you be going to the funeral?", I ask in a coarse whisper. My voice barely does well in the morning.

"The funeral no. I still have to come back here and help you out. I can't be in the same place with a corpse then come back to be around babies. But I do want to go see him tomorrow", she informs and Themba's voice immediately echoes in my head. What if he strikes on her way there? There's a message beep on my phone and I take it out the night robe with my other hand holding on to my mother's. It was him. Chills took a shortcut via my stomach and straight to my spine. He had sent the location. He then sent another text message which read:

"Bring R100K in a bag then we'll cut our losses. Promise."

I read the message and raised my eyes to my mother whose body was there with me but whose mind was very far and distant.

"OK", I replied and placed the phone back into my pocket. I created this mess, therefore I will be the one to clean it up.

Insert 110

It is said that curiosity killed the cat. But what they never tell you is that satisfaction brought it back. However, I am not a cat. I don't have nine lives. This is not CandyCrush. I don't have rechargeable lives. I wish I did not make that call. My mom went back to her room to lie down and I paced the kitchen trying to negotiate with my brain that it gives me a tangible solution to put to use. I kept continually slept the phone against my palm. If I give this man this money, he will keep on blackmailing me. It's going to manifest into never-ending cycle and eventually crawl out of hand. I went back upstairs to check on the babies and feed them. I found Muzi changing Lwandile's diaper.

"When did you learn to do that?", I laugh.

"Phela uKuhle doesn't wear an automatic nappy", he fires shots and I laughed even harder and suck my teeth. I take Mxo and go sit on the bed to feed him.

"I hate waking up and not finding you in bed", he says and picks the baby up.

"I got thirsty. O intshwarele baby"(Forgive me)

"Yebo beng'funa kona ukuk'tshwaratshwara manje

ngivuka ibedding e empty"(I wanted to touch and cuddle with you but I woke up to an empty bed), he misunderstands my statement in its entirety and I shoot out an immediate laugh.

"He-eh. Yes tshwara means to touch but intshwarele era gore forgive me", I clarify, still laughing. He laughs as well.

"Ah yabo? Ning ning you said botsa in tswana is to ask. In pedi it's to tell. I'm no longer putting myself through trigonometry in language form. I resign", he complains and my cheeks begin to burn from all the laughing.

...

I managed to bathe the babies but they began crying after that, which made me feel like I did something wrong. My mom assured me that's probably something else. She said she noticed how painfully they suck on the hands and prepared soft porridge for them. Evelyn was worried about their bowel movements and said the porridge might give them a lot of difficulty when they have to defaecate.

"I had to feed porridge to this one the same night she arrived home because she just wouldn't keep quiet. After that, she slept like she wasn't even in

the house", my mom defended as she dished it up into a bowl with a wooden spoon. The look on Evelyn's face suggested doubt and uneasiness. I trusted that my mom knew what she was doing. Their cries piece even inner layer of my heart. She fed and burped them by putting them on her shoulder and continuously rubbing their back. The both of them slept after that. Hopefully they don't get constipated. We took them upstairs and mom stood outside our door and asked me to go check if the coast is clear. If it wasn't, she was going to wait for me to come out again to take the other one. A clear coast in this case meant a fully dressed Muzi. I couldn't help but laugh. However, I appreciated the respect she portrayed towards my husband. I walked in and found him on the bed, topless and on his laptop. He had that serious face which is always successful in charming me off my feet each time. Muzi has the male version of a resting bxtch face. I love it. Weird but I love it so much. He asked me where the other one is. I just gave him an expression which bordered between a smile and laughter refusing to be contained. I went out and got the baby. She shook her head and laughed at the silly expression that insisted on

pasting itself on my face. She then left.

I put the babies down and went over to collect a kiss from him. He had papers in the other hand and softly placed the other on my waist. He tilted his face so I could kiss him as I stood over him.

"You good?", he asked and brushed the side of my waist. I took a deep sigh.

"Yini?"(What is it?), he added. I asked him move his laptop so we could talk. He did and lifted his feet off the bed so they could touch the carpet. He asked me to sit in between his thighs. I did and he placed his hand on the small of my back.

I did not know where to even start scraping this iceberg. I placed my hand on my neck and took yet another deep sigh.

"Khuluma nami"(Talk to me), his deep and assuring voice makes everything feel like it's resolvable.

"I'm in trouble", I said in a doubtful whisper.

"What kind of trouble?", he asked and I looked away, and placed both my hands on my thighs.

"Baby I can't help you if you don't tell what's going on?"

I widened my eyes hoping to see a possible solution without involving him in this. The solution marked itself absent.

"Whatever it is surely it can be fixed. Now tell me ukuthi wenzen"(...what you've done), he persists and I look him in the eye.

"I called someone I shouldn't have", I say and it takes him a few seconds to nod in slow motion.

"O-kay. Who is this someone?", he questions and I swallow.

"Detective Themba", I nervously state.

"Who's detec... wait...Themba Themba wase KZN?", he continues to interrogate and I nod a few times. I couldn't read the expression on his face. It looked like anger but it could easily be interpreted as confusion. He took a moment to digest what I had just told him. Or rather, to choose his words carefully.

"Why?", he asked in a husk.

"Remember the day Kgokagano came to my mom's house and you found him there?", he nods.

"He had sent me an email that afternoon which I only got to see after that whole drama. He came because he wanted to tell me his findings in person", I proceeded to meekly explain. The look in his eyes suggested that I should continue.

"So he sent me an email with a recording of an interrogation on it. Between Themba and a

woman whose voice sounded like Gugu's. My curiosity got the better of me and I called him" "Okay. I'm waiting for the part where you explain what kind of trouble you're in", he calmly states. "He somehow managed to trace my call and my personal information. Now he's threatening to harm my mom if I don't bring R100K to him tonight. He said if I do something stupid like telling you about this then...", the frown on his face gains more definition as I explain.

"So he's stalking mam'Vee?", he asks, to make sure he heard me correctly. I nod.

"Where's the recording?"

"On my laptop. What happened to Mbuso's twin baby? What really happened? Please tell me the truth?"

He drops his face in exhaustion, looks up and runs his palm against it. He prompts me to get up and I do. He then stands and heads to the bathroom. He comes back with a wet face and sniffs. He drops his whole weight on the bed and gently pulls me so I can sit on the very same position I was seated on before he went and tried to drown his stress in the basin. He shoots out air and deflates his cheeks before he can speak.

"I might as well just tell you the truth. I lied. Bheki did not die in a car accident". Bheki? That would be Mbuso's twin. I just stared waiting for him to go on.

"I beat him up. To death. I'm not proud of it but I don't regret it either. I barely fight because I hate the end result. I can't control myself once I start beating somebody up. I'm not a monster. I don't kill for fun", he confesses.

"Why? Why do you have to take it all the way to death when you can just end it when the lesson has been learnt?", I take a soft approach.

"I don't know for sure. But I think it has something to do with my childhood traumas and shxt", he lets out.

"What happened in your childhood?", I question and he exhales.

"I was bullied on my first day of school. In "SubA"", he tweaks his index and middle finger twice for emphasis. I keep quiet.

"I tried standing up for myself but I just wasn't strong enough. He was 3 years older than me and he would beat me up for absolutely no reason. Unprovoked. Whenever he found me by myself in the loo or any a secluded area I knew I was going

to get a whooping. He had the time of his life with lunchboxes and money. So much that waking up to go to school was an emotional struggle for me. I couldn't bring myself to tell anyone. I was young but I felt like a weakling because I was the always the leader in my squads by mere virtue of my status as a prince. But to him I was nothing. And he made sure I felt it to the core", he explained thoughtfully.

"One day, he beat me into concussion and probably fled and left me in the toilets. I woke up at the hospital and my pride still refused to let anybody know. My mom was in England at the time. UBaba and MQ tried everything to suck the truth out of me but I just couldn't humiliate myself like that. Then Manqoba got into this habit of picking me up from my class every lunch and school-out. He watched me like a hawk until I got sick of it and yelled at him to stop", I wrapped my arm around his neck as he explained. He obviously hasn't healed from any of this. He took a heavy breath before he could continue with his story.

"He saw it fit to teach me how to fight. Everyday at 3 PM without fail. His exact words were "Ntwana yam, don't be a cheese boy just because uphuma

eb'khosini. Uzolimala. I want you to be able to stand up for yourself. I want to protect you but I'm not God so I can't be everywhere". I began enjoying the classes so much that I practised by myself in my room. Then one day ya bhaiza ibhari and tried to come for me. I roughed him so bad he bled from his nose and mouth. My mind was blocked during that moment because I only got to see that almost the whole school was surrounding us when Manqoba pulled me from him before I could do any further damage. I wasn't satisfied. I wanted to beat him up some more for making me feel that helpless and weak, but I never saw him ever again since that day", he wrapped up his story and my heart broke even further.

"Unclench your jaws", I asked of him and he obliged.

"Drop your chest and shoulders", he did.

"You need to see someone. Or else, you're going to want to settle that ancient and old score with everyone you fight with", I say and he drops his face to his chest. I pull his head to my breasts and hug him.

He raised his head after a while.

"There was this one time I don't remember where

MQ and I had went and uMaDlamini was home. When we came back, I found uBheki choking and forcing himself onto her. The image is still very clear in my head. All I could think of is the remarks he used to make about how gorgeous she looks in dresses and I went nuts. We got into a fight and I broke his neck. The police came and arrested me for about a week. We found a way to make the case disappear by paying this very Detective Themba to make him forget that such a docket ever existed", he explained and I darted my eyes around.

"Yini?"(What is it?), he asked in suspicion.

"Lutho. I'm just..."

"Out with it", he commanded.

"Entlik let me see this email you're talking about", he cuts in before I could respond.

"I don't think that's a good idea", I say and he looks at me with that "I'm not gonna ask you twice" look. I sigh before I can get up to fetch my laptop. I go to the email and hand the device to him. He reads it and plays the recording as I sit beside him.

"Okay. I was. I was sleeping with him"

"Come again? Louder this time?"

"I said I was sleeping with him!"

"Okay. Start from the beginning..."

His mouth hung open. One couldn't miss the confusion in his eyes. He scoffed in utter disbelief and placed his hand on his mouth. One of the babies began crying and I got up to attend to him. I made my way out and bumped into Evelyn in the corridor. She offered to take him before I could even ask. I went back into the room and closed the door. Muzi was on the phone.

"Nah we already have the location. I just need you to bring me one hundred blocks. Cash"

"There's no time to go to the bank. Bring the money here ASAP"

"Nah that's too risky. We don't know who else he's working with. I feel like I need to have a clear conversation with him face to face"

"I don't know mf'wethu"

"Sure"

He cut the call and I just stood there.

"Please be careful. I don't want anything happening to my mom but I also don't want you to get hurt either", I say and he drops his hands with his phone in his left. He gestures that I should come for a hug and I go fall into his arms with urgency. I could feel his warm breath leaving his

nose above my head.

"Don't worry about me. Themba is not that smart. He is just a common, overly greedy policeman"

"What's your plan?"

"I don't know yet but I need to establish whether you're being watched or not", he says and my blood starts turning into snow. My mind somehow goes back to the time where I went to KZN to visit Muzi after his accident. Mbuso and Mabuyi had a mini altercation at the door and I didn't think much of it. Now that I'm entertaining it, it all makes sense. Those two didn't like each other. Mbuso knew about the affair!

...

Manqoba came with the money and Muzi took it upstairs. They went to the study and I followed them. The looks on their faces did not even faze me one bit. They realized that I was not about to give in so they gave up on trying to intimidate me.

"You were right. Kune bhari la ngaphandle in a grey Toyota watching this house. He's been parked at the house opposite this one so it looks like he's visiting or some shxt", Manqoba explains.

"DAMMIT!", Muzi's fists attack the innocent desk.

"So you need to find a more smarter way to get to

the location", Manqoba directs this to Muzi and Muzi drops himself on the chair.

"How about... Betso drives to..."

"No", Muzi interrupts before Manqoba could finish his sentence

"No lalela. There's only one way to put an end to this mess. Hear me out. I know how the minds of these fools work. Their plan is probably not even that sophisticated. You get in the backseat and lie on the floor of the car. But she has to drive out from the closed garage and so she can't take the car that's outside. He will follow her out to make sure that she doesn't do anything funny on the way there. Once that happens we surround this whole yard with armed guards. I will distract him somehow on the road. When you get there, Betso stays in the car then you deal with the menace?" Muzi sat there drowning in his own thoughts and contemplations.

...

When Themba said I should meet him at around 23h30, he was hoping that everyone would be asleep by then and I would be able to sneak out without any suspicious. Muzi placed a gun at the back of his belt and zipped up his jacket.

"Where did you get that?", I asked as I raised my head from the cot as I was kissing my babies goodnight. Anything could happen tonight. Muzi refused till he gave in to my coming with. He made me promise to stay in the car. It became evident how Evelyn knew all about her sons shady character when she did not even bother to question why she has to watch the babies. My mom was already asleep. Manqoba left in the afternoon but for cover sake. He promised to be in the neighborhood somewhere. I did not even want to ask any further. We got into the garage through the connecting door and Muzi jammed in his steps in doubt. He raised his eyes look at me.

"Nah baby stay. I'll come up with another plan", he says and I immediately tell him that we don't have time for another plan. I told him my mom is going back to Limpopo soon and that I wouldn't forgive myself if anything was to happen to her.

"I'll get her a guard"

"No baby that's adding fuel to the fire. Let's just go", I pleaded. I did not care what would happen to Themba. I cared what would happen to my mom, because of my impulse curiosity and stupidity. I got myself into the same circle with

kak'ky people like Themba. She deserves absolutely no wrath from my consequences.

"I don't want to involve you in this", he expresses sincerely.

"I'm the one who involved you. Let's go", I beg and he looks aside before he could exhale. He gets into the back and I hop into the front and place the bag of money in the passenger seat. The car alerts that I should put on my seat belt and I do. I press the remote for the door and it slides up as I wait for it to be open completely. I drive out of the garage and also out the gate. My heart was pulsating in my stomach. Manqoba's predictions were spot on. I noticed the Toyota driving from behind me. I was tightly holding on to the steering wheel with sweaty hands. I kept taking deep breaths in and out. We were getting closer to the location and the car was still behind me. An old sand truck got into the right lane from behind us and intentionally and continually collided with the car from the sides. The driver tried keeping his control intact but he was failing dismally. The truck went for a final hard knock and shoved the car from off the road. The sand fell off the truck and I watched as it continued to block the road. Luckily, this

doesn't look like a road that's commonly used so it was fairly empty most of the time. The intention wasn't to kill him was it? Where did Manqoba even get a sand truck? With sand in it? Chaaii.

I continued to drive and my phone rang.

"Yes?"

"You're 2 minutes late", he scolded in panic.

Manqoba was right once again. This is proof that he doesn't know what he's doing.

"I'm here", I say as I drive into the gate of what looked like an abandoned factory.

"Okay. I can see your car. Drive into the parking lot. Through the demolished wall", he says and I follow his instructions. He cut the call when I turned the engine off. The place looked all types and varieties of dodgy. There was a flickering light which made it easy for me to see his outfit but not his face. He was on at a distance from me. I got out of the car with the money.

"Sawubona nkosazana", he said and I swallowed. Hard.

"He... hello", I greeted back. My nose was already getting cold. If hell has departments, this is definitely a franchise from there.

"Don't look so scared. I promise. This is just

business. I really needed the cash. I'm sorry to ambush you like this", he says and approaches me. "It's okay. Just take the money. I need to go back home to my husband before he starts suspecting that I'm not there", he finally gets close to me. Close for my nostrils to sense what he smells like but not enough for me to hear him breath. He begins scanning me from top to toe, and back up. "Kodwa umuhle yazi. Naturally. Everything about you is beautiful. OMuzi badla kamnandi futhi ngiyacabanga ukuthi..."(You're so beautiful you know... Muzi surely feasts you with a smile on his face and I think...), he didn't get to finish his sentence. Muzi was already out of the car and on top of him. He threw a few heavy punches and Themba was already screaming about how dead he was.

"Gugu?!", I yelled when she wanted to turn back at the realization that Muzi was there. Muzi raised his face to see her. His hands were on Themba's neck strangling him. He let go of him and stood up. Themba ran off rubbing his neck and coughing. "Kuse Canada la? Woza la!"(Is this the Canada you were speaking of? Come here!), he said and gestured with his finger that she should come to

him. She was frozen with her back against us. What the hell is she even doing here? With a gun? She took a one step turn and faced him.

"What are you doing here Gugulethu?", he sneered. She swallowed.

"You being here was not plan of the plan", she confessed.

"Uyahlanya or uyazenzisa?"(Are you crazy or is it just an act?), Muzi asked.

"How could you?", he went on.

"Hm?How could you sleep with my brother and pretend that you didn't consent to it just because you got caught?!"

"You told him?", she hissed at me.

"Leave her out of this", he exclaimed. She thinned her eyes and scoffed. She then raised her arm and extended it to aim.

"You wouldn't dare",calmly, Muzi said.

"Also, why is your location outside of SA when you're here? Where's your necklace?", Muzi added and she ignored him.

"I accepted you as umnakwethu. Truthfully. I warned you once that you and I won't have to fight just as long as you don't threaten my family. And what do you do? Yindoda yami le! And you, I

bent over backwards to make sure that every need of yours is met and today you're gonna stand there and blatantly choose her over me?!", she vents and cocks the gun.

"Gugu put the gun down!!", I beg through my trembling lips. Muzi pulls out his and I hear a loud and an unapologetic gunshot go off...

[THE END]



Prologue.

Funerals are never an easy thing to deal with. Their main objective is always weighing down heavily on the atmosphere in which they take place. Eyes occasionally meeting and somehow looking for answers in one another. Young or old, the long and short of funerals is always that, a loss of any loved one is never easy to accept.

Muzi sits on the porch of the royal house and downs his shot of whiskey, with his head tilted against the wall. The funeral was made sure to exude all versions of majestic. Accepting it? Not so decorous. Evelyn even collapsed at the sight of the casket being lowered further into the ground.

Energy cannot be created nor destroyed. It can only be transformed from one form, to another. A mantra by science. So it is correct that ashes do go back to ashes and dust, to dust. A body needs to decompose to become one with the earth once the soul decides to depart from the body.

The dynamics around this are debated on a daily in one(or more) part(s) of the world if not the other. Some do believe that the soul and the body are separate entities with one temporarily inhabiting the other. Whereas some, some lean towards the

belief that life is just a mass of cells that live in cooperation just far as they're supposed to. Either way, it is none of anybody's business what a random stranger somewhere on this planet thinks about the intricate details around life and death. Even if it is not a stranger but a neighbor, the business still maintains it's position as not being anybody else's but the thought-hoarder's. Unless if they're forcing it down your throat. Then it becomes your business to either ignore them or put them in line with an aggressive "Voetsek" over the fence. Your choice.

...

"Mind doing my homework for me?", Mxo says with his back against the bed and his thumbs raised off his phone screen. Lwandile laughs.

"Forget it. I have to do all the thinking and also write TWICE? You're even lazy to copy? COPY Mxo. COPY?!", he exclaims.

"Come on. I'm busy", Mxolisi begs.

"Busy with what?", Lwandile straightens his back, stops writing and thins his eyes at him.

"See the hun that just got to school on transfer?", he says and gives out a sneaky smile.

"Haibo Mxo. What about uSne?", Lwandile is

obvious in his concern.

"The more the merrier", Mxolisi shrugs and Lwandile throws the whole exercise book at him, then laughs at his idiot of a duplicate.

...

[AT THE MALOCON OFFICES]

Bongiwe mindlessly spun her chair sideways as she got lost in her own thoughts. They'd consumed her so much that she did not hear her sister walk into her office. Lindelwa noticed this and saw the perfect opportunity to scare the crap out of her like she always did when she was a kid. The clown in her couldn't resist making a brief "Ho!" sound and enjoying every second of it when Bongi almost rocketed out of her chair in shock, almost spilling the coffee that was placed in front her waiting to be drunk.

"Dammit how many times am I supposed to tell you to stop doing that?!", she scolds as she tried to wipe off the droplets that landed on her peach top with handkerchief that her eyes landed upon when she was looking for something to rescue her shirt from stain. Lindi was laughing hysterically.

"No. Wait. That belongs to a man...", Lindi pointed at the handkerchief in suspicion before she could

lift off her crossbody bag and dump herself on the leather chair opposite Bongi, separated by her desk. Bongi continued trying to get the handkerchief to suck out all the brown from the material that laid on the top of her breasts.

"Are you going to tell me or should I do my own research ", Lindi insisted on irritating her big sister. "I don't even know who this belongs to. I see a lot of men in here everyday", she defends without ceasing from trying to rescue her top. Lindi lets out a suspecting "Mmmm". Bongi shakes her head.

"Anyway, aren't you supposed to be at school?", she ensures changing the topic because she knew that Lindi, the provocateur was going to grill her without a streak of remorse had she told her who the handkerchief really belonged to.

...

Muzi walked back into the house. To him, the crowd in the yard was beginning to feel like they were conversing on the top of his nerves. He made his way to the master bedroom and found the door closed. He knocked a couple of times before his mother could sluggishly come to open the door for him as he was about to walk away. He walked in and closed the door. They both approached the

bed, then sat. They both released heavy, melancholic breaths almost at the same time. Evelyn raised her head and gave an unstable smile to her son.

"Where's Thando?", she asked.

"I've no idea. She was in the kitchen the last time I saw her"

She then placed her chin on her shoulder and nodded. She tried to keep it together but her emotions were determined to come out to play and embarrass her. Muzi shifted closer to her and gave her a hug. He was also falling apart on the inside but according to him, there was no time for that. His mother needed him and he was determined to be strong for her, and everyone else that needed the pillar in him. There wasn't even a need for the effort of masking away his emotions. Only he knows when he's falling apart because it only happens on the inside, never on the outside unless if a particular, special woman is involved.

Episode 01.

It is undoubtedly heartwrenching for any child, even the big ones to witness their mothers' fall apart in tears. Muzi tried all he could to comfort the aching heart of the woman who birthed him and it bore no fruit.

When she finally calmed down, she asked be excused so she could take a nap. She then stuffed herself in between the sheets on her late husband's side of the bed, lazily, like bacon one would remember to add to sandwich only after adding everything else. Muzi stood up after a couple of dead brain seconds. He then pulled and fixed the comforter (if there's a pun here, excuse it) so it covers her well.

He had Manqoba on his mind when he went out of the room so that's who he was looking for. He asked around and nobody attested to having seen him. He takes out his phone from his pocket to call him but it throws him straight to voicemail with no detours. Knowing his brother, he figures he should call Joe.

"JJ?"

"Yeah man?"

"Is he there?"

"He was by the bar area when I left. I'm not sure if he still is but he didn't look like anybody who was about to leave anytime soon", Joe states and Muzi thanks him, prior to driving himself there.

...

He gets to Joe's place and finds it almost empty. It wasn't as packed as it usually is. People prefer staying indoors with their heaters and onesies under such a brutal weather. The sudden cold front was no surprise. Each time anybody dies in the Khumalo household, the weather makes no mistake in getting this point across. When it's a king, everybody knows not to leave their laundry outside at night. It rains cats, mice and dogs. It is that kind of weather that creates a dark and grey foggy atmosphere. One that drivers with faulty wiper blades don't like.

He placed his hand on his shoulder when he arrived and Manqoba did not raise his head from the counter. Muzi placed himself on the bar stool and the bartender asked what he could get him.

"Just a glass of water thanks", he replied. He'd had too much to drink for the day, according to him.

"Ufunani la Muzi"(What are you doing here?)

"You disappeared from the cemetery only to come here and drown yourself in alcohol?"

"I don't need a lecture from you", Manqoba dismissed him with his forehead still resting on his lower arms on the counter. The water arrived and Muzi fixed the glass on the coaster.

"Okay", Muzi said in defeat and just sat there.

"I am not ready to take over bro", Manqoba finally confessed.

"You'll never be", Muzi calmly said and took a sip on his water. Both their potent, yet very distinguished scents fought in the air, causing confusion to any pair of nostrils that passed by.

"Maybe I don't want to be. Why did they choose me? You'd do a better job than I would", he continues to vent.

"And why is that?"

"I am not made for such a huge task. My portion is IT and crime. Phelela lapho"(Ends there). Muzi takes a deep breath out. They were both hurting from the passing of their father but Manqoba was also stressing over it. His life was about to change and he was no where near ready for that. No where near 'around the corner' for it.

"I see you haven't been only drinking in this bar

but you've been smoking something as well. You've know about this your whole life. Why is it only coming as a surprise now? Uyangidida manje mina"(Your actions are baffling to me), Muzi says and raises his hand to wave at the lady who was greeting him. She was no stranger. An old classmate. So old that it took him a while before he could put her face to her name. Manqoba was sinking in silence.

"Let's go home", Muzi adds.

"I didn't ask you if it was a good idea for me to come here why would you think I'd need your opinion to leave?", Manqoba let out. Muzi shook his head and stood up with the car keys, both his and Manqoba's.

...

"Manqoba hasn't been inaugurated as chief kodwa already uzenzela umathanda emzini wam?!", Evelyn yells at Enhle who had moved a couple of vases around and changed the direction of the dinner table.

"It's not like that. I just thought..."

"There's no platform for you to think. This is my house. Stop being wayward and focus on how you're going to support your husband on this

journey", Evelyn screams as she pushes the table back to its original position, in her long pyjamas and unfastened brown gown. The loose belt was even sweeping the floor. Enhle did not think of what she did as a big deal hence she rolled her eyes at what she perceived as Evelyn being nothing short of dramatic. Most of the family members had left.

Muzi walked in on this altercation and pinched his nose bridge in irritation.

"Now what the hell is going on?", he couldn't hide the level of his annoyance.

"Ask this 2 minute noodle queen over here!, Evelyn snapped before she could march back to her room in her messy hair and puffy, red eyes.

"Enhle kwenzakalan?" (What's going on?)

"I moved a couple things around and..."

"Why would you do that?", Muzi asked in a husk.

"I just thought they would look better that way"

"Look, I don't want to get involved in female squabbles but to avoid trouble, just leave everything as it", he said and dropped himself on the couch.

"Okay then. Where is my husband?"

"I have no idea", Muzi shamelessly lied, which

wouldn't be the first time he did in a scenario like this.

...

"Enter!", an emotional Thando yells from her bed when Muzi was knocking on her closed door.

"Baby girl", he lowly said and approached her for a sitdown hug. She fell apart even further.

"I'm sorry", he whispered with his hand on her overly oily hair. She had overdosed on the hair food.

"I just... I just wish his death wasn't so unexpected and quick", she lets out in cuts and breaks. Her tears were suffocating her.

"What do you mean?", he asked in a voice full of comfort and concern.

"I don't know. I wish he fell sick for a while instead of being fine and dying from a heart attack the next day. That way, I would've somehow acclimatized myself to the idea of him being possibly gone or something", she confessed and he pulled a deep breath out.

"I think that's a bit... selfish don't you think?", he cautiously says.

"It's kinda the same as a person who dies from suicide. Most times, we always expect people to

keep alive or die according to our rules, not for theirs but for our sakes and our own selfish reasons", he explains and she shuts her eyes when it begins to make sense to her. She nods and tightens the hug around her brother, who then kisses her round but cold forehead.

...

After Thando managed to slip and fall into deep sleep, Muzi tucked her in and walked outside to find his wife. When he finally did, she was washing tripe and cow intestines in a bowl by herself.

"Look at you being a wife", he said with a smile and she laughed.

"Hey baby", she greeted and he got to her to steal a kiss. She then angled her face up so he could kiss her properly.

"Hm awusanuki awusanuki yilo mogodu"(You smell terrible because of this tripe), he teased and she laughed harder. He enjoys every second of her effortless giggles. Especially if he is the reason for them.

"Kodwa usangithanda"(but you still love me), she teases back with her tongue out.

"That'll never change. You look beautiful mama", he says and brushes the part of her weave that

was flowing out of the brown and silk LV doek around her head.

"Thank you daddy", she shows her gratitude with a huge smile on her face but her hands continued with the work.

"Aren't you cold out here?", his concern pushed him to ask.

"Ngiyaqeda manje"(I'm almost done).

"Did you bring the spinach as I asked?", she asked with her eyes on the bowl.

"Ah ngikhohliwe mina"(I forgot)

"Ha-ana Muzi...", she slightly stomped her feet from the backless chair she was seated on. He laughed.

"I'm kidding. I'm kidding", he quickly said before she could throw her toys around any further.

"Mciim yaz wena", she said and shook her head.

"It's in the kitchen. How could I forget when I'm the one who asked for it?", he said and went down to wrap his hands around her waist.

"Kodwa uyangiphazamisa yaz"(You're interrupting me), she giggled throughout the wet neck kisses she was receiving.

"Am I?", he whispered as he nibbled on her soft neck. They rub noses lovingly before he could let

out an exhausted breath out when they pulled apart. He wasn't quite himself. With good reason.

...

They went back inside the house with Muzi carrying the bowls and the knife. He could've easily had the tripe at the back but she offered to make it from scratch just how he likes- hoping to cheer him up. He added that she makes the 'gravy'-spinach she always makes and she agreed. He even got a business idea when she introduced that type of spinach to him and said he's going to find ways to get it into supermarkets since it's not available as yet. The twins came down running on the stairs and she yelled "Hey! Hey! This is still a funeral! What's with the noise?"

"No it's not", Mxo cheekily said.

"Excuse you?", Muzi said and he kept quiet. It didn't take long for them to be at it again.

"Boikanyo! Kopano! Fuseg man!", she sternly yelled. She had had enough of the delinquent rascals for one day. Muzi raised a face they both know too well and it worked. They bent their lips and took the walk of shame back upstairs. Betso complained about how crazy they drive her sometimes and apologized for swearing because

she knows how much he hates it. He pulled her for a hug and she stood on her toes.

"It's okay. Sometimes you just need to keep quiet and look the other way. Their lucky packet energy quickly dies down when they don't get a verbal reaction", he suggests and places a kiss on her frustrated forehead.

Episode 02.

The royal house had quietened down a couple days after the funeral. A family meeting was requested by the elders for reasons known to them. When they first arrived in the house, Betso, Thando and Enhle were lounging in the TV room indolent with Thando still in her pyjamas. A luxury only she can afford amongst them three since she was under no expectation to keep up a certain impressive image. She ran up the stairs to go call her mother and brothers, following the order of bab'Mkhul'Sizwe, her fathers youngest uncle. Betso and Enhle straightened out their legs anxiously as they both still find this man with an

intimidating statue uncomfortable to be around. He threw sharp one look towards the couch they were both seated and only then did they bump heads asking to be excused. According to bab'Sizwe, this is the very first thing they should've done at the sight of him. When everyone came down and greeted, only then did he take his seat. He then cleared his throat and put his hat on his knee.

"Nje ngoba sonke siyazi ukuthi isikhothamile indlalifa ka mfowethu, kufanele manje silungiselele inkosi yethu entsha, uManqoba, Nathisiyabusa...Khumalo. Akekho ongalazi loludaba. Manje ke..."(As we all know about the passing of the heir to my brother's throne, it's necessary now that we start preparing for the inauguration of our new chief, Manqoba Nathisiyabusa Khumalo. We've all been expecting this. So now...", an unsolicited entrance disrupted Sizwe from consummating his briefing. Evelyn irritably placed her palm on her face and looked away.

"Aningi ndlulise la, yi family meeting enjan le la kushorta khona amalunga amanye womndeni?"(What kind of a family meeting is this

that's held in the absence of other family members?)

That would be Mbhekiseni Khumalo, the half-brother to the fallen chief.

"You're interrupting a very important meeting Mbhekisen", Evelyn reprimands from where she is seated.

"Mbhekiseni", Bab'Sizwe calmly calls out.

"Yebo bab'mncan"

"Wa nyamalala kangaka. Ubuyaphi?"(What yanked you out of your disappearance?)

"I'd also like to know", Evelyn adds to Sizwe's question. Mbhekiseni shot a slicing brief look at her.

"Where I've been has nothing to do with you, ice queen. You shouldn't even be sitting in on this. Go make us tea like the good makoti you should be", Mbhekiseni vomits out these words with zero uncertainty. Evelyn scoffs and Sizwe reprimands him to guard his mouth. Mbhekiseni, disregarding every presence in the room, takes out a small bottle of whiskey from the pocket of his grey blazer.

"Ku ngan ungazanga uzongcwaba umfowenu?"(Why didn't you come for your

brother's burial?)

"Ey bengimatasa man nibongixolela"(I was busy please forgive me), he airily says and takes another sip of his intoxicating beverage.

"Kodwa ukwazile ukuveza ubuso kulo mhlango ongak'funi ngalutho?"(But you managed to arrive to this meeting that has nothing to do with you), Sizwe shoots out. Muzi and Manqoba were both too tired and hungover to argue, or even comment on anything. They went overboard last night with the indoor drinking.

"Angisayizwa kahle manje. UBab'mncan ukhuluma ngani ngoba yimina ofanele yile shlalo futhi ashade nalo ice queen"(I don't understand how this has nothing to do with me when I'm the one who's supposed to sit on this throne and also marry this ice queen), Mbhekiseni states his perspective. Everyone laughs. The laughter emanates from two possibilities--That he's either joking or that the alcohol got the better of important parts of his brain.

"I'm not joking", he says to Evelyn. The smile on her face abruptly disappears.

"Your blood is diluted and you have the audacity to think you can marry me? Or even become a chief

for that matter?", Evelyn blurts out and he stands to charge at her. Muzi was already shielding his mother before Mbhekiseni could get to her.

"My husband was a 100 times more of a man than you could ever be. I don't appreciate you disrespecting him in this manner!", an emotional Evelyn insists on ripping her chest apart, regardless of how volatile Mbhekiseni is known to be.

"Makoti nawe musa!"(Stop talking!), Sizwe directs this to Evelyn. Muzi was holding tightly to Mbhekiseni's wrists with no effort at all.

"U lwa nami heh mfana?"(Are you fighting with me boy?), Mbhekiseni threatened through gritted teeth. Manqoba stood up and left.

...

"This life ain't it bro I miss Joburg", Mxo complains to Melokuhle who was drowning in his own thoughts. With his back lazily sinking into the couch, in his room.

"Are you listening to me man?!", he hits him on the knee for attention.

"Hm?!", he quickly snapped out of it.

"I SAID... I am going insane. I miss Joburg", he says and dramatically pulls down his cheeks. Melo laughs.

"Ave une drama. What's in Joburg that you can't find here? I live here every single day and I'm never bored", Melo defends.

"Ey I ain't you bro you vibe to anything", Mxo's annoyed self continues to vent. Melo continues to laugh.

"Also, why would you choose KZN over JHB?"

"I dunno. There's peace here I guess", Melo explains.

"Really? So it has nothing to do with living with my mom and shii?"

"Naahh. Your moms and I are cool", Melo corrects.

"Rea-LLY?"

"Yeah. I ain't picking sides"

"Neither am I"

"Anyway, what's up with Lwandile these days?", Melokuhle asks with a confused frown on his face.

"What do you mean?"

"I don't know. He's pulling back from everyone. Man we used to video call at least twice a week. Not anymore. I've only ever spoken to him once or twice since yall got here"

"I don't know what you're on about. Anyway, where are all the huns hiding at because ngibathe ngiyabheka nix!", Mxo says with eagerness and

Melo shakes his head, stands up and laughs. Mxo follows out.

"Are you even hitting any?", he continues to be a pest as they walk downstairs.

"Awungiyeka"(Leave me alone), Melo says and walks into the man cave.

"You heard what dad and MQ said about this place yesterday",Mxo reminds.

"This is where they keep all the good stuff", Melo excitedly says and walks behind the bar.

"Come on man you'll get us in trouble again"

"Will you relax?"

"Look, old man is chilled but there's buttons I'm not going to willingly press. If they catch you in here, you're on your own", Mxo says,raises his hand in surrender and walks out in reverse.

"Okay okay. Sissy", Melo says and follows him out.

...

Muzi walked the yard trying to get some of the freshest air that he so much and particularly loved being home for. His phone rang and he thought twice about answering it. He felt no desire to be discussing anything that had to do with work at that moment. The company could collapse at that moment and he'd certainly opt to see to it later.

"Bongiwe", he finally answered.

"Mr K Hi. I know you said no interruptions whatsoever but CleanIt is threatening to take us to court", she was panicked. Muzi exhaled.

"There was a slight mistake with the slogan..."

"Whatever it is, please fix it and make sure the company name stays out of it. When you approached me asking that I give you office space, you were professional. Everything about your proposal was impressive. That's why I even bought in and agreed we partner up. I deal with construction. I know nothing about advertising. Clean this mess", he sharply commanded and Bongiwe immediately said "Yessir". He switched off the phone and placed it in his pocket when he felt the stress was piling up.

Betso was in the kitchen preparing dinner for the family after stressful afternoon. She could cringe at the thought of the part 2 that is to take place the following day. Just like the kids, she was also desperate to go back to her own house. The school had been notified about the expected absence of the twins and there was an agreement for them to submit back all the work that got sent to them via email so they don't get left behind. Ava now lives

overseas and having all the kids there except her broke her heart. She gave a flimsy excuse about not being able to get away from work to attend the funeral. She doesn't come home much. Even when she is home, when her maternal grandmother speaks anything of visiting her mother in prison she always finds an excuse not to.

"Pass me that strainer and get off from there!", she said to Mxo and took the rice off the stove. Mxo got off the counter and handed her the strainer.

"Where's your brother?", she asked.

"Which one? My brother-brother or my brother?", he teased and he laughed, hitting him with a dishcloth.

"Lwandile man"

"He's napping", he said and picked up a peeled carrot from one of the bowls.

"This is why I don't want you in the kitchen when I'm cooking. O shortisa di ingredients Kopano man", she scolded impatiently and he laughed. His laughter began fading when he had a sweet voice knocking from the front door.

"Sanibonani", the young lady said.

"Yebo sawubona", Betso politely greeted back while straining the rice into the sink.

"Uma uthi ngimbongele kuwe for idoek"(My mom says I should thank you on her behalf for the headwrap), she said and extended her hand to Betso so she takes it. Betso signaled to Mxo that he takes it. His ears were evidently blocked.

"Zinjan iynwele?"(How's her hair?), Betso asked and sprinkled Mxo with some of the cold water off her fingers so he springs out of his daydreaming. He snapped out of it and realised what was being requested of him and took the doek. The corners of his lips were twitching from trying to conceal a smile. The girl shyly dropped her eyes to the floor and said "Ugundile"(She shaved them off). A brief laugh slipped from Betso's lips when she remembered the disastrous incident where the lady in question's silk doek caught fire when she was busy gossiping at a funeral.

"Shame man. Thanks for bringing it sweet", Betso said and the girl said "Nisaleni kahle", with her one hand holding the other.

"Vala lo mlomo before you swallow a fly!", Betso said and checked on her steaming stew. Mxo laughed and attempted to walk out.

"Manje uyaphi weMbulazi?"(Where are you now going?)

He stood at the door in a daze with his hand scratching the back of his head.

"Ngisayobheka iynkomo nobaba ngale sbayeni"(I'm going to check on the cows with dad by the kraal), he blatantly lied and punctuated his failed deceit with a laugh he couldn't stop.

"Iynkomo ne?"(Cows hey?), Betso said and laced her sentence with sarcastic tone.

"Yebo mama"

"Did you sort your laundry just like I asked you to?", she asked and brought her hand to her lips so she tastes the stew on her palm.

"But ma. There's helps for that"

"Did you or did you not?"

"Not", he lowly confessed and sulked his way upstairs.

Episode 03.

"Do you really have to go?", Mxo asked Melo who

was now punctuating his final school look with a blue blazer. The red and white emblem on his left pocket stood out.

"Yeah. It's presentations today and if I miss them I'll have to do them when everyone has done theirs. Not happening buddy", Melo defends as he stuffs his books into his backpack.

"Come on. It's a Friday today and Lwa and I are going back home after the inauguration", Mxo sulks in his pyjamas, barefoot.

"I'll be back before school's out then. I promise", he affirms and they fist bump. At that very instant, his ride to school honks outside out of impatience. He walks out of his room and leaves Mxo there, rushing downstairs. Mxo walked out and went back to his room with Lwa. He found his twin staring out the window, obviously deep in thought. Could've easily mistaken for contemplating murder.

"And then wena? Udliwa yin?"(What's bugging you?), Mxo said as he slipped back into the sheets. The cold morning breeze around the house demanded him to.

"Nothing", Lwa coldly stated and kept his eyes riveted outside.

"You've been behaving like a fresh widow all week. You and I both know this has nothing to do with umkhulu. Tell me what's going on because you're dampening my mood too, which is unfair. Mxolisi rants and Lwa lazily turns to look at him with grimace.

"What the fxck is eating you up? I can't help you if I don't know what it is", Mxo insists. Lwa huffs out a lightweight laugh.

"You sound like dad", he comments.

"Now tell me what's going on? We've been together since womb days you should be able to trust me by now"

"Womb days", Lwandile laughs at this statement.

"Yes. Gestational ride or dies", Mxo adds.

"Oh fxck you", Lwandile laughs even harder, then walks over to sit on the bed. It takes him a couple of minutes before letting his chest open. His impatient twin was looking at him with desperate, growing worrisome eyes.

"Mxo, I think... actually no. I've realized... Okay fxck this. I am gay", he confessed and turned to look for a reaction in his brothers blank eyes. Mxo opened his mouth to speak but shut it immediately afterwards.

"Wait... You mean..." , Mxo said before he exploded in heart-piercing laughter till he fell on his side and ultimately his back on the bed.

"Mciim", Lwa irritably said and stood up to leave. Mxo quickly ran to the door, locked it and placed the key the pocket of his pyjama pants, still laughing.

"Wait wait wait. You mean to say that's the big spooky secret that's been keeping you awake all this while? Coming out to me actually gave you a headache? I've been told I'm special but this just thumps a stamp on it", he says and walks over to dump himself on the couch with an overly amused look on his face, leaving an irritated Lwa at the door.

"This is not funny", he says, still standing by the door.

Mxo tapped the side of the leather couch to indicate that he wants Lwa to sit next to him.

"I've known you for 16 years and you think.. bra you invaded MY womb space and I had to suck it up and live with it for 16 fxcking gravy years and you think this is news to me?!", Mxo rants and Lwa turns to him in surprise.

"You know?"

"I been knew! Dummy"

"How come you never said anything?"

"Your sexuality is none of anybody's business. Not even mine. You may have photocopied my identity but I have no business coming out on your behalf"
Lwandile laughs.

"Oh fxck you very much", he says to Mxo with a shy smile.

Mxo places his hand around his shoulder.

"I love you. Nothing is ever going to change that. Even if you wake up with an extra pair of eyes on your forehead I'll still love you the same. I'm not saying I'm not gonna laugh but I'd still love you the same", he confesses and they both burst in tear-filled laughter.

...

Meanwhile in the one of the rooms in the royal house,

"Good morning sthandwasami", Muzi said to a thoughtful Betso who was already wide awake but far away. He wrapped his hands around stomach and asked "What's wrong?". She placed hers above his and shook her head.

"I can see that something is bothering you. Ikiphe lenyoka esetshanini udaddy ayibulale once"(Take

out this snake in the grass so daddy can kill it), he says and Betso laughs.

"Cheesy", she remarks and he laughs as well, appreciating the smile on her face. Something he regards as an achievement.

"Tell your husband what's on your mind?", he whispers and pillows his chin against her shoulder. She takes a heavy breath out.

"I had a bad dream. That's all", she lets out.

"What was it about? Were you being chased by a screaming fork?", he asks and she laughs, slightly hitting him on the arm. When both their laughter dissipated into the air,

"I.. I dreamt I was pregnant", she says and the smile on her husband's face slowly disappears.

"I'm sorry...", he whispers in a throaty voice. She shrugged and pursed her widened lips together.

"I'm sorry I couldn't protect you that day", he adds.

"Don't. If I ever had to take a bullet for you ever again I'd do it. All over again and not think twice about it", she affirmed.

"That's the thing. I don't want you taking bullets for me. I'd rather die than lose you. You know this"

"I almost lost you once. I'm never putting myself

through that pain again. Watching you hooked to hospital machines sucked out my heart Mbulazi", she counter argues.

"Why does this suddenly feel like a race of who is gonna lose who first?", he says and she drops her face back and smiles.

"No one is losing the other here. We're gonna grow old together and die at the same time, holding hands even in the afterlife", she says.

"Hamba Shakespeare", he teases and she laughs.

"Trust you to ruin a beautiful moment", she says and he pulls the sheets above his head, travelling to her navel. She couldn't contain the laughs as his touch on her stomach felt ticklish.

"Wenzan manje baby?"

"You said I've ruined a beautiful moment. Allow me to remake it?"

...

The noise encapsulated by the grey walls of Johannesburg prison was hurtful to the ears of those who have not been acclimatized to it. When their stomachs get full, the prisoners always think it's somehow a wise idea to burn off the calories by fighting one another, most of the time. If the warder is an ignorant or lazy one, blood is most

likely to be spilt.

"Hey hey hey! Voetsek julle man!!", the warder intently broke off the fight between the two ladies while the others continued to cheer them on. He threatened the lot and they dispersed to their respective cells.

"I did not see you at lunch", Gugu's cellmate remarks and looks at her suspiciously as she sat on her lower bunk of the bed, reading a novel.

"I wasn't hungry", she replied without raising her eyes to make contact.

"Mmm. Thembi and Lorencia were at it again", she informs excitedly to no reply from Gugu.

"Arg how long are you planning on being miss goody two shoes in here huh? Jailbird slay queen?", she mocked and Gugu pounced on her in that very same breath. She pushed her to the wall and held a toothbrush with a burnt sharpened edge against her neck.

"Listen, I don't want trouble and you smell like one. I lived peacefully with my previous cell mate. If you're going to be any different from her then I'm sorry but I'm gonna have to end you", she hissed at her and the mate raised her hands in surrender. The warder hit the metal rails with a

rod and asked what was going on. Gugu quickly hid the brush before they could be broken apart.

"Should I take you back to your old cell?", the warder threatened the new mate.

"But I'm not the one--"

"SHOULD I take you back BACK to your old cell?!", the warder reiterated. The mate instantly got the message. Gugu was evidently protected.

"No...", she lowly responded.

"What was that?", the female warder said, holding her ear out indicating that she wants to hear her properly.

"I said no. I'm fine here"

"Good. Behave", she warned and walked out.

Pulling the rails so she closes them in. They challenged each other with a stare before Gugu could walk back to her bed and book.

...

The school siren went off and some were already at the gate ready to go home. Melo did not keep his forgotten promise to Mxo. He attended every class and session. Mxo should've known better than to try and convince a nerd at heart to bunk school. Jessica walked up to him as he was packing his books standing over his desk and hugged him

from behind.

"H-hey. What's up?", he softly said and continued packing his books.

"Non' much really. Just wanted to thank you for the flowers and chocolates you sent to me when I was in hospital. Even when you were going through a rough patch yourself. I'm sorry about your granddad"

"Don't sweat it. That's what friends are for right? I wasn't even expecting you back so soon", Melo said and turned to sit on his desk and press his palms on the edges.

"I'm okay now. Friends? We're clearly not on the same page", Jess says and tucks her blonde hair behind her ear. Melo purses his lips with an interested naughty look on his face. She took his tie in between her fingers and flirtingly played with it. Mthokozisi, Melo's 'bestfriend turned archenemy' walked in and the first thing he said was "You're an a**hole Melokuhle!". Melo turned to face him with a frown on his face.

"And what the fxck is your problem?", he said to a furious Mthokozisi.

"Busi floods my phone with crying emojis every night. She even missed school because of yalls

breakup. Hell her mom even put her through therapy and you outchea flirting with this Karxn?!", he shoots out and Jessica immediately takes offense.

"You're well versed in racism but trigonometry has your dumba** by the nuts!", she retaliated and Melokuhle laughed unintentionally.

"Yeah whatever. For what it's worth, what you're pulling is a real bxtch move Melo", Mthokozisi remarked and pulled his heavy backpack over his shoulder.

"Get over yourself. People break up all the time. And for what IT'S WORTH, bengiy'thanda leya ngan. Tell her to tell you the whole truth", Melo furiously says and zips up his bag.

"The only truth I know is that she's pregnant and it's your baby"

"What?", Melo lowly says and drops his shoulders. Mthokozisi instantly regrets his loose mouth and tries to respond but instead starts choking.

"Oh my God Mtho are you okay?!", Jessica rushes up to him when she notices his eyes rolling back. Melo runs to them and they get him gently to the floor. He begins having a seizure and has white foam coming out of his mouth.

"Kuhle call an ambulance OMG!", an emotional, panicked and teary plea comes from a kneeling Jessica.

Episode 04.

An influx of more family members made it all feel real to the pending king. He was no longer in a daze about taking the reigns from his deceased father but ready was no where near the right word. The cows were already put to the slaughter and the traditional beer was waiting deliciously to be consumed. Even a blind man could sense how big the event was going to be.

If there's an English word for sphithiphithi please kindly insert it here. Betso bumped into Enhle at the top of the stairway carefully holding a black and white attire on her arm. It had just been ironed.

"Hey Queeeen", she said to Enhle in a teasing tone. Enhle laughed and acknowledged the form of address.

"I haven't seen you all day", Enhle remarked.

"Ma made me manager of the pots of the back", she replies and airily rolled her eyes.

"Okay. Are they still in a meeting? It's been 2 hours now are they discussing a national heist yin?", Enhle questioned. Betso shrugged, placed both hands in her apron and made a quick trip down the stairs.

...

The elders stood up patiently when the meeting was adjourned. Muzi and Manqoba remained seated around the dining table. The shut doors were successful in keeping all types of noises outside. Evelyn kept expecting Mbhekiseni to show up to no avail. She had a feeling he would pounce on her like the wild animal he is. She derived this derogative from how he always smells like a wet dog. According to her. She doesn't mind him, just as long as he's at least 3 meters away from her and keeps his mouth shut. Mbhekiseni was the type of person who got magnetized to you just by the hatred you displayed for him.

Bab'Sizwe placed his affirmative hand on Manqoba's shoulder.

"Ngine sqiniseko sokuthi U bab'wakho uyaziqhenya ngawe la elele khona ngale snqumo

os'thathile ndodana"(I'm pretty sure your father is proud of you for the decision you took son), he stated and patted him twice on the shoulder and squeezed.

"We're here to guide and show you the way. Ungakhathazeki kakhulu"(Don't worry much), he added and Muzi nodded on MQ's behalf. The other elders had walked out and left the door open. An avalanche of noise was pouring in. Paroxysms of loud laughs coming from the ladies in the kitchen. Bab'Sizwe also eventually left.

"You've got this", Muzi reassured and put out his fist so they can bump. Manqoba gave a halfhearted smile and they fist bumped.

"Anyway, let me go find my wife", Manqoba said and screeched the tile with his chair so he can stand.

"Olyt", Muzi said as he unlocked his phone.

"Wait...", Manqoba turned towards Muzi before he can walk any further and Muzi bent his neck back to 'see' what he had to say.

"Did you finish the recent bottle of cognac all by yourself? Wakanda stress do you have?", Manqoba said and Muzi briefly stared at him like he was trying to figure out why he had suddenly

grown horns. It then hit the both of them, at the same time.

"Ayayaya!", they both exclaimed in exasperation and Muzi stood up so they could find the boys.

...

"Sit!", Manqoba said to all three after they pushed them into the dark study, after they found them sleeping. Melokuhle placed his fingers on his throbbing temples. Mxolisi snorted his way to the couch.

"I don't even know what I'm doing here", Lwandile said. Completely sober. Muzi opened the drawer to the desk that used to belong to his father and took out an object. The two rascals were already at the door preparing to run only to find the door locked.

"So you're drunk enough to lazy around but sober enough to run?", he said as he switched the device on. Lwandile was just standing there waiting to be sentenced for innocence.

"I said sit!", Manqoba said and went to sit on the edge of the desk.

They came back.

"Is that a taser?", Melokuhle nervously asked.

"The fact that you think that tells me that you're

too drunk", Muzi said and held it to his mouth.

"A breathalyzer?", Lwandile commented.

"I don't have to tell you what to do...", Muzi said as he waited for Melo to breathe into the object.

"Dad come on", Mxolisi begged.

"How many times did we specifically tell you to stay out of the man cave?", Manqoba interrogated.

"We never went..."

"BREATHE!", Muzi was getting impatient.

"I promise we're not drunk. See, the thing with these things is that they can easily give you false results. We see it all the time in the physics lab", Melo defended.

"Exactly. Also, we had cranberry juice. Cranberry, carbon dioxide and ions create alcohol in the blood dad come on?", Mxolisi added to the defense.

"HUH?!", Muzi and Manqoba both looked at him incredulously. Lwandile internalized a laughter.

"I don't think that science is correct. Breathe dammit", Muzi commanded.

"And why are you standing that far?", Manqoba directed this at Lwandile.

"You know I don't drink", he said with certainty.

Manqoba looked at him dubiously before he went "Mmm". Deep down, he knew he was telling the truth. The two finally gave in and exhaled into the breathalyzer sequentially. They both tested insanely positive. Muzi dropped the hand with the breathalyzer in defeat, with a look that was borderline disappointed and speechless.

"Ngitheni ngotshwala ku nina nobabili?" (What did I say about alcohol to you two?), he questioned and they darted their eyes around. Sucking onto their bent lips.

"Can I go?", Lwandile asked. Muzi insisted he also gets checked. He captured his breath and that put him in the clear. Manqoba threw Lwandile the keys and he left.

"I'll deal with them", Muzi said and Manqoba threw a half-open eye to the two and told them they're now under heavy surveillance.

"Your stupid legs must be wobbly. Sit", he instructed and they scurried to the couch. He wheeled the leather chair that was in front of the mahogany desk and sat in front of them. He then took out his phone, turned on the flashlight and inspected both their eyes. They sharply squinted and frowned throughout all of this.

"Exactly how much did you drink?", he shot out with intense curiosity.

"Not that much. You couldn't even tell we were drunk", Melokuhle continued to defend.

"Which we are not", Mxolisi, the paralegal, footed in. Muzi exhaled heavily.

"Boys, this is not a joke. I don't want you drinking. Not like this", he gravely stated.

"But you drink all the time and you never do anything silly"

"I can't be your parent and your age mate at the same time. Listen, alcohol is not going anywhere. Give it two more years. I'm asking for just two sober years from the two of you", he said and they both looked down.

"Where's your car Melokuhle?", he asked and Melo cleared his throat.

"At the scrapyard"

"When were you planning to tell me this awusho?"

"That wasn't because of booze. AND I wasn't the one driving it", his words faded the more he spoke in shame.

"Who was?"

"That's a long story?"

"U tshela mina nge long story? Did you win that

car in a bet somewhere?"

"No. You bought it"

"This is new", Mxolisi said as his eyes moves from his dad and his brother as they conversed.

"Awuthule wena madakweni"(Shut up, alcoholic), Muzi shot out from taxed patience.

"Okur"(Okay), Mxolisi sheepishly said and sunk further into the couch on his back.

...

"Baby!", Manqoba yelled to Enhle who was making shuffling sounds in the ensuite.

"Yes love?", her disembodied voice responded to the call. Manqoba kept quiet. She appeared with a towel around her body and dripping wet hair.

"This is not the shirt I picked out", he said with his brow raised.

"Uhm... I know but I felt like..."

"Hayi man Enhle. Angiyona ingan'. I specifically told you that I want to wear the black shirt for tonight", he calmly stated.

"This one matches your sneakers perfectly. They're both white", she tried to make him see her reason.

"Why do you always want to control me with every single thing? Thembalami please, for the love of oMbulazi, stop micromanaging me", he

emphasized multiple times with the blade of his right hand on his left palm.

"Ah you should've ironed it yourself then!", she said and stuffed her hands under her armpits.

"Angizwanga?" (Please repeat that?), he sneered. He turned to walk back into the ensuite.

"You will not walk away from me while I'm talking to you Mbalenhle", he rigidly stated and she stopped on her tracks. She clenched her fists to control the anger that was towering down on her hot head. She turned back slowly and faced him.

"Manqoba", she said lowly, so much that he almost didn't hear her.

"I do everything for you and I never complain. You could've said a simple "Thank you" that I ironed it for you but instead you're here making noise about how it's the wrong one. Is not going to fit?!", she irritably lashed out.

"You want me to thank you for your insisting on treating me like a child?"

"For Pete's sake it is just a shirt!", she yelled and stomped her feet. He slowly walked until he was standing in front of her.

"Ngithe, lahla lo mkhuba wakho woku khuluma nami ngathi u dilika eshlaheni" (I told you to stop

speaking to me like you're falling off a tree), he threatened looking over her relatively shorter self.

"I am not your maid, Manqoba"

"That's correct. You're my wife", he argued.

"Tell that to your side chicks. I'm done with you patronizing me!", she took off her ring and threw it at him. She tried to walk away and he caught her wrist. Her other hand came flying to slap him but he caught it as well, crossing his arms.

"Ungengelwe yini ngempela wena?! (What on earth is wrong with you?!", his appalled self interrogated.

"You can't fight me Enhle. If I fight back you'll end up in ICU. Don't start what you will not be able to finish baby"

"So you'd hit me?!", she asked in disbelief

"You would've started it. Isn't that so?"

"Just... Awungiyeka"(Let go of me), she said breathlessly. She fought hard to escape his grip but he just watched like she was making a spectacle of herself.

"Are you angry that the kids are coming with their mothers? I can't have this ceremony without them and I knew they were gonna give hassles had I disputed to them bringing the kids themselves", he

explained and she still fought off his restraining grip on her.

"Okay. Okay", he eventually surrendered and left the room. She then collapsed on the floor and manufactured tears enough to fill a pool.

...

"What did dad say?", Lwandile asked when he walked into the room snacking on braai meat he got outside. He closed the door with his foot since both his hands were occupied with the plate and the woks in the other.

"You already know", Mxolisi said and pulled his t-shirt over the rest of his torso. He had just taken a shower to sober up. He grabbed some meat off the plate without considering permission.

"If bad manners was a person", Lwandile said and sat on the bed with him. Mxolisi laughed.

"Anyway, your girlfriend is here", Lwandile informed and kept chewing.

"My girlfriend?"

"Yeah. The one mom cxxckblocked you from the other day in the kitchen", he said and laughed.

"How did you see all that because the last time I checked you were sleeping?"

"I was about to come down the stairs so I just

decided to watch", he continued to laugh.

"Anyway, forget that. Ukuphi?"(Where is she?), he excitedly said like a predator on a hunt at the sight of vulnerable prey.

"At the back. By the fire. She came with her mom though I must warn", Lwandile says and searches for the remote.

"Where's the remote", he asked and Mxolisi said "Here", placing the meat in his hand. Lwandile pursed his lips and gave a bored stare to his brother who was now frantic looking for his cologne.

"Is this t-shirt fine?", he asked and pinched it off his chest.

"Arg nevermind", he took it off when Lwandile was taking too long to respond.

"Since when do you even try to impress a girl wena? Besides, I don't think she'll mind your outfit she's...", he stopped.

"She's...", Mxolisi repeated with broadened eyes.

"I don't know. Simple and rural?"

"And gorgeous. Thunder thighs mfana! Say it. Why are you giving incomplete descriptions?", he said with a cxcky smile. Lwandile rolled his eyes.

"Ngeke ikuqome leya ngan. Sit your plank azz

down"

"Why are you so sure?"

"I know she won't. She'll just tell you that you look like a player aphume uit uit kuwe"

"Wanna bet?"

"Spare her. She doesn't look like she knows much. You just want to phula her nhliziyo ngoba uyinja"(You just want to break her heart because you're a dog). A trembling laugh escaped Mxolisi's lips as he spritzed on his cologne onto his neck and his fresh t-shirt.

...

"Are we taking your car or mine?", Muzi asked Manqoba as they walked down the stairs to stock up on booze for the night.

"Anything with wheels man", an irritated Manqoba groaned as he lead the way down.

"How long are you planning on keeping up this bad mood for?"

"Arg it's not that", he nonchalantly said and opened the door. The yard was fairly full and merry. The chief strongly believed in feeding the community properly each time something was going on in the royal house.

"Then what is it?", Muzi asked and Manqoba

stopped walking. He exhaled before he could speak.

"Women can be--"

"Hold that thought", Muzi said as he attended to his ringing phone.

"Muzikayise here?", he answered.

"I thought I'd told you never to call me anymore?", he raised his nose at the irritation the call was flaking off of him.

"There's no we. Lento ka us ayisekho", he insisted. Meanwhile, Manqoba's eye was captured by the lady who was delivering food to the elders under the tree. She handed them their plates and the old men were chatting her up. Her smile and distant, courteous laughter lit up the entire yard and a portion of the street. Muzi's voice was slowly fading in his ears along with the indistinct chatterings in the background.

"Don't do it", Muzi said after hitting him on his chest.

"Hawu. What did I do?"

"I know that look. Don't do it"

"Suka. Who is she anyway?", he asked as they both hopped into Manqoba's car that was parked outside.

"You don't remember Sphehleh?"
Manqoba's eyes were still fixed outside.

Episode 05.

Most times, people hold on to people even when it hurts--For the simple reason that they think it will hurt more should they let go.

Enhle finally got up from the floor and wiped her red and flushed cheeks. Her skin was beginning to feel dry, exclaiming the fact that she hadn't moisturized. The evening breeze also sent shudders that travelled through her body hairs. She dumped her whole weight on the bed and pressed onto the edge hoping to draw some strength from there.

"Pull yourself together Mbalenhle. Changing men because they cheat is no different to jumping from a pan and into a fire", the words her late mother used to say to her each time she went home crying resounded in her head.

"Doesn't he take care of you? Isn't he there for the kids? What are you wearing? What's that

monstrosity you drive? Do you think he would be doing all this for you if he didn't love you? His only job is to provide. Indoda ngeke ihlale umini wonke ibukana nawe emehlweni. Kodwa into emqoka ukuthi ibuya kubani mase lishonile ilanga. Are you not the one he comes home to everyday?"(Your man will never be able to sit all day looking looking at you in your eyes. What's important is who he comes to when the day ends), they went on, and on, and on. She raised her face and it met the full body mirror which contrasted poorly against the paint since they were both white.

"You're a big girl now Enhle, a wife. A home is not a tuck shop. Kuyimanje ngisahleli no baba wakho ngoba azanka ngam'vumela omunye umfazi ukuthi a dlalele phez'kwe khanda lami. Yenza ngok'fanayo ukhombise ukuthi uzalwa uban habe"(I've never allowed another woman to play on the top of my head. Do likewise and be your mother's daughter), the voice again. It was louder and insistent this time. The phone ringing plunged her out of the deep, dreadful waters of her mind.

She stood up and searched through the messy sheets to find it. Her heart sank into her stomach. She felt the coldness of it against her intestines

when she realized how much strength she needed to put up pretense for this call. Strength she did not have.

"Daddy", she lowly forced the word out her larynx and out through her teeth.

"Mbali ka baba. Kunjani nono?", her father adoringly said. He sure took his time to finish a single sentence. Old age had taken it's toll on his vocal cords.

"Ngiyaphila bab'... baba!", her facade was falling through the cracks of her words but she managed to yank it up with enthusiasm. So she thought. She forgot one thing.

"What's wrong?", he took on a firm tone and relinquished the old and easily relaxed one. She took a deep breathe and let it slowly. What she had forgotten was, nobody knew her like her father. Nobody knew her like the man whose lap used to be every day seat.

"Nothing I'm just tired. It's been a long day and it's gonna be a long night. Plus the ceremony tomorrow. I need some rest", she lied through her teeth.

"Sure nono?", his voice was full of comforting adoration that insisted on teasing her tears, but

she wasn't about to cry. The old woman in her head would yank her eyes out from the inside. She nodded to agree.

"Nono?"

"Yes I'm sure daddy. I'm just tired I keep dozing off"

"You should get some rest then. I don't want you collapsing in front of people tomorrow", she nodded again, forgetting that she wasn't on a video call.

"Babà?", she called out quickly before he could cut the call.

"Yes nono?"

She rummaged for the correct wording in her head.

"I'm reading this other book here..."

"Uh-huh?"

"It... it says, something along the lines of... true love can withstand any storm. Do you agree with this statement?", she asked and puckered her face because she was feeling silly. Her father took moment before he could reply.

"What's the name of the book?", he questioned and panicking sirens went berserk in her head. She had to think fast.

"Love and war?", the shadow of Tamar Braxton that's been hiding somewhere between the folds of her memory came to her rescue.

"Well, I don't know anything about love my child. I have sinned against those I claimed to love at some point or the other if not more than twice. It's not as straightforward as mathematics. Love is a conforming science mntwanam. It takes the shape of your heart and your mental form. Only you know how you need to be loved", he states his thought and his daughter silently wells up in tears. She swallowed the slimy lump that was blocking her throat.

"And... how do I know for sure if I'm not being loved correctly?"

"I said it's a science. I did not say it's mathematics. There's no straight answer to that because a lot has to be considered when two different people are involved. How-EVER, if it doesn't feel right, then it probably isn't", he says and silence travels the line.

"Okay. I'll read with an open mind. Thanks daddy"

"You're welcome. And hey, tell that boy I'm going to crush his nxts with pliers when I see him", he commanded and a quick laugh escaped her lips.

"Daddy!"

"Enjoy your book", he intentionally draped the word 'book' in sarcasm. Enhle continued to laugh when they cut the call.

...

Mxolisi barged into Melokuhle's room while putting on his watch at the same time.

"Your knuckles are not going to fall off if you knock. You know that right?", Melokuhle stated in muffled annoyance. He was lying on his stomach with his head submerged into his pillow.

"Awukahle. I need your help", Mxolisi stated and wheeled the chair out of the study table so he could sit and face Melo who was on the bed.

Melokuhle never replied.

"What's up with you?", Mxo asked in concern when he realised that Melo wasn't exactly in the best shape of himself.

"I fxcked up", Melokuhle confessed.

"You've been fxcking up. What's special about this case?"

Melo sat up straight and ran his palm across his face.

"It's Busi"

"She dumped you?", Mxolisi punctuated his

question with a laugh.

"She's pregnant", he immediately said before Mxo could irritate him any further. The laughing smile on Mxo's face immediately vanished like it had never been there.

"Hol' up. What?"

"I-yuuup", Melo said and fell on his back on the bed.

"Should I get you a gun, a rope or you'll overdose?", Mxolisi asked and Melo sent a cushion flying to his face. Mxo caught it and stood up to go sit on the bed with him.

"Okay on a serious note now, (How does ma do this advise thing? He thought to himself) Okay let's start here, does she want this baby?", he asked and Melo pasted his eyes to the roof.

"I don't know. She's not taking my calls"

"Manje you saw it fit ukuthi uhlale la ukhamise?" (... that you sit here and do absolutely nothing?)

Melo sat up straight again.

"What do you want me to do?"

"Do you love this chick?", Mxolisi questioned with his brows pinched together.

"You know I do"

"I'm not convinced"

"WHAT DO YOU WANT ME TO DO MXOLISI?!"

"I've never been pregnant, thank God I don't have a womb-", he said and made an imaginary cross from his forehead and chest then clapped his hands once in grateful prayer.

"But, I can imagine how confused and distraught she must be feeling. She needs you bra. That's a no brainer"

"If she needed me she would've picked up my calls and answered the thousand messages I've sent to her"

"Chicks BE LIKE THAT we batata!"

"Listen I don't like guessing games. If you feel red don't communicate blue to me because I'll take blue as the final word", a frustrated Melo said and Mxo threw his palm to his face.

"Women don't operate like that. Get your azz in the car and go talk to her. If you show up on her doorstep and show her you mean business she'll have no choice but to speak to you. Otherwise, an abortion will be the baby's fate, unless if that's what you want", Mxo said and Melo raised his face.

"That look on your face tells me you want her to

keep it right?", Mxo prodded.

"I don't bra. Raising a human being from scratch is not a joke"

"From scratch? Where would you prefer to start? When they're what? Twelve?"

"You know what I mean"

"No I don't. Look, go and talk to the girl you'll cross other bridges when you get to them"

"I no longer have a car remember?", Melo said wistfully.

"You know what? Let me go speak to MY potential baby momma maybe I'll come back with a solution"

"Potential baby momma?", Melo asked, boggled.

"Scratch that. Insert wife", Mxolisi pulled the reverse Michael Jackson walk in excitement while continuously sticking his tongue in and out of his mouth. Melo laughed at what this signified.

"Ukhohlakele"(You're so evil). Mxo laughed too and closed the door.

...

Nighttime had fallen upon their part of the earth but that did not deter him from trying to find her in the dark. He scanned the women from a distance by the fire, laughing in between the

sounds that the big lids were making when sliding on their rightful black pots. He noticed Tumi was sitting right there chatting up a storm with one of the ladies but his mother was no where in sight "I need a favour", he texted his favourite uncle. He watched as Tumi put down his glass on the brown, soiled ground and took out his phone from his pocket.

Tumi: What kind?

Mxo: Firstly, where's my mom?

Tumi: Disappeared with your dad. Don't ask me questions.

Mxo: Arg TMI. The lady in a red dress. Can you ask her where her kid went? Don't be awkward.

Tumi: There's no way that can never be weird. Anyway, she got sent home. She left about an 30 mins ago when I arrived

Mxo: Is she coming back?

Tumi: Dunno. Didn't look like it tho'

Tumi: Can't you call her like a normal person?

Mxo: That's the thing. I don't have her number.

Tumi: How desperately do you need it?

Mxo: R200

Tumi: R700

Mxo: R450

Tumi: I'll make a plan.

Mxo laughed and threw his fist in the air. He was also laughing at the fact that Tumi uses every chance he gets to squeeze money out of anybody. He never does anything for free. No matter how small. He went back into the house and bumped into one of his twin big sisters.

"Hey sis I need a favour. It's actually Melo who.. look, can I borrow your car for a minute?", he asked and she laughed.

"Not until you tell me what's going on? Is Melo alright?"

"Everything's fine really. We just have a little emergency to deal with", he illustrated with his fingers to show how tiny the "emergency" was. Intentionally undermining it rather. She looked at him suspiciously before she could give in to his convincing smile.

"Why not ask dad or uncle MK?"

"Those two will give me the third degree only to say no. I haven't eaten yet I don't have the energy for that. Plus, you're already parked outside so it'll be easier"

"Kahle kahle niyaphi?"(Where exactly are you going?), she asked as she pulled out a bottle of

water from the fridge.

"But you always it's important that siblings have each other's back?", he cornered and she laughed.

"Relevance?"

"Why are you now forcing me to break a code?"

"Okay okay! Just don't scratch it. The keys are in the bedroom on the pedestal"

"And you wonder why I love you?"

"Ha suka!", she said and shuffled her slippers outside while laughing.

...

Lindelwa walked in to find her sister sitting on the couch in man's shirt, having a generous glass of red wine while watching TV low on volume.

"Hey sis"

"Hey baby", Bongiwe greeted back.

"I used my key. I didn't think you'd be home"

Bongiwe laughed lightly and told her it's okay.

"You're not working late today?", Lindi asked as she scanned the wide open fridge for something to eat.

"No I'm tired. Don't tell me you don't have food at res I sent you money 2 days ago?"

"Yyy-eah-hh, about that...", she slowly winced her way into an explanation.

"Lindelwa!", Bongiwe scolded and approached her in the kitchen area

"I needed a textbook come on?", she said as drank orange juice from the bottle and shrugge with her eyes wide open. Bongiwe angrily placed a glass on the kitchen counter and forced Lindi to pour into it.

"You bought all your textbooks at the beginning of the semester ", she said and put her one hand on the counter, the other on her waist.

"I meant a study guide", she lied and darted her eyes around.

"What study guide costs R2000?"

"The one I use"

"Your smart mouth is going to be the reason you starve till month end", Bongiwe threatened with her index finger pointed her. She then exhaled in defeat and gently pulled her little sister to the living room to sit.

"Look, you need to start managing your funds correctly. I can't always be bailing your out. Trust me I don't mind taking care of you but you need to be responsible", she guided and Lindi nodded.

"Also, I am still waiting for your academic record for last semester"

"Ah-"

"Don't say ah. Your fees are too expensive for me not to-"

"Sis I am doing fine. You need to loosen up! You're too serious. Always about work school work school WHEEENN are you burning this shirt and getting a man?!", Lindi said and hit the tough collar of the shirt that used to belong to Mangaliso, Bongiwe's ex. Bongiwe folded her hands and slumped on her back on the couch when she felt attacked.

"Move on. He already has. There's a lot of men who would appreciate you wearing THEIR shirts. That hunk at your office, whatshisface?", Lindelwa snapped her fingers trying to prompt Bongiwe to catch who she's talking about.

"Who? Muzi?"

"Yes!"

Bongiwe laughed.

"Ha that's my boss Lindi! AND, he was married to my best friend. Matter of fact he is still very much married"

"So what?"

"Didn't ma teach you anything"

"Nope. I only took away aunt Gertrude's teachings because they made sense"

Bongiwe couldn't stop laughing at her silly little sister.

"Uzothakatha nje ngaye"(You'll end up a witch just like her)

"Oksalayo", Lindelwa held steadfast to her opinion while circling the edge of the glass with her tongue.

...

Mxolisi barged into Melo's room and threw car keys at him that spiked his bare back.

"Ouch!", he yelled and turned his back to look at Mxolisi.

"Go fix the aftermath of your poor pull-out game", he remarked before closing the door. He then took out his phone to attend to the message that demanded his attention with a beep.

"She doesn't have a phone. You know my banking details"-Tumi. He read the message and jerked the phone in his hands so much it almost fell in frustration.

...

Melokuhle parked outside of the Busi's homestead. He called her and she declined the call. The hope of her coming out dwindle with each rejected call.

"I'm outside. If you don't come out then I'm coming in", he opted for a text. His patience was now running thin.

"I'd love to see my dad fxck you up"

"Baby your dad takes instructions from me. Not the other way around", his arrogant self replied.

"You're an a**hole", she sent back.

"I've been told. Now come out"

It took her 10 minutes to reveal her face. It was clear that she went out of the house without permission from how she kept looking back nervously. He unlocked the car so she could get in. She did and pull the rest of her loosely hanging night gown in so she can close the door. She intently kept her eyes on the windshield to avoid looking at him. His eyes were on her the whole time.

"How does it make sense to you that I should find out that you're pregnant from another man?"

She clutched onto her silence.

"Ngikhuluma nawe Busisiwe", he insisted. A tear dropped from her eye.

"Tears are not going to save you. Answer my question!"

"Is that all you care about?!", she exploded. He

pinched nose bridge in annoyance.

"You dumped me like I was nothing. I accepted it and now you're here annoying me as if you want this baby"

"I borrowed you my car out of love and you gave it to Mthokozisi. When I told you that he crashed on purpose you defended him!"

"He had to rush his mom to the hospital there's no way he could've...!"

"Do you have any proof of that besides the lies he told you?", he asked and she looked away.

"So you're defending him based on his word? Only his word?", he pressed on.

"Yes"

"But when it comes to me, I need to provide all kinds of affidavits and lab samples to prove my mere whereabouts?", he bit his lower lip. She dropped her tight chest and allowed it to untangle from all the angry knots. She then wiped her tears with the back of her hands. He exhaled heavily before walking out the car. She watched him disappear into the dark. He then came back minutes later and opened the door to the passenger seat. He signalled with his head that she should step out. She did and attempted to walk

away. He caught her wrist and pulled her into a hug. She immediately broke down in tears. He pushed her head to his chest and clawed his fingers into her hair.

"I'm not ready for a baby Kuhle", she confessed emotionally.

"Sshh. We'll figure it out", he whispered in uncertainty.

"How far along are you?"

"4 weeks. We still have time", she sniffed.

"What do you mean?", he enquired lowly. She shrugged

"I don't know Cakes. I don't think I can be able to live with that. Besides, my dad would kill me"

"People abort all the time. He'll kill you either way"

"It's not other people's kid you're carrying in there. He won't. He's obviously not gonna be happy but he can't be furious forever. When the kid is born all the anger will subside", he assured with uncertainty, biting his upper lip.

"The kid will only be born if MY parents don't kill me", she grimaced.

"Don't worry about that", he said and kissed her forehead. In his head, somebody had to keep their calm even if he didn't know what he was he was

going to do next.

...

Manqoba stood up from the fire where almost all his male relatives were seated around and reminiscing about things of the past, mindlessly rotating the beer in his hand. He then stood up without warning and left. He walked into the house and straight to his bedroom. The light was off and Enhle was sleeping. He could tell from how she was breathing. He sighed. He was hoping to find her awake. He then went over to her and kissed her exposed shoulder goodnight. She woke up when he was about to walk away.

"Baby?", her sleepy voice lazily called out.

"Go back to sleep. We'll talk in the morning", he softly said and she sat upright. He already knew she wasn't going to listen so he dropped his hands and went to sit beside her.

"Ngeke ngikwazi ukulala kyafana"(I won't be able to sleep anyway), she let out. He just nodded.

"I'm sorry about this afternoon", he was the first to go.

"No I'm sorry. I overreacted. I just.. You know how Diketso and Nokwanda like teaming up against me. I allowed my beef with them to blind me from how

you much needed your kids here. I'm also sorry for trying to slap you. It'll never happen again. About the shirt also."

He took her hand in his and massaged the palm with his thumbs.

"We were doing great. For years now. I'd hate for all that progress to go down the drain. I'm sorry for upsetting you. I could've handled it a lot better than I did", he confessed and she smiled.

"I know something that you handle really really well...", she provoked him flirtatiously as she straddled him in her too short of a nightie. He looked away briefly and smiled, exposing the full gold tooth that that fit perfectly over his incisor next to his canine on his straight teeth. She doesn't think his smile would be quite the same without it.

TO BE CONTINUED...

Episode 06

[REMOVED]

"Were we supposed to do this before the

inauguration? Won't it cause problems for the ceremony with Ngema this morning?", she enquired and a brief laugh escaped his lips before he could pull the elastic up. He gently placed his hands on the sides of her face and looked her sincerely in the eye.

"The only thing it'll cause is I'll be thrice as tired as I should've been if we hadn't done it. It would've been a problem if you were a sidechick", he assured and kissed her forehead before he could walk to the bathroom. The music was still playing in the background.

"Take a shower while you're in there!", Enhle yelled out for precautionary measure and MQ laughed.

"Ngiyezwa nkosikazi"(I hear you wife).

After a couple of minutes, he came out of the shower with a towel around his waist. Enhle was in bed. She turned to look at him.

"Aren't you going to join us for the night?", he asked as he lotioned his arms.

"Nah. Ngikhathele from all the ups and downs I've been doing all day. I'll wake up at 3 when Ngema is here", she yawned and pulled the sheets. He went over to her and kissed her hair.

"Okay. Sleep well then", her said adoringly and she smiled while rubbing his arm. He got dressed and left.

He bumped into Muzi when he was about to turn a corner in the kitchen they almost crashed heads.

"Uphumaphi?!"(Where have you been?), Muzi asked as he was wondering where Manqoba had disappeared to.

"Since when do you bath twice in one day?", he said before MQ could respond. He laughed.

"On second thought, I don't need the answer to that. Tebogo and the gents are here", he informed and pleasant surprise curtained over Manqoba's face.

"I haven't seen them in a while. It's been a minute", he states as they walk out the house to go join the men.

...

Tebogo requested to speak to Manqoba in private after they've been chilling and laughing over the open fire with a large group of other men, enjoying the traditional liquid delicacy that one can never miss at any event that has to do with the ancestors. Some had their commercial beer whereas others enjoyed the refreshment of cold

cidars. Manqoba got up and led him into the house then straight to the study. He closed the door and led him to the couch.

"Kusha kuphi?"(What's up?), he asked when they finally settled on the couch. Tebogo took a deep breath out.

"I know you said you're retiring from this business but things are falling apart man. I can't do this on my own", he confessed. Manqoba had his hands clasped together. He didn't reply for a moment.

"I don't know what you want me to tell you really. I'm not changing my mind. You can always call me should you need help but I've got bigger things to worry about. I'm not fully for this chieftaincy life but it's my birthright and I can't run away from it"

"You can be a chief and continue operating. You're the one with the connections. Your people trust YOU. Regardless of the reference I have from you. This is a delicate business and trust is not transferred in our world. You know this", Tebogo pressed on and Manqoba laid his back on the couch, allowing his head to fall back on it.

"Is this about the heist that went wrong in Middleburg?", Manqoba asked with his eyes glued to the roof. Tebogo stood up and went to balance

himself against the desk. He couldn't sit still.

"The police are looking for me MQ. I won't get off without you. I need your help. You need to come back. And don't take this the wrong way I'm not gonna throw you under the bus I'm not blackmailing yo-", he rambled.

"Tebogo! Relax man your jittering is working on my nerves", MQ shot out. Tebogo swallowed.

"All these years working side by side with me and you haven't learnt a thing?", he asked.

"I learnt everything. Your people just don't trust me hence they screwed me over!", Tebogo snapped angrily.

"Sit down", MQ commanded. Tebogo threw his eyes to the side before he could exhale and sit.

"I am not coming back but what I can promise you is that, I'll get to the bottom of this. Okay?"

"Fix it MQ. You have to!"

"Didn't I just say I will?", MQ impatiently snapped back and Tebogo shook his head repeatedly. "I am not going to jail" was ringing loudly in his head.

...

The laughter from the teenage boys sitting outside in the street was the evidence of their joy and them being completely carefree in that moment of

mocking one another. The boys were chilling with others from the community, including Melokuhle's friends. New friendships were forming in Melo's absence. When he finally came back, he parked before them and they began making fun of him before he could step out of the car. He huffed out a halfhearted laugh since he did not have the energy to entertain any of his brothers, neighbors or friends. He imagined his bed and the peace he would find from it. Only, he couldn't sleep then because it was already 2am and the slaughtering ceremony would begin in an hour.

He got out of the car and greeted those he hadn't seen. They fist bumped and he informed that he needed a young nap. Lwandile could read right through him. The young gents just said "Ola" cheerfully to his facade. They took his word as it is. Lwandile tried to get up from the ground to follow him. Mxolisi grabbed his wrist and shook his head to indicate that he shouldn't. He listened and sat down. Some were standing leaning against their cars including Bernard, a friend to Melo from school. Mxolisi teased him about how he shouldn't call animal services when he sees that animals were slaughtered since white people are notorious

for this. Bernard laughed and said "The deliciousness of the meat made up for everything". He pretty much behaves like a black boy. Melo made sure to put him through initiation even though his parents don't approve of their friendship. Bernard's parents.

...

The hour that Manqoba was dreading finally arrived. 3 am hit and Bab'Ngema arrived. He actually arrived 15 minutes prior and asked that everyone evacuates the house so he could 'strengthen' it according to the specific ancestors that led the new chief. After he was done, He asked that Manqoba and the family follow him to the back of the house. Everyone else had to remain in the front and continue eating, drinking and whatever else they were doing but he sternly commanded that the music be turned off. The guards made sure that nobody tried any funny stunts to disturb the ceremony in an attempt to see things they shouldn't see.

After the ritual to initiate the young chief was done, Bab'Ngema announced that his son went for training. He further went on to inform that his ancestors are calling his name and that the date

has been set.

"Is he dying?", Enhle whispered to Betso who was sitting next to her on the group and Evelyn went "Shh" with a sharp frown on her face. Muzi's eyes travelled through all three of them before he could bring them back to bab'Ngema. Manqoba was in his jeans. He tried putting the t-shirt back on but Bab'Ngema immediately stopped him and explained that whatever he had sprinkled him had to dry first before he could bath or even wear anything. Whatever it was, it smelt horrible. This smell was most pungent to Melokuhle. It was as if his impatience for the whole thing exarcebated it.

...

Bab'Ngema announced that his job was done and that he is going back to his place. However, he did promise that he will be back after Manqoba had addressed his people and they left. It was standard procedure.

Betso's eyes were now stinging, burning and heavy. The sun was beginning to come out.

Everyone went to where their heart desired and she yawned before she could get up. Muzi smiled at her as he helped her up, careful not to step on where the blood was spilt.

"Let's go get some sleep", he said and picked her up like a bride without warning. She shot out a laughter infused scream and asked him to put her down and that somebody might come and see them. He laughed as well as he placed her feet carefully on the ground. He hugged her from behind and kissed her neck then her hand.

"Baba? Do you notice how distant Melokuhle was?", she instigated the topic and he nodded over her should.

"I did. He'll talk when he's ready. I've learnt never to force anything out of him. It's useless because he always seems he can fix things without my help, even when he needs it"

"Is this about the car?", she asked and twisted her neck so she could look him in the eye.

"Not really. He's my son and ngiyamazi. He's been like this ever since he was a child. Forcing him to speak os futile"

"Hm. I wonder where he took it from", Betso says and laughs.

"We just look alike, but I am nothing like that hothead", Muzi defends and laughs, knowing that Betso was speaking the truth.

...

After his shower, Mxolisi stepped out of the house hoping to find the girl he had been dreaming about in his miniskirt of sleep. The yard was getting increasingly full and he was hoping that she would come. He then noticed her mother fastening the cloth around her lower body and walking out the wide opened gate. He didn't think about it. He just went on and followed her, careful not to get caught. She walked a 10 minute distance from the royal house to her home. Mxo kept jumping in between trees to avoid being seen. She walked and closed the gate. He spotted a tuckshop not far from her house and went over to it to avoid being weird by standing in the middle of the street. He could have a clear view of the yard from the tuckshop. A man appeared from behind the rails and asked what he could get him. Mxo got tongue tied. He didn't have any cash with him. Just his card because he keeps it in an adhering pouch at the back of his phone.

"Uhm.. sawubona baba", he greeted first. The man greeted back with a smile. He had to think fast.

"Niyas'phatha iSprite lesi se cucumber and lime?", he opted for that because from his observation, the other shops around did not have it. It wasn't as

common as it was in the city.

"Yebo. 2 litre?", the man agreed and Mxo internally begged the earth to open up and swallow him whole. He took out his phone from his pocket and slid the card out.

"Niya swiper?"(Do you have a speed point?), he asked and the man immediately laughed.

"Ithi uyadlala"(Tell me you're joking), he continued crackling. Mxo bowed his head in defeat and laughed as well.

"You're making a fool of yourself", he whispered lowly to himself. The man eventually stopped laughing.

"Where are you from?", he asked in pleasantry. Mxo explained.

"No wonder", the man remarked and resumed his laugh.

"What are you doing here? I'm heading to your home in a few minutes",the man mentioned.

"I'm here to see someone"

"Intombi?", the man raised his brow and smiled. Mxo laughed.

"Eish. Angilali ngale ngan' baba"(I'm no longer sleeping well because of her).

"Ah-ha! Ngazile"(I knew it), the man said. Mxo

laughed. The girl appeared from behind him and greeted both him and the shop owner formally. Mxo's heart was now beating out of order. He never expected to see her there. She did not even look like she took considerable notice of him. The man immediately got 4 from putting 2 and 2 together. She asked for white bread and R12 airtime. The man couldn't wipe the smile off his face. He enjoyed this sight. It reminded him of a lot of memories he holds dear to his heart. He gave her the bread and lied that the machine was giving him problems for the airtime. He unplugged the device and said he will be back.

The moment then became awkward. Mxo saw his chance and dived in on it. The girl's eyes were running all over the place except for where he was standing.

"Hi", he greeted, again. She shyly raised her hand and quickly put it back into the other one in front of her thighs.

"Unjan?", he asked with his trusted smile and bit his lower lip.

"Ngiyaphila"(I'm fine), she lowly replied and stretched out her neck to see if the man was coming back. There was no sight of him.

"I wanted to speak to you the other day at home but never found the chance to"

"At home?"

"Yeah, kwa Khumalo?", he said in an almost confused tone and she took 5 seconds to recall.

"Oh. I remember", she said, still shying away from looking at him directly in the eye. Mxo was now legit confused. No girl has ever forgotten about him after the first encounter, ever! They're usually the ones that follow his tail and do all the work for him. It took him a moment to get his sense in one box. His phone rang and the screen reported that his father was calling. He silenced the call and said, "Look, I need to go now but I really need to speak to you. Do you mind if I have your number? Even if you do mind let me have it you'll deal with the guilt later", he rambled and an innocent laugh escaped her lips. She bit her upper lip.

"Angina phone"(I don't have a phone), she said in a muffled tone.

"Have mine then I'll call you from it", he said and extended the hand which held the phone towards her. He didn't think this move through. She laughed.

"U ma uzothi ngiyithathaphi iphone ebiza

kanje?"(How will I explain this expensive phone to my mother?)

"What she doesn't see won't kill her. Uzoyifihla angithi na"(You'll hide it), he begged. The man came back and plugged the machine back. He processed the voucher and gave it to her. She placed the over rolled R100 on the counter and Mxo pushed it back to her.

"I'll pay. You can keep this one", he said and she doubtfully looked at him then at the money.

"Please...", he begged for her to take it. She did, thanked him with a smile and stepped off the 'stoep'.

"Wait...!", he shot out.

"Give me your mother's number then", he suggested and she shook her head vigorously to show that she wasn't going to budge. He saw that it was a fight he wasn't going to win.

"How am I supposed to get in contact with you then?", he asked in impatience. She shrugged.

"Can I come see you later?"

"My mom is going to kill me if she sees you"

"She doesn't have to"

"How?"

"I'll figure it out", he said and she bit her upper lip

again. She then turned and left. That wasn't a no. Neither was it a yes. Mxo took a heavy breath out. He balanced his elbow against the counter in between the rails and placed his palm against his forehead in frustration.

...

It was around 12 in the afternoon when Bab'Sizwe had to officially ordain Manqoba as the new chief before the whole community. Manqoba wore a straight smile throughout all this when he was being seated on the high leopard printed chair, a chair that used to belong to his father. He didn't expect to be, but he was nervous, hence the straight smile. Ululations and clan praises broke out and roared from the crowd when he officially took his seat. He felt a powerful aura surround him when he placed his head against the high chair. Like he was surrounded by an invisible, yet very powerful presence. His eyes fell on Sphesihle, who was walking a distance from everyone else looking like she was struggling to hear whoever was on the line. She had her finger blocking one ear in an effort to strengthen the efficiency of the other. Enhle was looking at him the whole time, following his visual trail.

Episode 07.

Enhle excused herself after Manqoba gave his speech and stormed into the house. Betso cheerfully stopped her in the kitchen, asking her to taste the sauce she had made since she went out of chicken spice she always uses. She had to improvise with beef stock as Tumi suggested. Tumi was sitting behind the table counter on his phone. He wasn't even paying attention to them. Enhle, in frustrated haste, rolled her eyes internally but still extended her hand so Betso places a bit of the sauce on her palm.

"Hayi cha. Niyawu pheka udoti nino mngan'wakho"(You and your friend cooked rubbish), she remarked before she could walk away and Betso gasped at her reaction. Tumi shot his eyes away from the screen to Enhle.

"Bxtch excuse me?!", he was ready to declare war.

"Are you okay Enhle?", Betso lowly asked in concern.

"Watch how you speak to me", Enhle threatened

Tumi before she could handle the tail of her long dress to leave. Tumi scoffed when she went out of sight. Betso was genuinely concerned. Tumi held out his wrist to check his watch and said, "It hasn't even 30 minutes since she's been declared queen but she's already stripping on a high horse". He was in complete disbelief. Betso glanced outside to maybe get a clue of what might have upset her. She shook the worry off her face and went back to preparing the royal lunch. She put the sauce aside in hopes that Evelyn would walk in so she tastes it. "This sauce is fine friend. Don't let Queen doti fxck with your head", Tumi assured as he tasted it for the third time now. Evelyn finally walked in laughing with Bab'Sizwe and Betso asked if she could steal her. She gladly obliged. Bab'Sizwe proceeded to the living room.

"Mm! This is nice. And different. The texture is impressive as well. It's... I don't know, not too thick but rich in taste", Evelyn remarked. Betso sighed from relief.

"See, I told you not to listen to ..."

"Thank you! Ma...", Betso said and prompted Evelyn to walk out with her hand behind the Evelyn's back, her thank you was loud enough to

mute out the rest of Tumi's probably vile sentence. Evelyn smiled suspiciously and left.

...

The Khumalos sat around the lengthy table, enjoying their celebratory lunch and exchanging pleasantries. Manqoba was having a conversation with Bab'Bayede, one of his respected uncles. Mbhekiseni walked in, drunk beyond instant repair. The sound of the busy cutlery on the black porcelain plates came to a slow halt, amidst the fading laughs, fading due to curiosity.

"Niyajabula neah? Kumnandi uyihlephula kab'hlungu leyo nyama heh Sizwe?"(You all are evidently having fun. It's so nice that you're showing no mercy to that meat Sizwe), he stated before he could sip some more of his beverage from it's silver metallic container with his back and legs bent out of shape. He burped loudly, almost throwing up and everyone couldn't hide the disgust on their faces. Mxolisi was entertained. He was looking at him with pinched eyebrows and a curious smile, waiting for him to say something else.

"Hlala phansi bakuphakele Mbhekiseni"(sit down so they can dish up for you),an obviously bored

Bayede suggested, hoping to assuage to situation and extinguish it before it spread any further.

"Wee Evelyn, ngicela sithi ukujikela ngale sike sikhulume mina nawe lovey"(Let's excuse ourselves so we can talk), he said and looked at her straight in the eyes, blatantly ignoring the invite to the table. Evelyn exhaled from a place of exhaustion before she could push her chair out.

"You don't have to ma...", Muzi whispered from her side. She assured that it was okay, before walking out and leading Mbhekiseni to the TV room in her long, swaying dress. Bab'Sizwe was glaring at their backs suspiciously. They left an uneasy atmosphere behind them. Enhle had her eyes lodged on Manqoba as she took slow sips on her juice. He realized this and asked if she was okay. She ignored and picked up her utensils to slice her meat. Betso cleared her throat and asked if anybody would like a refill or seconds. Aunt Hlengiwe enthusiastically said "Yes please!", also hoping to diffuse the tension that was hellbent on breaking the legs of the table.

She later come back to the table and Mbhekiseni yelled his goodbyes to everyone and walked out. Mxolisi laughed into his glass of juice.

"Are you okay, Evelyn?", Bab'Bayede asked as she settled onto her chair and gulped down her juice. "Hm? Yeah! I'm perfect", she pulled a facade of a smile and 'assured'.

"Okay. If you'll excuse me...", Bayede said and wiped the corner of his mouth with serviette before he could stand up to leave. The lunch was pretty much done and he did say that he had some other place to be before it commenced. Muzi's eyes were on Evelyn even when the awkwardness around the table had subsided and people went back to laughing and conversing, including the kids. Her mind was everywhere but in that house.

...

Everyone eventually dispersed whereas some were still idle reclining on their chairs due to full stomachs, including Muzi, Betso and some of the kids. Some went upstairs to the bedrooms. Texting around the table is prohibited so they obviously couldn't wait to go back to their own lives. Most of the community members had their take-aways in abundance and left for their respective homes. When the very last one made their exit, the guards pulled the gates closed, declaring normal, everyday proceedings.

One guard walked into the house, humbly greeted the royals and asked for MQ. Muzi gestured with his head to direct the guard to Manqoba who was now slowly walking down the stairs, paying attention to his phone screen. The guard took two steps to get closer to him, humbly greeted and reported that there's two men and a woman at the gate demanding to see the chief. Manqoba asked what it might be about and the guard uncomfortably stated that they are here to report a pregnancy. He added that the young girl was in the car. He went even further to alert the chief on how furious the men appeared to be. Muzi's eyes fell on Betso, who was also anxiously looking at him for answers with her forehead furrowed. Manqoba thanked the guard, told him to let them in and looked at Muzi. Muzi exhaled deeply and told Lwandile to go call Melokuhle.

"Are you sure that the one you're sending away is innocent?", Manqoba asked.

"True. Melo might be staying here full time but these two also visit, a lot", Betso stated.

"Wanna bet?", Muzi said to the both of them with his eyebrows furiously raised. The look on Melo's face when he came down declared that Lwandile

had already spilt the tea. Mxolisi was behind him. He finally reached the last step on the staircase and bit his lower lip.

"Are condoms a foreign concept to you?", Muzi sneered.

"Ha-ah baba you don't know for sure that--", Betso tried to defend.

"I was reckless. I'm sorry", Melokuhle confessed and Betso dropped back to her chair in defeat.

"That's all you have to say for yourself?", Manqoba calmly reproached.

"Why do you get high off being irresponsible?! Wena no Mxolisi ngathi--", Muzi lashed out and Mxo defended himself from his chair.

"Haibo! Ngimithise bani manje mina?!"(Now who did I impregnate?!)

"Nobody, yet!", Muzi shot out.

"Crucify me I am your messiah", he mumbled to himself and Betso stopped Muzi from lashing out some more by putting her palm on his chest. The guests walked in, led by the guard. They humbly greeted and Manqoba told the kids to scoot out. He instructed that they go find aunt Hlengiwe outside. The girl was timidly standing behind her mother, soaked in tears. Melo tried to comfort her

but they all bit his head off.

...

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Manqoba walked the guests out after they had come to a conclusion and reached common ground. When they left, Melo was called back into the living room. He dragged his flops till he was seated on the couch opposite that of Muzi. He avoided making eye contact with his father, whose eyes were not about to move from him anytime soon. Manqoba asked that everyone excuses the two and they abided. Muzi has never laid a hand on any of his kids before but Melo was somehow sure that he was going to get a beating from him. "Was I talking to your shadow when I taught you how to use a condom a condom Makhosonke?", Muzi tried his best to keep his burning chest from erupting.

"I'm sorry", Melo whispered.

"Unless if your sorry can be used as a currency to raise the baby you made, please shut the fxck up!", he spat the worse without remorse. Melo bent his speechless lip and kept his eyes on the floor.

"I asked you a question!"

"No. You were not talking to my shadow"

"Were you listening?"

"Yes"

"What was the very first thing I said?", he asked and Melo swallowed before he could answer.

"You said... You said I shouldn't rip the wrapper with my teeth"

"Why is that?"

"You said it might damage it and I wouldn't see"

"So in your fear of damaging the wrapper, you decided not to touch it altogether?"

"Hayi baba", Melo impatiently fell back on the couch.

"How do you plan on raising this child?", Muzi questioned.

"It's not rocket science", Melo blurted out and Muzi scoffed.

"Okay Einstein. I hope the two of you are not planning something stupid like aborting the baby. I'd break your face uyangizwa?"

"Why would you think that dad? I'm not that careless. You taught me better than that!"

"Well I also taught you how to use protection but here we are now", Muzi said and Melo threw his tightened eyes to the side.

...

The sun was bidding goodbye when Mxolisi took another shower to go and attempt to win a heart that held his captive. The weather had gotten comfortable with being on the chilly side of things. He was already out of the house when he felt that he definitely needed to put on a warm hoodie. He used the backdoor to avoid being asked questions. He almost got lost in the light darkness but quickly saw what way he used the last time. He had no idea how he was going to get her out of the house but his adavance propelled him forward. He had the cash that he promised to bring to the shop owner. The light emanating from the tuckshop lit up a large portion of the street. He got to the shop and found the man seated behind the bars reading a sports magazine. He stood up with a smile when he saw Mxo and they greeted one another before a friendly laugh.

"Hey uzimisele ne"(You're very determined), the man commented. Mxolisi laughed.

"No ngilethe leya mali"(I brought the money that I owe to you)

"That's all?", the man gave a suspicious smile as he took the hundred rand note and looked for change.

"Nah it's okay. You can keep the change", Mxo assured and the smile on the man's face grew wider.

"Your dad does the exact same thing whenever he passes here".

Mxolisi laughed shyly since he didn't know what to say.

"I have to go now", he said as he kept his eyes on the girl's yard.

"I hope you're not going where I think you are?", the man said. Mxo laughed once again.

"I'll just say I'm a friend when I get there"

"Akadlali loya mama. Uzophuma ugijima ngiyak'tshela"(That woman doesn't play. You'll come out of there running), the man warns in between laughs.

"Ngenze njan ke manje?(What am I supposed to do now?), frustration was speaking on Mxolisi's behalf.

"We've all been there. I know how you feel", the man said and laughed. There was poorly concealed disappointment in Mxolisi's eyes.

"Tell you what? Ithi ngizame something"(Let me try something), the man said and took out his phone. He was waiting for whoever to pick up.

"Uhm yebo Ceboo. Lalela, k'sasa kuna la ngiyakhona manje ngizovula late mangibuya. Ngilethe isinkwa or uNdalo uzos'landa"(Hi Cebo. Listen, I'm going somewhere tomorrow morning so I'm going to open up late when I come back. Should I bring the bread or you'll send Ndalo to fetch it?), he asked with his eyes on Mxo.

"Okay kulungile. Bengithi ngiyavala manje ngizom'linda"(I was about to close up so I'll wait for her). Mxolisi's eyes lit up when he heard that "Ndalo" was coming. He didn't even catch her name.

"Thank you so much! But... won't it come across as weird or suspicious to her mom?"

"Ungakhathazeki. I do this everytime I have to go somewhere in the morning because she needs the bread for breakfast before school", the man assures and Mxo sighs in relief. He began growing anxious when he saw her walk out the yard. She finally arrived and immediately laughed when she saw Mxo there. She was too smart to not piece things together so they make sense. The man's behavior was also suspicious to her.

"Sawubona Ndalo", the matchmaker greeted and handed her the bread. Ndalo greeted back. She

couldn't stop laughing. Mxo just gave a gentle smile with his lower lip tucked in between his teeth. He took out an extra R200 from his backpocket and told him that it should cover the loss if he really is to close tomorrow morning. The man took it.

"Just don't keep her for too long", he said and Mxo agreed.

"And hey. I trust you because your dad was well mannered when he was your age", the man threatened with his index finger pointed out at him. Mxo laughed and nodded. He was laughing at all the stories he has heard about his dad in the streets about how familiar he was with the ladies. None of them spelt well-mannered, even when written backwards.

"Sawubona ntombenhle", he said and took the bread from her.

"Sawubona nawe", she greeted back and tried her best to conceal a blush.

"You're good?"

"I'm fine. How are you?"

"Angikho right. Uyayilimaza inhliziyo yami bo"(You're doing some serious damage to my heart). He confessed and she laughed.

"Haibo", her speechless self said.

"It's even worse because I can't talk to you when we're apart and I promised that I wouldn't keep you long. I don't want you getting into trouble", he gravely stated the status quo of his heart and mind.

"Uqinisile vele. Uzongifaka enkingen"(You're right. You are going to get me in trouble)

"Akusiyona inhloso yam leyo"(That's not my intention), he said and stopped walking. She stopped too but kept her eyes away from him. He took her hand in his and studied her face. He was thinking about how he'd never seen anybody that naturally gorgeous before.

"Hayi cha. Umuhle ngane yabantu abakuyeke"(You're gorgeous), he complemented and she placed the other free hand on her blushing mouth.

"Ngibuke phela"(Look at me), he said and made sure that his eyes followed hers even she looked away.

"Uyak'thanda uMxolisi Ndalo"(Mxolisi loves you Ndalo)

"Kodwa awungazi nje"(But you don't know me), she said, still looking at her feet.

"That's what makes it worse. I'd love to get to know you. It drives me crazy not being able to reach you because you're all I think about"

"Kodwa angijoli mina"(I am not into dating)

"Okay bheka. Ngibuke emehlweni ungitshele ukuthi awungifuni. Ngiyak'thembisa, ngizok'yeka emva kwaloko"(Okay look, look me in the eye and tell me that you don't want me. I promise to leave you alone after that), he said and hoped for the best. She did not reply.

"Awungifuni?"(You don't want me?), he reiterated in a whisper. She bit her upper lip in a blush.

"Ngiphendule phela sthandwasami ngizokwazi, noma kungeke kube lula, ukuqhubeka ngempilo"(Answer me my love so I can, even though it's no going to be easy, to carry on with my life), he lied. He knew from the deepest wells of his heart that he wasn't going to be able to let go.

"Angazi", she quickly said and laughed. Mxolisi took out his phone and begged her to take it.

"Ngeke ngikwazi. Uzoy'bona umama le phone"(I can't take it. My mom will see it)

"Manje ngizoxhumana nawe kanjani ngoba angihlali la full time mina?"(How am I supposed to

get in contact with you because I don't live here full time)

"Ukhona ku Facebook"(Are you on Facebook?), she asked. She was avoiding him asking for her mother's number.

"Anginayo iaccount but I can always create it"

"Okay. Search Ndalo Angel Shezi"

"You don't have any weird spellings right? Just as it is?", he asked and she laughed.

"Yes. Just as it is"

"Ao. Ngiyabonga Sgananda", he smiled and addressed her with her clan name. She blushed even further and insisted that she really had to go. Her kissed her forehead and she quickly left after that. He just stood in the middle of the road watching her walk away.

"Wadla Mbulazi!", he exclaimed in absolute excitement.

Episode 08.

Mxolisi finally turned to walk back home when he

saw that Ndalo was safely back in her yard. The shopkeeper had closed down and went back inside his house. All that was ringing in Mxolisi's head was Ndalo's laughter. He caught himself smiling like an idiot. His phone vibrated on his way home. "Mom I'm on my way", he said when he answered the call.

"Where did you even disappear to?! Didn't I say I wanted all of us to eat together before we leave tomorrow? Kopano keng ka wena mara huh?!", she furiously scolded.

"Yehlis' umoya ma I'm 2 minutes away",

"You were not supposed to have left in the first place!"

"I know. I know. I'm sorry", he tried to pacify her. He could hear her breathing out heavily from exhaustion. She then cut the call.

"Ave ene drama umfazi ka Muzi"(Muzi's wife is dramatic), he mumbled to himself and continued walking. When he finally arrived in the house, he found her dressing the salad.

"Buka awukaka qedi kodwa bengithethiswa"(Look, you're not even done yet but I was being shouted at), he said and Betso thinned her eyes at him. He got to her and kissed her on the cheek.

"Ngiyadlala. Waze wamuhle today"(You look beautiful today), he went on and laughter that she was trying her best to suppress tightly under her feet travelled up and out her mouth.

"Ketlo' betsa hlogonyana e yao tlhoka ditsebe. What are you saying about my looks on other days"(I'll beat this stubborn head of yours...), she threatened and placed her hands on the sides of the huge bowl. He laughed.

"Why do women insist on misunderstanding the things we say?", he said with his arm around her waist. Muzi walked in with a Heineken bottle in hand.

"You're disturbing my wife wena family meeting", Muzi said and Betso laughed at how he addressed him, from his 'Kopano' name. The alternative weaning of Kopano is meeting.

"Kesa flirt le mamaka"(I'm still flirting with my mother), he teased and Betso imitated a blushing smile to him.

"As always", Muzi remarked and opened the fridge. They then all laughed.

"Go call all your siblings tell them dinner is ready. I know they're going to be deliberately late", Betso instructed and Mxo did as requested.

...

He paced up the stairs and went around knocking in their individual rooms. Lwandile was already out.

"And?!", Lwandile asked enthusiastically, wanting Mxo to spill the tea about where he'd been. Mxo laughed and promised to tell him all about it after dinner. When he got to Melokuhle's room, he found him on the phone. As per usual, he didn't knock. Melo raised his face at Mxo and continued speaking on the phone.

"I know baby but it'll blow over. They'll get tired of breathing down your neck all the time. Also, stop overthinking so much. I am not gonna leave you"

"Never. So I can't see you today?"

He exhaled at whatever answer he was getting from the other end of the line.

"I understand. Try not to stress okay? If you can't do it for me then do it for our baby"

"Sharp there's a bug in my room. Let me squash it before it starts laying eggs", he informed with his eyes on his brother and Mxolisi laughed as he settled next to him on the bed.

"I'll call you before you sleep", he then cut the call, dropped his hands and kept his eyes on the

screen.

"So... what's the way forward?", Mxolisi asked.

Melokuhle exhaled through his nose.

"The usual. Damages and shii. AND, they're coming out of my own pocket", he explained and huffed out a laugh.

"Well at least he's not cutting your allowance", Mxo tries to console. Melokuhle bit the side of his lip in distress.

"It's not the money I'm worried about bruh. What if...", he suddenly went speechless.

"What if...?"

"I don't know. I'm already... a big part of me is already warming up to being a dad and shii. What if something goes wrong or I make a completely bad father?", he lowly confessed.

"Man stressing about the future is self-torture. Solve the problems that need your immediate attention. On being a bad father, I don't know man. I don't have any experience in that field but I was in your shoes I'd trust that the footsteps I'm walking in are enough to guide me", Mxo said. A smile emanated from the corner of Melo's lip.

"I guess. He's a cool guy", Melo said, referring to their father.

"Yeah. When he ain't mad", Mxo said and they laughed.

"I legit thought he was gonna punch my teeth out this afternoon"

"I don't think it'll ever get that far. What did he say anyway?"

"He made me revise the condom lessons", Melo said in embarrassment and Mxo exploded in laughter.

"Your dad is a colour film. Imagine studying for an exam you've already failed", Mxo mocked and Melo lightly hit his chest. They then stood up and headed downstairs with Mxo still laughing behind him while creating a Facebook account. When he was done, he just sent a straightforward "Future wife" text to Ndalo and hurried to the table before they could fry him and his phone.

...

After dinner, Mxolisi asked if he could speak to Muzi for a minute after almost everyone disappeared to the respective bedrooms. Muzi kissed Betso on the cheek and told her that he'll shortly follow her to the bedroom. Betso adoringly pulled Mxolisi's ear.

"Good night Koppie", she said with a smile and he

laughed.

"Good night mom and stop calling me that", he stated, still laughing. Betso wrapped her arm around Lwandile's shoulders and they walked and talked.

When they were supposed to go their separate ways along the corridor, Lwandile stopped as he was about to open the door.

"Mom?"

"Hm?", Betso lazily said with her exhausted eyes dropped to her cheeks and her hand on her neck.

"Can we talk? It's important"

"1-10?", she gave him a scale to gauge the importance of the matter. All she was thinking about is a hot shower and her bed.

"9", he said and she tensed her brows at his facial expression.

"Mm-kay", she agreed in concern and they walked into his room.

She sat on the bed and watched him pace the room in front of her in confusion.

"What's wrong Kanyo?", she asked and he abruptly went to sit next to her on the bed.

"Bua le mama"(Talk to mommy), she said and ran her palm on his forehead.

"Okay. Here goes. I... I'm...", he struggled to put together a comprehensible sentence. He couldn't. "I received an email from school. I've been selected amongst the 3 that will be going to Belgium for that accounting competition I told you about", he swerved from his original thoughts and decided to tell her something else, which he was also meaning to tell her.

"That's great news baby!", she exclaimed in excitement, pulling him by the head to her chest. He laughed nervously and sniffed. She kept his head there.

"When do you leave? And for how long? What are you gonna need?", she rambled.

"When school closes after prelims. For a week. I don't think I'm short of anything"

"You're gonna need warm clothes and---"

"I have more than enough clothes mama", he cuts her short.

"Still. I'm happy for you. Thank you for making me proud once again", she brushed his arm. He just nodded.

"But Kanyo?", she whispered.

"Hm?"

"I gave birth to you. I know you. That's not what

you wanted to tell me. Out with it", she said. He tightly shut his eyes.

"Something is bothering you. It has been bothering you for days now. What is it?", she went on.

"Kanyo?"

"I'm gay mom!", he blurted out compelled by impatience. Silence. She finally exhaled.

"I guess, I'm finally disappointing you for the first time", he said and sobbed.

"Hey! Get that stupid thought out of your head. I am disappointed yes! Am I disappointed by your sexual orientation? No. I am disappointed by the fact that I failed you as a mother"

"No why would...", he raised his head trying to interject and she raised her hand so he stops talking.

"Boikanyo, if I was doing a great job as I thought I was you wouldn't have had a hard time telling me that you're queer. There is nothing wrong with you. Hell I have a homosexual bestfriend why did you think I was going to judge you baby?"

"I don't know. It's different when it's your own child"

"That would make me a hypocrite, don't you think?", she asked and he dropped his face. She

then exhaled heavily and pulled his head back on her chest.

"You're still the Kanyo I gave birth to and raised. Your sexuality does not change your identity"

"My sexuality IS a part of my identity mom"

"It has always been. You didn't suddenly adopt this. You just happened to realize it. "

He kept quiet. So did she.

"Are you gonna tell dad?"

"Do you want me to?"

"I don't know"

"I'm not going to tell him but I'm willing to hold your hand when you finally decide to", she assured. He wrapped his hands tightly around her waist.

...

Meanwhile in the TV room...

Muzi settled down on the couch and Mxolisi did the same.

"What's up?", Muzi asked in a casual tone.

"I need your help"

"O-kay?"

"I've been playing around with this idea for a while now and I think it's time I put it in motion. I'mmm thinking of opening up a studio", he disclosed.

Muzi nodded in a manner that suggested that he needed to hear more.

"You're taking this music thing seriously ne?", he remarked.

"Yeah dad. I mean, I'm already making music from the comfort of my own bedroom. Why not go for the whole thing and get rich while at it? I was born rich but you get what I'm saying."

Muzi laughed.

"Niyahlupha nina ma rich skrrpot"

"It's skrr skrr dad", Mxo corrected and laughed.

"Yona leyo...", Muzi said and laughed as well.

"So, you don't think it's a good idea?"

"Not at all. I've heard the kind of music you make. Plus that song you produced by...?", Muzi shrunk his face trying to remember the name.

"Ashanté?", Mxo came to his rescue.

"Yes. It went viral. I just didn't think you took it seriously because you never speak about it much. You weren't as excited as I expected you to be so I let you be"

A single breath escaped Mxo's lip in the form of a laugh.

"I'm not against it. On condition that you pull up your socks at school because you're slacking"

"School doesn't align with my brand MK"

"And what the fxck is that supposed to mean?"

"I hate it there. I count hours instead of numbers"

"But you used to be so good at maths. You loved it too. What went wrong?"

"I outgrew that shii"

"You outgrew school?", Muzi repeated out of confusion.

"Yeah. School is depressing. It demands a lot from me"

"Everyone needs something to fall back on. All this, could collapse tomorrow and you'll find yourself without a job because "daddy's" company wouldn't be there to save you anymore. Your shares mean nothing if there's no company. We don't know what tomorrow holds"

"We both know that will never happen. Not on your watch"

"I could die next week?", Muzi sternly stated. A sudden morose look occupied Mxolisi's face.

"Don't say that", he said and clenched his teeth. Muzi dropped his shoulders and pulled him by his shoulder so he hugs.

"I'm just saying. Life is very unpredictable mfan'wami. I want you to have the spirit of going

for anything and everything you're capable of. Leave no stone unturned when it comes to opportunities. Remember how badly your mother struggled to find a perfect school for you?"

"Yeah", Melo reluctantly agreed. Still unsettled by the thought of Muzi dying.

"She did that because she wanted a school that was going cater for your each and every need but you're taking her efforts for granted. What happened to swimming? "

"I got sick of it. That's more of Lwandile's thing. I play soccer now"

"Do you like it at least or are you gonna drop it as well like you did in primary school?"

"You know I love it. We never miss a match"

"Watching and playing are two different things"

"I know. I won't ditch it. I promise"

"Lobu indecisive bakho buyangithusa. You need to learn how to be committed to one thing and stick to it"

"I'm still young dad. I'm bound to fxck up. It's the only way I'll find my feet", he said and Muzi nodded once after a moment.

"I guess you have a point"

"So, studio?", Mxo pressed and Muzi laughed then

stood up. He took his phone from the coffee table and said, "Draw up a proper business plan, call my PA to schedule an appointment, wear a suit and come present your idea to me".

Mxolisi laughed. Muzi left.

"He's serious?", he questioned his meta self with his jaw dropping.

...

After picking up his jaw and scattered senses from the floor, Mxo picked up the remote and turned the TV on. He took out his phone to check with Ndalo had replied to his text on messenger. She hadn't. His heart dropped. He threw the chat head to the corner of his phone and browsed her pictures with closed smile on face. He came across a picture of her sitting on a black plastic chair with a fairly short yellow dress on, laughing in a carefree manner as the picture depicted, even though her hair was a complete mess. An "unexpected" as one would say.

"The things I'd do to you baby gurl?!", he thought out loud. Melo appeared from behind the couch and caught a glimpse of her on Mxo's screen.

"I can bet--", Melo said and Mxolisi jumped.

"Tsek man baby daddy don't sneak up on me like

that!"

Melokuhle laughed and took a handful of cereal out of the box and poured it all into his wide open mouth.

"I can bet with all my exes that you're never gonna get that chick", he said and went to sit on the couch with Mxo, who huffed out a cxyky laugh.

"All your exes you say?"

Melo nodded and continued chewing.

"Wa khuluma ngath' awungazi?"(Why are you speaking as though you don't know me?), he asked with a challenging smile on his face.

"I do. But I also know that Shortstuff will never entertain you. Buza bonke labafana ba la esgodini. My self included"

"Ohhhh. I see. This is jealousy talking", Mxo said and began cracking in a mocking laughter.

"It's not. I'm just warning you so you know what you're up against. Izok'phula intliziyo leya ngane if you invest yourself in pursuing her"

"Wee investment, warn me to the moon and back. Unama rights",Mxo said and stuck his tongue out, dancing his way to his room. Melo shook his head while laughing and changed the channel.

Ndalo finally replied at 01h22. Mxo was still up,

listening to music well in a dead quiet house and switching between social media apps. His heart almost jumped out of his chest when he realized that she had replied.

Mxolisi Kopano K: Future wife 🥰

Ndalo Angel Shezi: Lol hi 🙄

Mxo: You good?

Ndalo: Yea. Just cold. Wena?

Mxo: I'm not. Your scent is stuck on me. It's not making things any easier. 🙄

Ndalo: Amanga 🤣(lies)

Mxo: Ngifunge ngani ukuk'tshengisa ukuthi I'm being honest?(What should I swear on to show you that I'm being honest)

Ndalo: Lol I don't know.

Mxo: I'm guessing this is the only time you can access her phone because she's sleeping. Correct?

Ndalo: Lol not really. She borrows it to me freely but I had to study. So, couldn't talk.

Mxo: Are you writing today? You should get some sleep if you are.

Ndalo: Lol yes dad.

Mxo: Mciim 🤣 I wasn't trying to be your dad, BUT I could be your daddy? 🙄

Ndalo: Goodnight Mxolisi 🤣🤣🤣

Mxo: Wait...

Mxo: Where do you go to school?

Ndalo: Meadows Comprehensive High. Why?

Mxo: What time will you get off tomorrow?

Ndalo: 15h30. I have an extra class. Why? Are you planning on coming to my school? Please don't 😞

Mxo: Ulale kahle. I love you ❤️

Ndalo: Lol you keep saying that

Mxo: Because I don't doubt it.

Ndalo: 🙄

Ndalo: You never answered my question though.

Mxo: Get some rest.

Ndalo: Mxo!

Mxolisi: Goodnight Ndarly 😊 Or morning.

Whichever one my lady prefers. I'm not going to respond to the next text you send. Just so you know. 😏

Ndalo: 😭

[Seen]

Comprehensive school? This should make it easier to find their emblem. He thought to himself as he browsed the net. The brilliant idea at the back of his head was even making him anxious. He may have found a way to get Ndalo a phone, a phone that she can freely keep. He just, needed to fake a

few things...

Episode 09.

Save! Mxolisi exclaimed when he was finally done with the document and stored it in his stick. He was proud of himself for how he pulled it off. It looked and sounded professional when read.

"Dear parent

We hereby inform you of the new TechForLearner programme, brought to us by the Department of Education. Due to our excellent streak of outstanding annual results, Meadows Comprehensive High has received a sum of R50 000 that has been put to use provide deserving learners with digital devices that will assist them in any area of learning. The curriculum is forever evolving. By this, we hope to combat any challenges that might arise due to this fact. Our school is known for it's attentive nature to individual learners, ensuring maximum performance at the end of each academic year.

Hopefully this finds you in order.

Regards,

[Signature]"

"Ha-haaa!!!", he celebrated and woke an already irritated Lwandile up.

"Do you mind? What are you even doing?", Lwandile asked with squinted eyes.

"I'm busy being a genius as always", he said and winked at Lwa. He had his back against the grey headboard.

"Are you writing the assignment? Without being forced?", Lwandile was genuinely surprised and he wasn't even trying to hide it.

"Assignment? Ain't nobody got time for that", Mxo said and kept his eyes on the screen. Lwandile took a deep breath out.

"Can you please be serious for once? Do you have any idea how badly you're going to fail if you carry on like this?"

"You stress too much"

"As I should! If you're not ready for the exams then it means I'll have to fail them too, deliberately!", Lwandile vents.

"No you don't"

"Of course I do. I can't be one class ahead of you.

It'll fxck up all our life plans"

"I won't fail. Relax"

"You don't understand how serious this is do you? If you're not careful we'll end up going to different universities because of your mediocre results"

"Your problem is, you think with your emotions. Dude we're still in grade 11"

"Do you have to be a brick each time I try to make you unders--"

"Relax!", Mxolisi yelled.

"Seems I'm the only one concerned about us sticking together huh?"

"You know that's not true. We'll always be together. We can do different things but still see each other everyday, just we've ALWAYS done. We like completely different things. Why am I explaining this to you like it's something new?"

"Lemme shut the fxck up before you accuse me of being emotional"

"You can't force your interest down my throat. You should know this by now!"

"Fxck you and your throat!", Lwandile shot out of bed and left for God-knows-where in the house. Mxolisi shut the laptop closed and threw it to the side on top of the sheets. He wiped his face and

balanced his frustrated face by his palm.

...

During breakfast, they sat across one another whereas they usually sit next to each other, each stubbornly focusing on their own toast.

"Are the two of you alright?", Manqoba asked.

"Perfectly fine!", they both shot out at the same time, still keeping their eyes on their plates.

Manqoba's eyes danced between them suspiciously. He turned to look at Muzi and Muzi shook his head to indicate that he shouldn't press on the matter any further. The only time he gets in their business is if their issues last for more than 24 hours.

"Are you done packing, we're leaving in a few hours?", Betso asked the two.

"Packing doesn't take the whole day mom", Mxolisi said.

"Say that again and the toast you're chewing will spray out of your nose", Betso threatened and pointed her index finger at him.

"I'm sorry", he apologized with remorse. Betso dropped her high chest and sharply threw her eyes to the wall. Melo looked at his watch and announced that he was getting late for school

whereas he wasn't. He stood to go fetch his bag and blazer but immediately placed his hand on his inflated mouth with his eyes popped. He ran upstairs to go vomit.

"Are you okay Kuhle?", Betso questioned and removed the white napkin on her thighs to run after him. The eyes around the table were looking for answers in one another.

She found the door to his room wide open along with that of the bathroom. He was kneeling on the toilet vomiting his guts out. It then hit Betso that he might be going through a sympathetic pregnancy. She squatted next to him and placed her hand on his shoulder. Muzi walked in.

"Boy, what's wrong?"

Melo placed his arm on his tummy and squeezed painfully as he continued to throw up. A look of concern grew on Betso's face.

"Melo?", she lowly called out.

"Ngilunywa yisusu ma", he cried out in pain.

"I think he's having morning sickness", Betso said to Muzi who was standing by the door.

"Should I get you some water?", Muzi asked. Melo shook his head rapidly and continued balancing his head on the arm that he'd laid on the toilet seat.

The vomiting had stopped. When they were sure that he was fine, he went back to worshipping the porcelain god. Muzi shrunk his face in concern.

Betso placed her fingers on his forehead.

"Baba he's burning up!", she said and immediately stood up. She turned on the tap on the basin, grabbed one of the brown towels outside of his shower and submerged it in the warm water. She then twisted most of the water out, folded it and placed it on his forehead. He had stopped vomiting. She loosened the striped tie around his neck and undid the first button.

"How long is it going to last for?", Muzi asked his wife. Betso was about to reply when Melo abruptly threw up again.

"That's it. I'm taking you to the hospital. Can I have the car keys baby? ", she said and stood up. Her last sentence was directed to Muzi. Melo took the damp towel and wiped his mouth.

"There's really no need for that. I'm fine", he insisted with a throaty voice. He could still feel and taste the vomit grains at the very back of his tongue.

"The doctor will tell me that", she stated and walked out to go find him something warm to

wear. Melo weakly stood up from the floor.

"Tell her I'm fine MK", he said with slight frown. He wasn't looking forward to the chakalaka smell of medication at the hospital. That usually makes him even more sick.

...

Betso led the way down the stairs in her long, 'floor-sweeping' black dress.

"I'm taking Melo to the hospital. Nina, behave yourselves while I'm away. And pack also!", she pointed them with the car key in her command. Muzi was already out of the house.

"What's wrong you?", Mxolisi asked Melokuhle casually. Melo lazily rolled his eyes Betso and Mxo laughed with his thumbs on his screen, still seated at the table. He understood what he meant. The gesture meant that Betso was making a mountain out of mole hill as usual. He still had stomach cramps but he decided to push the pain at the back of his head. He was hopeful that it will eventually go away if he didn't pay any attention to it. Lwandile had gone back to his room and locked it. Mxolisi stood up and went to the study to speak to Manqoba. He had initially planned to disappear but he decided against it when he saw

his parents leave.

...

The door was open and he could see Manqoba in the balcony with the glass door open behind him, facing the sun and speaking on the phone.

Manqoba turned, saw and gestured with his hand that he should come in.

"How long are you planning on giving me the silent treatment for? I woke up and ubungekho embheden. Thembalami, please answer the phone so we can talk about what is bothering you?"

Ngiyak'cela", he wrapped up his voicemail and placed the phone back in his pocket.

"Ja mfan", he said to Mxolisi and brushed his face. Mxolisi laughed and tried to duck his hand but it was too late.

"Don't get married boy uyangizwa? Women are walking, talking and moody headaches with long lashes and manicures"(...do you hear me?...), he said to Mxolisi jokingly and they both laughed. He placed his hand on Mxolisi's far shoulder and they slowly walked to the couch.

"That's actually the reason why I'm here", Mxolisi confessed.

"Weeeee", Manqoba exclaimed and Mxolisi

laughed even harder. They sat down.

"Who is she?", Manqoba asked. Mxolisi raised his face with a slight smile on the corner of his lip and said, "Her name is Ndalo. Shezi. "

"Umntwana ka Nomcebo Shezi?!", Manqoba exclaimed with high pitched laughter. Mxolisi bit his upper lip and nodded, suppressing a laughter.

"Why are you so brave?", Manqoba asked and continued laughing, laying his back on the couch.

"Kant wenzan lomama?"(What kind of a person is she?)

"If stop-nonsense was a person", Manqoba said.

"Kodwa ngiyayithanda lengane MQ", he confesses.

"Uyithanda impela or you want somebody to add to your hit list?"

Mxolisi laughed

"I don't have a hit list"

"I've been 16 before Mxo. Ne behavior yakho gives a lot away", MQ says and Mxolisi snorts and looks away with an embarrassed smile on his face.

"But the fact that you're talking to me about her means she's something special", Nqoba says and digs deep into Mxo's eyes with his.

"Angazi. Maybe. She's... different"

"Different you say?", Manqoba says with his brow

raised and a curious smile on his face.

"Awusho, what's so different about this young lady? Yena muhle ngiyavuma but same goes for all the other ones I've caught you with", he adds. Mxo releases a single snorty laugh.

"Angazi man. She's just...", the picture of Ndalo's face in his head rendered him speechless.

"Let me rephrase. How did you realize that she's "special" as you say?", Mxo kept silent for a moment and raised his eyes to look at MQ.

"She just makes me feel some tyipa way"

"Hm?!", Manqoba exclaimed with fascination.

Mxolisi laughed out loud.

"So here's the thing, I need you to borrow me your car today"

"I thought you were leaving today"

"We are but I can't leave without doing this"

"How would you have achieved this if Makhosonke didn't get sick?"

"I was gonna make a plan. You know I think about crossing bridges only when I get to them"

"What if they come back before you do? You know how your mom can get"

"That's another bridge", he said impatiently and Manqoba laughed.

"Haiy ezakho zangihlula k'daloo. The keys are somewhere in the living room. If they ask, I'm gonna say you stole the car. AND drive safely"(I've learnt not to involve myself in your shenanigans), Manqoba emphasized.

"Your car is gonna come back in one piece. I promise"

"It's not the car I'm worried about. I can always get another one but there's only one you", he said and brushed the top Mxo's hair in adoration.

"Technically, that's biologically incorrect", Mxo teased and they laughed.

"Speaking of which, what was happening with you two this morning?"

"I'd rather not talk about that. I'll see you later ayt?", Mxo said and Manqoba shook his head as they fist bumped.

...

Bongiwe sat by her sickly father's hospital bed and sobbed as she watched how his health had deteriorated in a matter of hours. He gave her a languid smile and tried to squeeze her hand. An emotional Lindelwa walked out as she couldn't take it anymore.

"Nobody is immortal my kids...", he finally said as

he coughed weakly with his mouth closed.

"Kodwa bewungcono last week baba?", she said in a breaking voice. Aunt Gertrude walked in with her shiny yet ravaged bag hanging from the inside of her elbow.

"Such is life. You kept stalling when I wanted grandkids buka manje sengiphelelwe yiskhathi"(...I've ran out of time). Bongiwe bit the inner part of her upper lip trying not to fall apart. Her father's statement took her back to the time where Mangaliso left her right after she had gotten a miscarriage.

"M'tshele bhuti. K'dala ngisho mina ngithi akazitholele indoda ngoba ayabola amaqanda ngala"(Tell her brother. I've been saying that she must find a man because her eggs are rotting in here), she said and poked Bongiwe thrice on her abdomen. Bongiwe rolled her teary, fuming eyes and looked away.

"Uziphethethe nje ngendoda. Ungayiqoqa yonke imali yalo mhlaba kodwa um'ungenayo indoda nabantwana kuyafana sesi", aunt Gertrude went on. She tried to touch Bongiwe's weave and Bongiwe jerked away. Her father tried to get to shut up but he couldn't stop coughing.

"KUYAFANA!", she reiterated maliciously.

...

Mxolisi went to his room to get his wallet and the memory stick but found it locked. He knocked politely to no avail until he got irritated.

"Open this door Lwandile man!", he shot out and banged on it. He pinched the bridge of his nose before he could bang on it again.

"Okay fine. Give me my memory stick and my wallet then I'll be out of your hair", he said and waited. No answer.

"I'm giving you exactly 2 minutes to open this door. You're gonna pay for it if I break it", he threatened. Lwandile opened it and handed him his things. Mxolisi looked at him in the face before his hands could drop to his spread out hand. He shook his head in disapproval before snatching them from him, resulting in him dropping the stick that it slid down the corridor. Lwandile's face was straight and emotionless. He then closed the door and locked it again. Mxolisi picked up the memory stick and left.

...

After purchasing the phone, Mxolisi trusted the GPS to get him to Ndalo's school, hoping that he

wouldn't get there when lunch was already over. He parked by the gate, a small distance from the security check office and walked towards the window. He greeted and the security guard greeted back while wiping her hands with a Shoprite promotions paper, trying to remove the oil from the vetkoeks she was eating.

"What are you here for?", she asked as she grabbed the big book from behind her, notifying that the one in front of Mxo was full.

"I'm here to see my sister. What time is lunch?", he said and kept a straight face, hoping it's convincing enough. The security guard checked her watch and said about 6 minutes from now.

"Do you have your I.D with you?", she asked and he reached for his wallet in his back pocket. He then handed the smart card to her. She took it and filled in the row. She then turned the book in his direction and asked him to sign on the last cell of the row.

"Mara o cute wena yong", she complemented and he laughed shyly. He never expected anything of that sort to come out of her mouth. He was in fact anticipating something rude or anything along those lines from how her face looked when he first

arrived.

"Ngiyabonga", he said and pushed the book towards her. She then pressed a button and the gate unlocked. She sat back on her chair and asked him to push it further because 'break' was just a few minutes away anymore. He did as instructed and the siren went off, causing the learners to pour out of the classrooms. He then remembered that he didn't know which grade Ndalo was actually in. He walked on anyway. He asked a random learner if she knew Ndalo and she said no. He thanked her and walked away. He was about to ask another learner when he saw Sbusiso, one of the boys he was chilling with outside of the yard on the eve of the inauguration. Sbu also took notice of him.

"Ey man! Ufunan' wena la?"(What are you doing here?), he said in excitement and they bumped shoulders, followed by a 'thumb-snap' hand greeting.

"Eish bra. I'm glad I bumped into you. Ngifunana no Ndalo mfeth"(I'm looking for Ndalo)

"Um'uthi Ndalo, usho uNdalo Ndalo Ndalo? Angel? Shezi?", the guy exclaimed, a brink away from laughing.

"Yena loyo"(That one), Mxo said and the guy

chortled.

"If I were you I'd go back home. Akunkani akunkani laphaya? Even a donkey is better"(You won't be able to conquer her stubbornness), he said and Mxo laughed.

"Yekel' ukungibhedela and go find her. I'll owe you one"

"You probably have the cash now so pay and I'll bring her to you?", he negotiated and Mxo continued to laugh in defeat.

"Find her first", he said and they struck a deal. Mxo stood against the tree and took out his phone. He noticed a figure standing in front of him and he raised his face.

"OMG and it's really you?!", she said in excitement.

"Uhm... hello", Mxo said with a curious, awkward smile.

"I'm sorry but I just had to. I follow you religiously on Instagram. I was at your house yesterday but I only saw your brother", she rambled on. Mxo huffed out a laugh, with his thumbs over his screen.

"Melo obviously. I wouldn't been able to tell the difference if I'd seen the one you usually post", she

said and Mxo looked down briefly and laughed. When he raised his face, Ndalo was walking with Sbusiso towards them. She was laughing from a distance but it all faded when she arrived.

"It was nice seeing you", Mxo said when he picked up the vibes he was getting from Ndalo although she tried hard to act normal.

"Cool. Reply to my DMs phela nawe", the girl said and Mxo gave half nod.

"Khokha ke sbali", Sbu said and Mxo laughed, taking out a R100 note from his wallet.

"Tsii!", Sbu celebrated and left.

"Hi", he softly said to her. She had her hands crossed on her chest.

"Hi", she greeted back.

"Unjan?"

"What are you doing here?"

"I'm here to deliver 16 bags of cement", he said and puckered his lips, trying to suppress a laughter. He could see that she was not happy with him.

"Mciim", she replied and looked away.

"Ngiyadlala. I'm here to see you haw"

"Me? It didn't look like it", she said and kept her eyes away. Her face was clean of any emotion.

"Is she the reason you--? She just came up to me and started chatting me up. I'm sorry", he pleaded with her. The jealousy she was trying to hard to hide was amusing to him.

"Please walk me out?", he added when he realized she wasn't about reply to her. She glanced at him and saw the smile he was trying to tuck away into his lips. She laughed and began walking.

"Exactly how much are you willing to go around spending to get people to call me for you?", she asked and he laughed.

"Ngivumele ukuthi ngibe isoka lakho before you start seeing my face on I Blew It", he says and she shoots out a laugh. They walked towards the car and the eyes she was seeing and sensing around her made her uncomfortable.

He reached for the McD paper bag at the backseat and handed it to her.

"Mi, I brought you lunch", he said and placed it on her thighs before she could dispute. She rolled her eyes in an attempt to dissolve the shy look on her face and said, "Thanks", placing the small bag on the dashboard.

"I wanna play you a song", he said while trying to connect his phone to bluetooth. Liquideep's

fairytale began playing in the car. He started dancing, mostly with his shoulders to the beat. She didn't know how to react. All she could do is laugh, blush and smile when he began singing along.

"Can I be your fairytale? Promise I will love you well?", he continued singing and jamming to the beat. He laughed it off when she was looking out the window.

"Can I?", he asked in a serious tone. She shrugged. He could see the smile from her cheeks even though she was facing away.

"I'm not ready", she finally said.

"Ready for what?", he gently took the hand she was holding against her mouth in a fist, in both of his.

"The drama that will come with being a relationship with you. I've already gotten a feel of it moments ago", she confessed, still looking away. He patiently rubbed the top of her hand with his thumb.

"Ndalo, ngine nhliziyo eyodwa. Noma kthiwa ngiyafisa, angeke ngikwazi ukuthanda wena ngiphinde ngithande nabanye futhi"(I only have one heart. Even if I did wish to, it won't be able to love you and others at the same time), he said and

brought her hand to his lips. He bent all four fingers and kissed their top surface.

"Ungisaban ngempela?"(Why are you so afraid of me?), he asked and waited to see if she'll turn towards him.

"Uban othe ngiyak'saba?"(Who said I'm afraid of you?), she forced herself to look him the eye to prove her point. Her eyes began glistening up, but she wasn't about to back down.

"You tense up when I'm around you", he said and she laughed. 'Fairytale' began playing, but the reprise version this time.

"No I don't"

"If you continue saying no I'm gonna have to prove it to you"

"Angikusabi Mxolisi", she was adamant. He reclined her chair without any warning and she gasped. He then slowly and gently climbed on top of her. He could see that she was holding in all of her breath behind her tightly shut eyes.

"I want you Ndalo. I love you. With all the nerve endings in my brain and every muscle in my heart. Qoma phela ntombi iyagodola inhliziyo ka Zikode?", he whispered very closely to her ear so much she felt like the individual words swung

down the nerves on her spinal cord.

"Please be mine?", he insisted. She nodded.

"Ubong'buka phela meng'khuluma nawe"(Look at me when I'm speaking to you?)

The song continued to softly play in the background.

Ndalo just laughed but kept her eyes closed. She could feel his face approaching hers. He dropped a light kiss on her lips. She slightly parted them in a gasp. He watched her crumbling underneath him with a smile. He then got off her when he felt like she couldn't take the pressure anymore. He dropped back on his seat and took out the blue Labello stick from his pocket and moisturized his lips. She finally opened her eyes, failing dismally to contain her laughter.

Her grabbed the box that contained her phone and handed it to her, in the small plastic bag it came in.

"I told you my mom--",

"Just open it", he said and waited for her to take it.

"I really can't"

Mxolisi looked into the white bag and took out the letter he had printed out in colour and folded in half.

"What's that?"

"Read it"

She took it and read it with patience. She laughed in disbelief.

"Mxo!"

"You have no excuses now", he said and handed her the box.

"You could get arrested for this. You can't fake somebody's signature. How did you even--", she rambled, still in disbelief.

"Your principal is a famous woman. It wasn't that hard", he said and opened the box to set the phone up since he felt she was wasting time.

Episode 10.

After he was done setting up the device, Mxo handed it to her. She was still in disbelief that he'd go to such lengths just to speak to her on a daily basis. She took it and admired it from front to back.

"Ngiyabonga", she said through a blush. The manner in which she said it made him feel proud

of himself. Her tone was full of innocent appreciation. It exacerbated the already existing urge in him to take care of her.

"Do you like it?"

"I love it"

"Mission accomplished then", he said and kissed the back of her hand. She blushed and checked for time on the pink watch belted on her wrist.

"You should eat before the siren goes off", he suggested. She was reluctant.

"Only if you're eating with me", she said and he laughed.

"There's only one of everything in there", he said and gave a side eye to his vibrating phone he had placed next to the gear control. Ndalo dropped her eyes onto the screen and gathered that a "Sne" was calling. He glanced at her before he could answer.

"Hey", he answered. She stole a very brief look at him and took the bag. She peeped inside and her sight fell on fries, a big mac and a fizzy drink.

"Nah I'm not home yet", he said and Ndalo took out the chips and pretended not be listening.

"You always do this when he fxxks up. Why?"

"That's not what we--", he said and abruptly cut

his sentence short, then exhaled.

"Look I can't talk right now. We'll talk when I get home"

"Don't be like that"

"Okay I'm hanging up", he stated and cut the call. She kept her eyes to the dimmed window and while she chewed.

"Don't tell me you're a slow eater?", he mocked and she kept quiet.

"Are you okay?", he asked as he put the phone back down.

"Was that your girlfriend?", she enquired, still looking away. He exhaled.

"We had something going on but she's not my girlfriend", he explained. She kept quiet. He tried to take her hand again but she pulled away.

"Are we honestly going to fight about things that happened in my life before you came in it?"

"They're obviously still going on"

"Akulona iqiniso lelo"(That's not true)

"If it's not then why is she calling?"

"She's calling because I haven't told her about you yet. She's not my girlfriend. She has somebody else. She and I mean nothing", he pleaded.

"She is dating you both?", she said in shock.

"We are not in a relationship. We never were"

"Then what do you call whatever it is that's going on between the two of you?"

"No strings attached"

"I don't engage in such things"

"I made myself clear from the get go about what I want with you. Why are you now deliberately confusing yourself?"

"Our lives are completely different. I love you too but I can't allow my self to get hurt", she confessed and he only caught three words from all she said.

"You what?", he asked with a closed-lip smile and a satisfied look in his eyes. She shrugged off her shoulder and looked away with a frown on her face. He leaned in closer and cupped her chin, turning her to face him.

"Give me the benefit of the doubt. That's all I ask from you. One thing I'm not gonna do is to watch you punish and walk away from me for things that occurred before I knew you", he said in a low, raspy voice. Ndalo's eyes fell to her exposed thighs. Her skirt was not short but it didn't go below her knees. The manner in which she was seated caused it go even further up.

"Look at me?", he said and she didn't.

"I know the type of girls you love and I'm not--"

"Wazelaphi?" (How do you know?), he cut in between her statement before she could finish.

"Ndalo, I don't have any intention of playing games with you so I'd appreciate if you didn't play games with me too. Uyangfuna noma cha?" (Do you want me or not?), he asked with both his hands on her cheeks. She pouted.

"I don't have all day. Neither do you. Manje ngicela ungiphendule ntombenhle?" (So answer me pretty lady)

"I do", she lowly said.

"What is it that you do?", he asked and she laughed. A smile grew on his face.

"Ngiyak'thanda nami Mxolisi", she laid her heart bare and his skipped two beats. He shut his eyes and dropped his head.

"Mara ungenzan Ndalo ungishayisa ngovalo kangaka sthandwasami?" (What is that you're doing to me my love?), he asked and she laughed through a blush. He raised his face and looked her in the eye. She tried to look away but he said, "Don't". She soldiered on and braved the stare.

"Angeke ngikulume if you don't want me to"(I won't bite you

..), he assured and she laughed.

"Why would I want you to bite me?"

"I don't have have quite the answer to that. I'd rather show you?", he whispered and insisted on keeping his eyes locked in hers. She ran speechless. He then leaned in slowly towards her trembling lips.

"Relax", he said in a rough whisper. He then planted a kiss on her lips and she put her hands on his chest.

"Mxo wait. I've never--"

"I know. Relax and I'll lead. Okay?"

She nodded. He went in again and began working her lower lip with his, both their eyes were closed. He eased her into it until she started reciprocating. His hands travelled down her waist as their continued smooching one another. She got lost in it and he smiled in between the kiss. She smiled back. He kissed her cheek and pushed her braids back. She had tied them at the top of her head but their length was a disturbance to his mission. He travelled to almost the back of her neck in kisses and she started breathing heavily. He got there

and began sucking and bursting a few of her capillaries with his lips. She was now hyperventilating. He left 2 red marks there and went back to kissing her patiently and passionately on the lips with his hand on her neck. His forehead meet hers and he said, "See why you'd want me to bite you?", he asked in a whisper. She laughed shyly.

"How did it feel?"

"Kubhlungu kodwa kumnandi at the same time", she punctuated with a laugh.

"Make sure your mom doesn't see them"

"Doesn't see what?"

"Just keep your braids like that till they disappear", he laughed.

"What did you do to me?", she laughed as well.

"If a nigga approaches you today, show him those marks and tell him who left them there", he said and she laughed.

"This is just a very thin tip of an iceberg by the way", he whispered in her ear and violent butterflies erupted in her belly. The siren went off.

"Sengiyahamba manje. We'll talk on the phone. Send me a message whenever you can talk and I'll call, okay?", he said and she nodded. He gently

pulled her by the back of her head and kissed her one last time. He planted a cold kiss on her forehead and they said their goodbyes. The learners were pouring back into the school.

"You haven't left yet kodwa seng'ngiyak'khumbula"(But I already miss you", he said to her and she pursed her lips. She didn't want to go either.

"Ngiyak'thanda ngelosi yam"(I love you my Angel) "I love you too", she said and opened the car door. "Wait, let's take a selfie", he said and unlocked his phone.

"I'm gonna be late Mxo"

"It'll only take you a minute to get to the gate", he said as he looked outside and saw a few learners still coming from different directions. He took the paper bag and placed inside the plastic.

"Okay", she said and posed next to him. She smiled to the camera and he placed his lip on her cheek and closed his eyes. He took a shot of the picture using one of the volume buttons. He then looked at it and admired it.

"Nom' ungathini Ndalo, mina nawe siyafanelana mama!", he exclaimed and she laughed as she ran out of the car with her phone and plastic bag. He

started the car and drove off.

...

He could tell that his parents were not yet back when he drove in the yard. He got inside the house and placed the keys where he found them. He ran upstairs and found the door to their room open. He walked in and found Lwandile putting on shoes. The whole room smelt of his shower gel. When he looked over to the bed, he saw two zipped up suitcases.

"You packed for me?", he asked in surprise. If it was any other day it would've been perfectly normal for him to see this. But he thought things were tense when he left. Lwandile tightened the lace on his white sneaker and exhaled.

"Did I have a choice?", he asked without raising his face and pulled the other shoe towards him so he can put it on.

"I'm sorry", Mxolisi said and sat on the bed.

"You're sitting on my sock?", Lwandile said and waited for him to stand up. Mxolisi did and he pulled the black discreet sock and put it on. Mxolisi sat down again.

"I shouldn't have spoken to you like I did this morning. I'm really sorry Lwa?", he pleaded.

"It's cool. Mom said she's still picking up a few things at the mall so she won't have to do it when we get home", he notified as continued pulling his laces. Mxolisi couldn't make out whether he had been truly forgiven or not.

"Okay", he said and Lwandile walked out when he was done.

...

Bongiwe and Lindelwa spent the night at the hospital. The doctor informed that he was seeing progress with the old man's health although they shouldn't be too hopeful. Their aunt went over to sleep at Bongiwe's house. Her reasons being that she wouldn't have survived her arthritis in the cold of the night. The two insisted on staying.

Gertrude woke up in the morning and made herself some tea. She explored the house and admired a few thing. She took her tea upstairs to do some more exploring. She only ever came there once and didn't have the time to. Now that was by herself, she abused the full liberty. She got in the walk-in closet and was immediately at awe at the number of shoes and handbags her niece had to her name. The red bottoms were carefully placed in their individual compartments. The bags too.

One would swear she was in a designer shop had she taken a picture in there. Bongiwe had changed bags and left one on the make up chair. The bag caught Aunt Gertrude's eye. She loved it and thought it was more of her style. Her favourite part was how bloody expensive it looked. She knew the bag wasn't fronting. She picked it up and placed it on her bent hand and walked around with it.

"Uzongixolela uMabongi kodwa le, le ngibamba nayo shame. Sweety, uhamba nami wena"(Bongiwe will have to forgive me but I'm taking this one with me. Sweety, you're coming with me), she said, talking to the bag. She unzipped it on the outside and found four hundred rand notes and a nude lippie. She celebrated her way into the inner pocket, hoping to find more money. Her hand instead fell onto a cloth. She took it out and inspected it. It was navy, and folded. She immediately knew it belonged to a man. Women don't carry such, she thought to herself. She placed the bag down and unfolded the material. She smelt it. It indeed smelt like a man's cologne. Potently so.

"Awumithi ngani um'unayo indoda Mabongi?"(If

you have a man, why are you not falling pregnant?), she questioned herself, puzzled.

"Nje ngoba ungakwazi ukugcina indoda, uzokusiza uAunty"(Since you can't keep a man, aunty will have to step in and help you), she said and shoved the handkerchief in the front pocket of her old, wrap-around skirt.

...

Betso and Muzi finally arrived back home. Melo was more lively than he was in the morning. They found Manqoba standing outside having a conversation with one of the guards with his thumbs in his front pockets. Muzi joined them. Betso walked into the house and instructed the boys to bring all suitcases including hers and her husband's. She gave Melo a long hug and gently pushed him away by his shoulders to look him in the eye.

"I'm gonna miss you", Melo declared. Betso's heart blissfully bounced about.

"I'm gonna miss you. Angithi awufun' ukuza uzohlala nami"(Isn't you don't want to come stay with me?"

He laughed.

"It's not that ma. I just like it here. My spirit is

more at peace here than it is when I'm in Joburg"
"You sound like a chakra hun now", Betso said and they both laughed. The two came back, each carrying two cases. They bid Melo goodbye. When it was Mxo's turn, he whispered into Melo's ear and said "From today, phuma uit uit emabhozeni", he said and Melo wore a confused look on his face. Lwandile and his mother were already out the door. Mxo took out his phone and showed him his wallpaper.

"You lie!", Melo exclaimed with utter shock on his face.

"All the time but pictures don't"

"Put it here", Melo said and held out his fist. Mxo laughed and bumped his fist.

"This symbolizes your resignation from Bhozeni and partners", Mxo said and Melo laughed.

"Ukunya"(Nonsense), Melo replied.

"We'll talk when I get home. In the meantime, keep yourself busy with videos on how to change a diaper on Youtube", he said and ducked away from Melo's playful slap.

...

Enhle finally came back home. She walked into the bedroom and found Manqoba on his laptop,

seated at a corner on a single couch. He raised his face and waited for her to speak.

"I'm back", she plainly said and her hands fell on her thighs.

"Welcome", he said, still waiting for her to explain herself. She just sat on the bed.

"Uqhamukaphi makaOluhle?(Where are you coming from?)

"I went to get some fresh air"

"There's plenty of air in this yard"

"I said fresh", she bluntly expressed. Manqoba scoffed and stood up to go sit next to her. Holding the laptop in one hand, careful not to type gibberish. He placed it on the centre of the bed and went to squat next to her. Barefoot and barechested.

"You still haven't shaved your hair", she remarked when she felt like he doesn't listen to her.

"My hair doesn't have to bother you this much. I will shave it when I get the time"

"I bet you didn't get eye checked as I suggested as well"

"My eye is fine now. I am not a child Mbalenhle. I'm old enough to know when I need a doctor", he states and she keeps quiet.

"Did you get it?", he asked with his hands hanging in between his open thighs.

"Get what?"

"Fresh air. Isn't it what you say you went out looking for as if this house is a chimney?", he said and Enhle threw her eyes to the door that permits entrance to the ensuite.

"You promised never to cheat on me again", she said without even trying to engage in any eye contact.

"When did I do that?"

"When I was pregnant with Oluhle"

"And when did I cheat?"

"You haven't yet but I know you will and I already know who she is"

"Thembalami what are you talking about?", he asked in a tone lathered in confusion.

"I saw you looking at her", she said and he immediately knew what she was talking about. He dropped his face and snorted.

"I've been meaning to talk to you about that", he said.

"About what? Her?", she said with attitude.

"Yes"

"I'm listening..."

He stood up and went to sit next to her. He exhaled. It took him a while to construct a sentence to the gentlest of his ability.

"I really don't know ukuthi nginga yiqala ngakuphi lendaba think I like her. I didn't want to speak to her without your permission mkami"(...where to start) he finally dropped the bomb. Enhle had her mouth opened. She finally scoffed it closed and stood up.

"So you're back to your old cheating ways?"

"I haven't cheated on you in 18 years. You know this because you police my phone and my movements"

"Manje yin loku?"(What's this then?)

"I wanna do things the right way. If I like her enough to marry her, I'm going to need your permission", he went and looked at her standing over him. She turned trying to walk away but her anger compelled her to slap him with the back of her hand. She immediately came back to her senses and placed both hands on her mouth in absolute remorse.

"Baby. Baby please ngiyaxolisa babakhe I honestly don't know what came over me"(I'm sorry), she tried to apologize. He had his palm against his

burning cheek with his mouth slightly open from the shock that came down flushing his whole face. He stood up and she fell down on her knees and grabbed his leg, crying.

"Baby please. I didn't mean--", she begged and he tried to get his leg back.

"Ngiyeke ngihambe before I do something I know I will regret?", he calmly asked of her and she continued clutching onto his leg and shaking her head in emotional disapproval.

Episode 11.

Muzi and his family finally arrived home. The boys took their cases to their individual rooms and took their parents' suitcases with.

Muzi pulled Betso by the waist when she rambled about having to get started on making supper. She laughed as her hands fell on the top of his shoulders. His travelled down to her bxtt and grabbed on them. Betso placed her lips against his and they shared a slow, passionate kiss. The boys were watching with tons of fascination from the

top of the staircase whereas the rents thought they had disappeared. Muzi cut the kiss and opened his eyes.

"Forget supper. Let's go to the bedroom"

"But baby the kids...", she couldn't contain her laughter when she failed to explain that she had to make food for the boys, and him.

"They'll order in", Muzi said, lowly and roughly.

"You know I don't like feeding them take-aways"

"Kodwa ngiqhanyelwe nje mina?"(But I'm horny?), Muzi begged with his eyes reduced in size. Betso laughed. Muzi tightened his grab around her a**, making sure she felt that her man meant business.

"Ngicel' unakekele indoda yakho baby?"(Please take care of your man), he persuaded as he kissed on her neck.

"Ngiyak'cela, ma wey'ngane zami?"(Please, mother of my children?), he whispered into her ear and till today, this still sends shudders down her spine.

Mxolisi pulled Lwandile by the arm so they leave.

They couldn't hear the conversation from up there but he knew that the party downstairs was going to come to an end if the parents saw them. The furthest Muzi ever takes with showing affection in front of them is kissing her with his hands on his

waist. They disappeared, shaking their heads with wide smiles on their faces. Betso led Muzi up the stairs, holding on to his index finger with hers.

[REMOVED]

...

Manqoba eventually walked out of the room and Enhle was left crying her lung out on the carpet. After a couple of hours, she ran out of the strength to continue crying. What remained was the pain behind her bloodshot eyes. Her nose was red. She laid her cheek on the floor and drifted into sleep. When she woke up, she was completely in the dark. The curtains were apart and the windows were still open. She checked her phone to see if she had any missed calls but nothing. She went out to the study to check if he was back. He wasn't there. Oluhle came up the stairs, jamming to a song she was listening to via airpods. She took an unexpected halt and slowly took them out in concern.

"Mom, are you okay?", she asked as she tried to turn off the music on her phone at the same time. Enhle faked a smile.

"Yeah I'm fine baby. Have you eaten?"

"Your eyes are swollen...", she remarked in

suspicion. She wasn't even trying to hide the fact that she didn't believe her mother's lies.

"Let it go Luhle. Where's your father?"

"So you guys fought?"

Enhle exhaled from impatience

"I'm not gonna talk about my issues with my husband with you baby"

Luhle scoffed before she could answer.

"I last saw him at breakfast. Ngibuya manje min"(I just got back)

Enhle nodded and dragged her feet back to her bedroom. She switched on the light, closed the windows and threw herself in bed. Sphesihle's face was rotating around her mind, till she fell asleep.

...

The sun rays were blinding to her half-asleep eyes when she opened them. She instantly realized that she forgot to close the curtains the last night. She checked her phone and still, nothing. Her irritated self threw it back under her pillow and she clutched onto it, the white pillow. She then grabbed the phone and dialled his number.

"The subscriber you have dialled--"

She cut the automated voicemail and shot out of bed. She took off her clothes and took a very long

hot shower mixed with her own tears. When she finally got a grip, she turned the faucet and the water went off. She grabbed one of the towels to dry herself and ultimately got dressed in just her underwear and his t-shirt. She ignored the knocks she kept hearing at inconsistent intervals on her door. She then took her phone and plugged onto the charger. She took the remote and turned the radio on so it could keep her company as she made the bed. She kept changing the channels to find one where there was less talking and more music. When she tuned in to Metro FM, Tony Braxton's 'Why won't you love me?' was coincidentally playing. She had the urge to keep switching the channels but the inner her felt the song. She put the remote down and began making the bed.

She felt her emotions slowly coming apart and hitting rock bottom. "Tell me whyyyy, why won't you love me the way I need to be loved. I keep trying. Why won't you love me the way I need to be loved?". She lost it and threw the phone, smashing it against the mirror and watched it breaking into a plethora of pieces. The breaking noise rang in her head as she watched the brown

board that used to a proper, full-sized mirror. Tony's voices was one of the noises that competed in her head as she tried to catch her breath.

...

Lwandile and Mxolisi ordered in when they realized that their parents were never going to come back downstairs. Lwandile was in his full set of pyjamas whereas Mxolisi was wearing military green cargo shorts. When the pizza arrived, they had it while watching TV. Lwandile had both his legs on top of Mxo's thighs. Mxo had his one leg raised and placed illegally on the coffee table. Both on their phones and occasionally raising their eyes to catch some scenes of the movie they were watching. Their issues were long behind them.

"It's mother's day tomorrow. Any ideas?", Lwandile asked as he drank his apple juice.

"Flip!!", Mxo exclaimed. Lwandile laughed.

"O lebetse?"(You forgot)

"Completely! Neke ithaa kere goiwa skolong kaosane"(I thought it was a school day tomorrow?), he said while laughing as well.

"Well...?"

"Ay mfethu. Angazi. How about a kitchen takeover?"

"Plus laundry?"

"Hayi lapho uwedwa"(Count me out there). He said and typed on his phone. Lwandile rolled his eyes and took a large bite of his pizza.

Meanwhile on Mxolisi's messenger.

Mxo: Ha ah baby ngeke ngikwazi. Ngiyabuya mina k'sasa😓(I'm struggling. I'm coming back tomorrow)

Ndalo: Lol you'd do that?😂😂

Mxo: It's not just a possibility. It's a fact.

Ndalo: You're serious ain't you?😬

Mxo: Ngiyadlala. Ungakaze upanic😂(Before you panic)

Ndalo: Lol I was gonna block you😂

Mxo: I was gonna turn into your worst nightmare 🧛

Ndalo: How?😂

Mxo: I was gonna walk in your mother's house and demand to see my wife

Ndalo: I was gonna break up with you 😡

Mxo: I'd love to see you try😹

Ndalo: Prince Mxolisi Iscefe Khumalo 🧛(Annoyance)

Mxolisi: If only you knew that you're stuck with me for life. 🙄

Ndalo: Sfefeza😱

Mxo: I love you too😘

He continued chatting to her on his way to his

room. Lwandile was in the kitchen getting a glass of milk for the night.

He asked her to put her phone on silent so he can call her. She agreed and moved to the living room. It was a few minutes past midnight. He had left Nastee Nev's 'Take me all night'(ft. Donald Sheffey) playing on repeat in his room when he went out so it was still playing softly on the background.

"Lerato la pelo yaka", he greeted as he threw himself on his back on the bed. She laughed lightly, trying not to be loud.

"What does that mean?"

"It means, uyisthandwa senhliziyo yami"(You're the love of my life)

"Wow. You should speak sotho more often"

He let out a single breath laughter.

"It's Pedi. Or Tswana baby. Not Sotho. I don't know what they say in Sotho", he corrected with an evident smile in his voice.

"Ah konke kuzwakala kufana la kmina"(They all sound the same to me), she said and they laughed.

"I'll teach you. Udlile?"(Have you eaten?)

"Yeah wena?"

"I have. I miss you cute face angisakhoni"(I'm unable to handle it anymore). Her blushing forced

a laugh through her mouth.

"I miss you too", she lowly said in a very shy tone.

"My mom is up", she alerted as she heard her urinating in the other room.

"Okay. Happy mothers' day baby", Mxo said. She shot out a laugh.

"But I'm not a mother Mxo"

"I can fix that?", he said and she laughed even harder.

Episode 12.

Sjava- Eweni(feat. Mzukulu & Anzo)

Manqoba sat on the bed in one of the rooms in the air BnB he had booked himself to. He sat and studied Sphe's picture thoughtfully on Instagram. He bit his lower lip in deep thought.

"Ukukuthanda kwami ngathi kuzongiholela ekufeni
Angisaboni noma konakala ngiwela eweni
Ukukuthanda kwami ngathi kuzongiholela ekufeni
Angisaboni noma konakala ngiwela eweni
Ngisho abafwethu (mabengibonisa ngawe)

Angibambeki, angikhuzeki
Ngisho ekhaya mabengibonisa ngawe
Angibambeki"

The song played at a moderate volume in the room as his thoughts alternated between the women in his heart. He was trying to negate how he actually felt about Sphe but somehow trying to find ways to get closer to her. He cringed at the remembrance of Enhle thrashing slap at him. It felt like he was reviving the sting and debasement. He didn't know where to direct his anger. To her or himself. He threw the phone on the bed and stood up to go pull the curtains apart. Muzi's call came through and he already knew what it was about.

"Mfa' kaBaba"(My father's son), he answered.

"Bayak'funa ekhaya"(Your wife needs you at home)

"Ngiyazi"(I know), he replied apathetically

"You know how much I hate it maning'faka ey'nkingen zenu. Nje ngoba wazi ukuthi uyak'funa pho uhlaleleni lapho?"(Since you know that she's looking for you why are you sitting over there?), Muzi asked from taxed impatience and Manqoba exhaled.

"There's a lot going on at the moment. U grand

wena?"

"Umayelana noSphe lo lot going on angithi?"(This lot you're speaking of to everything to do with Sphe right?)

"Sort of"

"You're already sleeping with her?"

"No man. Look I'll let you in on everything later. I have to go now"

"Nqoba go home. She really didn't sound good. Sharp, sokhuluma"(We'll talk). Manqoba shortly took his car keys and drove home.

...

Muzi placed the phone back down and admired his wife still captured by deep sleep. He brushed her relaxed hair and combed it with his palm.

"God I love you woman", he whispered and continued feeding his eyes with the sight of her effortless beauty.

Meanwhile downstairs.

"First, we start with breakfast", Lwandile instructs enthusiastically to a dead but walking Mxolisi. He was still very much asleep. He wasn't expecting that Lwa would want the kitchen takeover to start at fresh bird-chirp hours. He dumped his weight on the bar stool and placed both his hands over his

head as Lwa took out a bottle of milk and a carton of a dozen eggs, closing both doors to the fridge with his foot and back.

"What are we even making?", Mxolisi asked with squinted eyes.

"Cinnamon and choc chip cookies for breakfast. She's been craving them", Lwa informed as he bent to scout for more ingredients in the cupboards.

"Baking? As in oven, dough and the works?", Mxo asked anxiously.

"Have you ever fried cookies before?", Lwa sarcastically jabbed at him before he could turn dramatically back to his open cupboard.

"Why not pancakes?"

"There's not much effort there", Lwandile said and pulled out the flower.

"You know what? Let's just go out and get her some cake", Mxo suggested, already on his feet.

"It won't be the same man"

"They're all baked goods?"

"Made by other people?"

"What's the difference? Do you hands come with special ingredients?"

"EFFORT!"

"There's effort in driving from here to the complex?", Mxo defended his case adamantly.

"Stop being such a lazy fxck"

"It's hecatically early for such hard labour Lwandile. I'm jet-lagged"

Mxo complained and Lwa dropped his eyes in disbelief

"Jet-lagged?"

"Don't look at it from a time zone typa view. Take it from distance. Ku kude e Natal mfeth"(KZN is far). They heard their parents laughing from behind them. Everyone in that house was still in the pyjamas except Muzi. He was just in his blue jeans. He was hugging Betso from behind with his chin stabilized on her shoulder.

"What's all this bickering about?", she asked.

"Ah ask your son!", Lwandile exclaimed from minor exasperation and marched up the stairs. Muzi tried to stop him but he was having none of it.

"Umenzan umfowenu kant Mxolisi?"(What is it that you're doing to your brother these days?), Muzi asked, now standing up straight.

"LUTHO! We just had a little disagreement. Manje ngoba uyamazi he exaggerated the whole thing",

Mxo said and followed after Lwa.

"Jaanong oya kae!"(Now where are you going?), Betso asked.

"To put out the fire!", Mxo informed from irritation. A subtle laugh escaped from Muzi's lips.

"This is not funny. I don't like how frequent their fights are these days", Betso let out.

"They'll be fine. Manqoba and I were exactly like this growing up", he assured and kissed her cheek.

"I think this is a surprise went wrong", he remarked from the ingredients he saw on the table.

"And your hooligan of a son ruined it", Betso said and they laughed.

"I've come to realize how sensitive Lwandile is compared to Mxo", Muzi mentions and Betso clears her throat.

"We got lucky. Imagine having two Mxolisis in the same house. One would've had to be given up for adoption", he said and laughed. Betso followed with an awkward laugh and said she needs to get started on breakfast.

"You're doing no such thing. The two rascals actually beat ke to it. I was planning on spoiling you indoors today but I think it's better we just go

out. Just the two of us", he suggested and nibbled on her ear. She moved her face like a content cat as he did this and smiled.

"I'm not feeling like the outdoors today", she gently turned him down.

"There goes my only escape from cooking", he playfully complained.

"I've got it. Don't worry", Betso laughed.

"I told you you're doing no such thing. Happy mother's day mkami. I can never thank you enough for my boys", he said and kissed her lips. She was smiling throughout all this. He then proceeded further into the kitchen to get started.

...

Muzi went all out for lunch. He cooked all his wife's favorite dishes as she sat outside with the boys on camp chairs. He was playing music from his car as they sat around and enjoyed their juice and him alcohol. He was the only one doing ups and downs, going in and out the house to check on his pots that weren't ready yet and chill with his family at the same time. Maxwell's 'Fortunate' one of the songs that were playing from the car as both the boys massaged their mother. Mxolisi was on the feet and Lwandile on her shoulders and

scalp. She was enjoying this attention oozing from every direction.

After he had dished up, he took his and Betso's plate outside and got settled on his chair next to her, throwing off his slides off his feet.

"Hawu. Thina?"(What about us?), The two asked open-mouthed.

Muzi raised his brow and asked,"Are you mothers?".

Betso laughed as her spoon dug in her plate.

"Tjo!", Lwandile said and stood up to go fetch his plate. Mxolisi still had his hands on his waist, watching his father eat without a single care in the world.

"As I was saying baby...", he deliberately said to Betso, ignoring Mxolisi.

"Uh-huh?", Betso played along, trying too hard to keep the laughter tied to the roof of her mouth. Mxolisi clapped once and left. The rents exploded in laughter after he disappeared into the house. They collected themselves when they saw them coming back with their plates. The twins settled down and began digging in, also trying to suppress their laughter.

"Lwandile, your mother tells me--", Muzi says and

Lwandile chokes. Mxolisi turns to look at him with suspicion.

"Are you okay boy?", Muzi asked in concern and Betso tried too hard to reprimand him from ratting himself out through her eyes. Mxolisi lifted the juice glass he had placed in the holder of his chair. Lwandile took it, had a sip and handed it back to him.

"You ayt now?", Mxo asked as he doubtfully extended his hand so he takes it back. Lwandile nodded. His eyes were even teary from all the choking trauma he just went through.

"Yeah I'm fine", he said and kept his eyes on his plate.

"Eating is not athletics. Take your time", Betso said trying to diffuse the atmosphere. Muzi laughed and Mxo finally caught on. He laughed as well to help his mom clear the bad air. His father wanted to speak about the Belgium matter. That's what Betso had told him.

...

Night fell and they began packing up. Or rather the rents gave the kids the job of cleaning up and retired to their bedrooms. The twins didn't mind since they weren't the ones that had cooked.

Lwandile stepped on the bin so it opens for him to get rid of the remnants on the plates including the bones. Mxolisi insisted on doing the dishes all by himself. Lwandile was both impressed and shocked by this gesture from his clone.

"Hm. What do you want?", he asked, suspiciously. A sudden laughter slipped from Mxolisi as he overdosed on the dishwashing liquid into the hot water.

"Hawu. Nothing heban", he said and pulled the long sleeves of his black t-shirt.

"Man just use the dishwasher", Lwandile said "So you've resigned from being an advocate for "effort" ", Mxo said and punctuated in the air with his fingers. Lwandile laughed.

"Suit yourself", he said and opened the fridge to look for a snack.

"Lwa?", Mxolisi calmly called out.

"Hm?"

"Stop being so jumpy around him if you're not ready to tell him yet. He's not stupid", Mxo advised. Lwandile bit his lower lip anxiously.

"What if he disowns me or some shxt?", he asked and looked to see if Muzi wasn't near. Mxo stopped scrubbing the plate he had in hand.

"Then he will have to disown me too"

...

Muzi and Betso had yet another steamed session in the shower. When they were done, he wrapped her with a towel and did the same for his waist. She was drying her hair standing on the mat outside of the shower.

"Wait here...", Muzi said and disappeared into the room. Betso continued with what she was doing mindlessly. He came back with a small velvet box and handed it to her.

She laughed.

"You didn't have to baby. What's this?", she said as she took the box.

"Open it", he promptly. She slowly pulled it open and noticed two diamond stud earrings.

"I love them baby", she asked and smiled in excitement.

"I'm just making up for the one you lost in that changing room", he said and they laughed.

"That was all your fault!", she shot out. He led her out so they could lotion one another in the bedroom. She began complaining how she was not looking forward to work the next day.

"You don't have to go there if you don't want to",

he said and shrugged.

"We have a lot of events lined up this week I have to go"

"Even if I convince you otherwise?", he said and put on his naughty boy smile and approached her. She laughed and ran to the other side of the bed.

"Please give me a break?", she begged and laughed at the same time. He was like a tiger waiting to pounce on prey. He ran after her and she had no where else to go.

"Muzi noo", she was now laughing hysterically as backed her on the bed and got ontop of her to corner her. They were both laughing but hers was more loud and piercing as she tried to get him off of her. He wasn't willing to obey. He pushed her hands above her head and pinned them there with one hand and had the one position her face so he forcefully takes his kiss. Her laughter was now trapped in her cheeks because she had her mouth tightly shut.

[REMOVED]

...

Mxolisi's phone beeped from his pocket as he was packing away the dishes. Lwandile was in the TV room having the time of his life watching anime.

He wiped his hands clean with his shorts and took it out.

Ndalo: I need to get something off my chest before this goes far.

Mxo: Okay?❤️

Ndalo: I know what you expect from me as a girlfriend but I can't give you everything. At least not now. I hope you catch my drift.

Mxo: How did we get here?

Ndalo: I was just saying.

Mxo: You should stop overthinking this. I never demanded anything from you and I'll never force you to do anything you're not comfortable with. Whatever stories you've heard about me, leave them in the bin when you finally take out the trash tonight.

Ndalo: Are you mad?😞

Mxo: No baby. I just hate over-explaining myself. I'm not going to say I don't want sex from you because that will be a blatant lie. However, I am willing to wait. Sthandwasami I'm just here to love you and love you right. That's my priority with you right now. You'll submit yourself eventually.

Ndalo: I wasn't expecting that😞❤️

Mxo: Stop trying to cram me. You're going to fail.

Dismally.

Ndalo: Scefeza 😂

Mxo: Continue calling me that and it'll be the reason why uzodliwa way lot sooner than you expect. 🙄

Another text came through after he pressed 'Send'.

Sne: So you gonn mize me now?

Mxo: Thought I pressed send. Sorry.

Sne: Why am I getting bad and weird vibes from you lately?

Mxo: I'm not the one whose vibes you're supposed to be studying.

Sne: TF?

Mxo: You become clingy when you're single and you know very well that I don't like it. I am not your boyfriend.

Sne: I wanna see if you'll be able to say all that shxt to my face

Mxo: Don't come here Sne. I'm tired. I had a long day. I'll see you tomorrow at school.

[Seen]

...

Manqoba walked into his house and found Enhle having lunch with Evelyn and the kids. Oluhle and

Melo. They greeted him back and Enhle pulled a facade of a smile. A part of her was happy he came home and another wanted to throw the fork she was holding right into his eye. Evelyn pretended not to see shxt. He informed that he's going up to shower. Oluhle was showing Melo a YouTube video. That's what they were concentrating on. He questioned why they were allowed to bring phones to the table but did not pursue the matter even further. Some things are not worth saying, sometimes. The whole atmosphere was pale and tasteless. He paced up the stairs and Enhle wiped her mouth and asked to be excused. She followed him to the bedroom and found him taking off his t-shirt.

"Ubuyaphi?"(Where are you coming from?), she spat out. Manqoba just raised his brow and shot a look that she couldn't read as him being bored or mad.

"I asked you question Manqoba"

"Yindlela yoku khuluma ne ndodayakho leyo?"(Is that how you're supposed to speak to your husband), he asked and dropped the t-shirt on the bed. She scoffed and looked away. He walked towards the shower and she grabbed the t-shirt

and sniffed it. He turned to look at her.

"And then?", he was puzzled. She tapped her foot on the floor numerous times when she didn't find what her nostrils were looking for.

"To put your mind at ease, I wasn't with anybody last night. Stop being so insecure", he said and walked on.

"I'm sorry", she lowly and emotionally apologized. He stopped walking but never turned his face to look at her. When he finally did, he took a few steps towards her.

"What are you sorry for?"

"For disrespecting you"

"You've never respected me Mbalenhle"

"That's not true"

"You know it is. You wanna wear the pants in this union. What you did yesterday officializes this fact"

"No baby that's not true", she begged with tearful eyes and dropped to her knees.

"No get up", he tried to pull her up but she was stubborn. He gave up.

"What happened yesterday--, baby bekuyiphutha ngiyak'cela"(It was a mistake I'm begging you)

He looked away and exhaled. He then pulled his

pants so he could squat down in front of her.

"Thembalami, I love you. So so much. I loved you from the very first moment I saw you. But right now, I regret that moment with everything in me", he went on and she shook her head in disagreement, tears streaming down her face.

"That's the very moment you thought you owned me. It was cute at first but now it's scary. You want to choose the clothes I wear, what I eat, when I drink, when I sleep. I. Am. Not. Your. Child. I've allowed you to get away with a lot of shxt but you insist, you insist on making this relationship hell for me. "

"Baby please! I don't want to control you. Everything I do for you is out of love", she begged and crawled towards him. She reached out with both hands but he held them and clasped them together in his.

"Yesterday was the last time you put your hands on me. I'm not weak or stupid for not putting you in your place. I just don't want to bury you. I still love you. That will never change. But I cannot do this anymore. You are a ticking time bomb", he spoke to her with his eyes dead set on hers.

Episode 13.

Mxolisi's phone rang as he was trying to finish up his assignment. An assignment which took four mountains and half a cliff of convincing from Lwandile for him to get started on.

"Sne?"

"I'm outside"

"It's half past eleven?"

"Just come out before I press this intercom"

Her voice struggled to stay afloat in a pool of tears. He took a deep breath and out.

"Ngiyeza"(I'm coming), he said and slipped his feet into his slides. He threw the phone on the bed, grabbed a hoodie and headed out.

He got into her car and pulled her into a hug.

"What's went wrong?", he asked with his hand at the back of her head. She was sobbing like a fresh widow. She didn't answer. All he could do is offer a shoulder. Literally.

When she finally got a grip on her calm, she pulled back and took out a pocket tissue to wipe her

messed up face.

"Talk to me", he said and leaned back on the passenger seat, waiting for her to speak with her hand in his.

"Did he cheat on you again?", he investigated. She nodded.

"I honestly don't understand why you insist with being with this mongrel. He always does the same shxt. Over and over again. Sne you're a very beautiful girl. Almost every guy at school ukhala ngawe. Move the fxck on you'll find somebody who will love you better"

A smile spread to the corner of her lips and stretched them.

"You really think so?"

"It's not about what I think. It's a fact"

"I'm done with him this time. For good"

"I've heard that before. Not once. Not even twice"

"I mean it. I was really stupid for choosing him over you Mxo"

She confessed.

"The heart wants what it wants. You were my very first heartbreak you know that?", he said and huffed out a laugh.

"You also cheated on me with Judith don't act like

a saint"

"I started dating her after I realized that something was indeed going on between you and Kagiso whereas you thought I didn't know!"

He shot out and she dropped her face.

"But we can still make it work. Can't we?", she tried to take his hand and he pulled it away.

"You can't choose another nxgga over me and expect me to take you back just cause he's treating you like trash? I loved you Sne. You know this because I couldn't hide it, even through my actions"

"Loved? That's past tense", she said wistfully and waited for him to correct her.

"Your understanding of basic grammar is impressive", he said without a drop of remorse. She scoffed in disbelief.

"I can't really say I blame you though. But I do have a question"

"Khuluma ngilalele"(Speak I'm listening)

"Were you using me?", she asked and insisted on making eye contact.

"Using you?"

"Yeah. All the times when you've slept with me?"

He laughed.

"Are you on crack?", he asked sarcastically and looked at her as if waiting for an answer.

"Just answer me, Mxo!"

"After we broke up, was there ever a point where we did it at your house?"

"No. Why are you asking me that?"

"Was there ever a point where I called you wanting to fxck?"

He interrogated and she kept quiet.

"The answers to both these questions is no. Know why? You were always the one to initiate things. The same way you arrived here now when I specifically told you that you shouldn't", he sternly stated and she frowned as the heartbreak gained momentum, signalled by the cold in her chest.

"You're forcing me to hurt you when I don't want to Sne", he went on.

"Cool then. We don't have to... things don't have to go back to how they were initially. We can keep them just the way they were"

"What do you mean?"

"No strings", she suggested desperately.

He folded his upper lip towards his nostrils thoughtfully then released it.

"That's not gonna work"

"Why? It's been working perfectly fine"

"Because you had a boyfriend. The only reason you want us to carry on with this is because you enjoy the privileges of having me as a boyfriend without actually having me as your boyfriend"

"I'll do better this time I promise"

"Oh no don't get it twisted baby girl. I'm just saying that even if we're just fxcking, I can never treat you like trash. I'll still handle you with care and that's what you're addicted to because Kagiso can't give you that. You went for a playa with your eyes wide open and now you want me to help you pick up the pieces?"

"You speak as if the both of yall are different!", she shot out with disgust.

"Yeah well we might be coming from the same factory but we were definitely not cut from the same cloth", he jabbed back.

"Why are you playing hard to get? You're turning me off"

"Whether you're on or uyacisha Sne please get this into your head, we can't be together anymore"

"What has that bxtch fed you Mxolisi?"

He threw his hands in the air, dropped them and exhaled.

"Judith is a basic bxtch compared to me uzobuya and by then I'd have found somebody else"

"Hopefully he treats you right. I have an assignment to finish before I go to bed. Drive safely okay?", he said and pulled her by her neck so he kisses her forehead.

"Mxo...", she lowly called out.

He got out of the car and she did the same. She quickly went round it to go stand in front of him. He inserted his hands into his pockets and waited for her to speak.

"I can't lose you. Not again"

"You made that choice completely by yourself. Now you want somebody to share in on the repercussions?"

She wrapped her arms around his waist and snuggled her slender self into him. He maintained his posture.

"Your dad is gonna come here looking for you like last time and I'm gonna get in trouble with MK. Sne, please, go home I'll see you tomorrow at school"

"You mean you're gonna watch me fxck her up for the second time?"

"You will do no such thing"

"Watch me", she said and walked back to the driver's side.

"It's not her!", he confessed from a place of taxed impatience.

She stopped walking and turned back.

"I knew there was something going on between you and Charlotte"

"It's not her either. Just, give up. I'm done with you. With Judith. Charlotte. Neo and whoever else. Nonke nje. I am done"

"As much as I hate to admit it, anybody else apart from all four that you've mentioned who'd be a downgrade in that school"

He said and he huffed out a laugh.

"Mus you're going to die on the spot once you see her", he said cxckily and the arrogant smile disappeared from her face.

"Who is this girl Mxolisi?!"

"You have issues Sne. Umuhle. Kakhulu futhi. But there'll always be somebody better. Always. You should learn to live with this fact before it sends you to an early grave"

"Okay fine. I'm taking my L then. I don't mind being the side ke"

"You don't get it do you?"

His hands were still in his pockets. She placed her cold hands on both his cheeks and said "Then make me", in a tone she thought will come across as cute and adorable. The tone she always uses to blackmail him emotionally. The tone that comes with a guarantee tag. He put his hands over her hands and placed his forehead on hers. She smiled and he scooped her up bride style and carried her to her drivers seat. She had left it open so he just got there, placed her in car and close the door. He signalled with his head that she should drive. She sucked her teeth and drove off.

...

[The next day]

Manqoba called bab'Sizwe to the royal house to discuss his intentions with Sphehlehle. He explained that he saw a beautiful in the Nkosi garden and that he'd like to go pluck it out to so he can plant it afresh emagcekeniakwa Khumalo. Bab'Sizwe was impressed by how MQ wanted to do things by the book.

"Hayi iskhalo sakho ngisizwile ndodana.

Ngizokhuluma no Bayede ngimuzwe ukuthi uthin yena then sizokwenza njalo"(I've heard your cry. I'll speak to Bayede and hear what he says then we'll

do as per your request)

He then stood up and ironed his grey Brentwood with his palms, put on his hat and left. Manqoba sat thoughtfully on his chair, swinging it sideways lazily in his study, facing away from the door. A call from Tebogo came through and he picked up.

"Tebza"

"Did you resolve that issue?"

"I spoke to the detective that's handling your case. You can come out of hiding now. I just forgot to tell you I have a lot on my plate"

"Dankie skhulu. So, operations? Are we still on?"

"I'm telling you this for the last time--"

"Okay okay. We'll talk", Tebogo jumped in and cut his sentence short. They cut the call and Enhle cleared her throat at the door. In a long orange and red maxi red tied around her neck and a black silky doek on top of her blond weave. The colours accentuated her light skin tone. This made her puffy eyes and red nose almost impossible to hide. She stood against the door frame. Manqoba turned his chair and faced her.

"Was that bab'Sizwe I saw walking out?"

"If it was?"

She asked and he wheeled himself closer to the

desk and pulled the laptop open. She walked in. "What was he doing here?", she grabbed a seat across him.

He shot his brow up and she immediately looked down.

"I'm sorry..."-Enhle. He dropped his eyes back on the screen.

"You're going ahead with this aren't you?", she enquired dreadfully.

"With what?"

"I thought you said you needed my permission to marry that--", she stopped herself. "Sphesihle. I thought you said you needed my permission to marry her?"

"What I need from you is your signature on the divorce papers you're going to receive no later than Friday. Help with me with that and I'll forever be grateful to you", he stated and dropped his eyes back once again to the laptop. Her jaw fell.

"Manqoba!"

"Nge mpama eyodwa nje sufun' idivorce?"(You want a divorce because of a single clap?)

"Are you listening to yourself?", he calmly asked as he typed.

"I'd have forgiven you if tables were turned. Like I

always do", she mumbled and shoved her fists into her armpits.

"Akasa ngideleli lomfazi uhlalisa isdakwa ethunen lika baba"(The disrespect has gone between infinite limits), he thought silently to himself as his own voice rang in his head.

"When have I ever laid a hand on you makaOluhle?", he raised his irritated face.

"You've never but--"

"You want to turn tables Enhle?"

She digested his question and didn't know how to turn answer.

"Let's turn tables then", he stood up and went to close the door and lock it.

"Wenzan' Manqoba?"(What are you doing?), a panicked Enhle asked as she stood up from her chair. He undid his cufflinks and inserted them in his pockets.

"Baby? Baba? Ngiyak'cela..."(I'm begging you) He kept a straight face as he folded the sleeves to his sky blue shirt. He loosened his navy tie and went to close both glass doors leading to the balcony. At this point, she was already crying and rubbing her left hand with the thumb of her right. He approached her and she backed away against

the shiny drilled in mahogany desk. He grabbed her by her neck with his left hand and pulled her towards him.

"I want to show you that impama eyodwa ingawuqeda uphele umendo and ungalinge nje uhayize angithi min zange ngawubanga umsindo?" (...a single slap can put an end to a marriage and don't you dare scream because I never made a sound), he threatened.

"Baby bekuyiphutha ngiyak'cela babakhe"(It was a mistake I'm begging you)

"Lalela ke thembalami, mina ngeke ngikushaye ngempama. Ngizokushaya ngenqindi ngoba you want us to interact man-to-man. You're the man of the house angithi wena? Le ndelelo ewunayo ngizoyikhipha ngenkani namhlanje. Uzoyikhipha ngamakhala uyangizwa baby?"(I won't slap you I'm gonna hit you with a fist. You're going to vomit all the disrespect you're housing today),

"Please let me go", she winced meekly under his grip. He stared into her tearing eyes and unexpectedly raised a boltlike fist but made sure that it got close enough but didn't touch her face. She had already shut her eyes tightly ready to feel her jaw break. He let her go and she swallowed

with difficulty with her hand around her neck. "Get the fxck outta my office!", he barked and she tripped on the chair and held on to the air for balance. She ran out and he dropped his high chest and downed the shot of whiskey he had poured for Bab'Sizwe, which he never touched.

...

Melokuhle got home and changed into his daytime clothes when school was out and ran to his girlfriend's homestead. She wasn't at school and she wasn't taking his calls. He stood at one of the corners knowing very well that he was going to get into trouble should he get caught. He kept calling but she didn't answer. He sent messages but she didn't reply. The possibility of suicide crossed his mind but he immediately shut it down because he felt he wouldn't be able to handle it if it was the case. He contemplated walking in to check on her but he knew that if she was okay, he'd get into deep trouble with both his family and hers. He took 6 steps forward and turned back in frustration. He exhaled and had a "If I die, I die" moment and took nervous strides to the gate. He saw her come out of kneeling by the fire and blowing to fuel it further. There was no one else

outside. He called again but it didn't look like she had the phone on her. She had her palms on the ground with her skirt tucked in her underwear on the sides. Since when do they use ground fire to cook? He questioned his shadow. The fire flamed up and she finally got on her barefeet. She noticed him at the gate and popped her eyes. She gestured with her hands with a stern yet panicked frown on her face that he should go away. He was unsure about what to do. She stomped her foot once to emphasize and he raised his hands in surrender. He gestured with his thumb and pinkie finger that she should call him. She nodded and waved him away still. He left.

On his way home, he came across Ndalo trying to get her wrist back from a boy who was adamant on forcing her to listen to him.

"Awungiyeke!"(Let me go!), she yelled and shook herself so hard the books in her school bag swayed left to right.

"Ndalo nginike nje ithuba elilodwa ngikutshengise ukuthi ngikuthanda ka ngakanani. Mfethu dala ngishelana nawe ngeke uyangiqoma namhlanje!"(Give me a chance to show you how much I love you. I've been after you for the longest

time now you're going to agree to be mine today!) Melokuhle ran closer to the scene and grabbed the suitor by the neck.

"Awumuzwa lomuntu umethi akakufuni? Are you deaf, stubborn or stupid?! Intombi ishelwa kahle ngolwimi not this violence you're subjecting her too"

"Melo mfethu--"

"Fseg!", he shot out and pushed him forward. Ndalo was busy massaging her reddened wrist with a frown on her face.

"Are you okay?", Melo asked, concerned.

"I'll be fine. I'm used to it"

"Used to what Ndalo?"

"Nxn!", she exclaimed.

"So he does this every day?", Melo asked. She nodded.

Mxolisi becomes a madman when triggered. He had better not find out about this. Melokuhle thought to himself.

"I'm sorry about that. Go home. Ngik'bhekile. He's not gonna follow you", Melo said and she gave a bland "Thank you" and paced up to her yard. Melo stood and watched her till she was inside. He then took a corner and headed home as well.

Episode 14.

"The sympathetic division is primarily concerned with emergency situations: to prepare the body almost instantly for stress and expending of energy. It is the primary method for protection the body from danger, and strongly reacts to conditions such as fear, pain, loss of blood, sexual stimulation and any form of stress. What it does is, it immediately prepares the body for a condition to counteract threats, either external or internal. Oftentimes, we refer to it as the so-called 'fight-or-flight' reaction", Mr Kwaramba's voice brushed on Mxolisi's hearing sense as he got lost in how he was going to compile his proposal. It began fading as his own voice took over, brainstorming in his head.

"Muxholisi!", Mr Kwaramba snapped. It was definitely not the first time he was calling him in that minute.

"Sir?!", he raised his head forward and tried to concentrate.

"Are you in class?"

"Yeah definitely!", he lied.

"What is the collective name for the amine hormones responsible for flight-or-flight?"

"Epinephrine. And norepinephrine?", Mxolisi answered with uncertainty.

"I said the COLLECTIVE name for those two?"

"Uhm, adrenaline", he answered and cringed at his guesswork. Mr Kwaramba looked at him doubtfully.

"Correct. However, I need you to come see me in my office after this class"

Mxo nodded and tried his best to concentrate. His phone vibrated in his pocket. He peeked on it sneakily under the desk and read the text.

"Van Starden wants to see the both of us at 2"-
Lwandile.

He read the text and exhaled lightly from irritation. Kwaramba continued drawing his flow diagrams on the white board with a blue marker as Mxo pondered over the obvious reasons why Boerevleis-as they secretly call him, would want to see them.

The siren went off and mayhem arose as each learner couldn't wait to get out of the classroom

apart from the few nerds who always stay behind to either draw something, do homework or read a novel instead of having lunch like normal people. Mxo packed up his books and zipped up his bag. He walked to his locker to go put it away to avoid walking around with it the entire time. Lwandile's smiley face was waiting for him when he pushed the locker door closed. He laughed.

"Stop being a clown", he said and took out his cellphone from the pocket of his grey pants.

"You going in the opposite direction. Lunch is usually that way", Lwandile said.

"Kwarambannoying wants to see me in his office", he informed in a bored tone. Lwandile laughed.

"See why I dropped biology for accounting?"

Mxo thinned his eyes and rolled them behind his lids. Lwandile laughed, told him to call when he's done and hugged him. Mxolisi is not the hugging type to gents but he does it because his brother enjoys them. Charlotte approached and Mxolisi walked away, leaving her with Lwandile.

"Khophano", he called out when Mxo entered his office. The butchering he does to the South African names of the learners can never be undone. The damage is too much.

"Yessir", Mxolisi grabbed a chair and sat in front of him.

"You already know why I called you here I'm guessing?"

Mxo laughed lightly.

"I'm slacking?"

"This is not a laughing matter", the teacher said and Mxo nodded trying to collect his seriousness together.

"You were performing so well when you first arrived here. Now look...", Kwaramba said before throwing the test script in front of Mxo. The 63% circled in red was impossible to be missed. He looked down.

"You're a very smart child Mxho. I've come to realise that you learn and grasp most of the content from by solely listening in class. You did not study for this test. Correct?"

"I did sir I just--"

Kwaramba dropped his eyes suspecting eyes under his glasses and creased his forehead. Mxo looked away.

"Correct", he lowly confessed.

"Imagine how much you would've scored had you studied?", he tried to guide, sincerely. Mxo

nodded.

"I'll try my best not to let you down", he made a completely empty promise.

"Let me not keep you any longer. Enjoy your lunch my boy"

Mxo left after their handshake. He took out his black bucket hat from his pocket after closing the door and wore it. He bumped into the principal and quickly turned around to avoid him, taking the hat off.

"Hey hey hey! Come back. Come back", he said as he bent his index finger back and forth. Mxo clenched his teeth and shut his eyes before turning back in his direction.

"What did I say about hats in the school premises?"

"Sir the sun is out. UV radiation makes my skin itch"

"There's sun screen for that"

"I can't afford it", Mxo said and it took the principal 4 seconds before he crumbled under his serious facade and laughed in defeat. Mxo tried to suppress a laugh and looked away.

"This will be the 5th hat I'm taking from you this year only"

"Then stop taking them because it's pointless"

"Do you want me to call your father again?"

"That won't be necessary"

"Hand it over?"

"But sir--"

"HAND. The. Hat. Over", Mr Rashmid emphasized in his Indian accent. Mxo dropped his chest and placed it on his hand, ready to receive it.

"That hat belongs to my grandmother by the way"

"Your point is?"

"Don't be surprised when it starts growing limbs and talking to you, demanding to be taken back to it's rightful owner", he threatened and Rashmid shot out a laugh. He hit him on the head with the hat and said, "Go to lunch before the siren goes off Mkolisi". Mxolisi laughed and left.

...

Bab'Sizwe and Bayede came back from the Nkosi homestead and found Manqoba conversing and laughing with the guards standing on the pavement outside. He told them to go back to work so he could talk to his elders. They walked over to the garden and each grabbed an outdoor wooden chair.

"Sibuyile ndodana"(we are back son), Bayede

informed. Manqoba fixed his watch and nodded. "Sikhulumile no Nkosi"(We spoken to Mr Nkosi), Sizwe added. They insisted on giving him the feedback in bits and pieces. His facial expression wasn't doing a good job at concealing his impatient irritation. They laughed.

"Sekunjalo. Uvumile umakoti. Kushoda iynxonxo zama lobola manje"(It's done. She agreed. The only thing that's left now is lobola negotiations), Bayede denounced. Manqoba clasped his hands together and smile in gratitude.

"Fanele ngisho ndodana. Ukhethe kahle. Inhlonipho ibuzwa kuye. Futhi asisakhulumi nje ngo buhle"(I must say, you chose well. She's very respectful. Beautiful beyond measure also), Bab'Sizwe remarked and a smile emanated from Manqoba's heart. They let him know of the date for the negotiations and he offered them lunch. They all walked into the house and he asked Nokwanda to make them something to eat. He then paced up the stairs to go fetch his phone. He got into the room and found Enhle applying a sheet mask in front the new mirrow.

"Have you seen my phone anywhere?", he asked. "I don't know where it is", she replied and

continued digging the purple packet to get some more of the serum on the face mask.

He searched all over and eventually found it in between the pillows.

"You can go ahead and marry her", she said and concentrated in beautifying her skin. He stopped walking.

"Angizwa?"(Excuse me?)

She kept quiet and pretended not to have heard anything he'd said.

"Did you hear a word I said yesterday?", Manqoba asked.

She took a moment to exercise her lungs before she could stand up. She fastened her brown gown and went to stand to stand in front of him. She took his hands and he just looked at her in puzzlement.

"Mntungwa. Mbulaz'omnyama. Mzilikazi kaMashobana. Zikode kaMkhatshwa. I have given you my all. I have vowed that only death will keep us apart. I gave up my life to be your wife. I bore children for you. I love you. And I know you love me too. Ngiyaxolisa babakhe. For how I've been treating you. Kodwa ngokukhuli ukuzithoba nokuhlonipha, you broke all my trust when you

cheated on me. You can't expect me to be the same person"(...I'm sorry... with all due respect...)

He scoffed.

"Are you saying that it is my fault that you're abusive?"

"I am not abusive. Hitting you was a mistake that will never happen again. I am just saying that pushed me to limits I also didn't know I had"

"Ine ntsango le mask ne?"(This mask has weed in it right?)

"Let's start afresh. I promise to be a better wife"

"Enhle--"

"You don't love me anymore?"

"That will never happen and you know it. However, two can be madly in love with one another and still not be compatible. We've tried. We've surely tried everything in the book but we still can't get it right. You're controlling Enhle and I've come to realise that it's not something you choose. It's imbedded in you. Meaning it cannot be changed"

"You promised my father that you'll never hurt me"

"That's before I knew that he didn't teach you respect"

"What is it that she has that I don't?"

"Don't ask me that...", he said and tried to leave.

"You made quit my job so I can be your wife now you want to dump me like a sack of rotten potatoes?!"

"I'll continue taking care of you", he calmly said without doubt. She shot a stare at him. He walked towards the door.

"I will destroy you Mangoba. You'll wake up and find all your filthy dealings in every newspaper. Don't test me", she threatened. He stopped walking but kept his face fixed ahead. She wouldn't...

...

Lwandile and Mxolisi walked to Van Staden's office when the siren announced school out.

"Have a seat", he said and pointed them to the chairs across him as he took a sip by the mini coffee station at the corner of his office. He went over to sit as well and pulled the Typek box with scripts for business studies in it. He went straight to theirs since they were arranged in alphabetical order, surname wise. He placed both scripts in front of them. Lwandile had obtained a 100%.

Mxolisi glared at the 48% on top of his script.

"Make me understand. How does this happen?",

Van Staden asked. Lwandile exhaled from exhaustion. Mxolisi bit his upper lip hoping to suck out a sensible answer from there.

"Khopano, whatever phase you're going through, it is going to delay and ruin your life if you allow it to. If you're happy with that it is okay. But my biggest fear is, see we've had cases of identical twins failing on purpose just so the other twin can catch up in order for them to be in the same class and graduate high school at the same time. Not once. Not twice. I don't want the same to happen to you. Both of you have so much potential. Lwandilé is putting in the work, the effort. You're just allowing it to rot and go to waste", he went on a rant and Mxolisi fell on his back on the leather chair.

"The reason we have prelims for every class and not just grade 12 like other schools is that we need to gauge whether you're ready for the final exam. This is important for each and every learner. If your marks do not improve by then, I will be forced to call your mother so we can put you under obligated boarding camp before the final exams", he said and Mxo sat up with his eyebrows tensed.

"Yes. While other learners are on holiday, you're

going to be stuck here in these very premises. You and I both know that your mother won't object to this. Pull up your socks!", he sternly warned. Mxo saw it fit to nod so the operation-get-Kopano-in-line wouldn't be prolonged.

"Good then. Fare well", he said and waited for them to leave.

...

Bongiwe walked into Muzi's office for the scheduled meeting with nothing but her cellphone and a pen in hand. She was texting and walking. He raised his face once and went back to submitting his email. He closed the laptop and grabbed the file they had to have a discussion over.

"Mr K", she greeted before she sat herself on the chair like a lady.

"Bongi", he said and paged through it.

"I want us to discuss the approach you want to take with the campaign for my new concrete wall design", he said and she put her phone down.

"O-kay?"

"I'm seeing a list of well known influencers here but no prominent newspaper in sight"

"I can explain that?"

"I'm listening?"

"Nobody reads newspapers anymore. News travel a lot faster through social media influence"

"I beg to differ. The people who need this type of service still read newspapers. I am one of them. Bongwiwe this not a face cream or a new brand of mascara"

"I know that. I just feel we need to bring in a new serious element to this influencing thing. I am an influencer myself and I already know how I'm going to structure the posts. The briefing will be the same"

"What are you gonna say? "Hi guys MaloCon sent me to take pictures on their new concrete walls to show off their new designs?" ", he asked with a frown and she laughed. Her phone rang, she picked it up and blocked the mic with her palm.

"Just trust me, okay?", she said before placing it on her ear. "Bongwiwe here?"

"Yes this is she?", she answered as panic began embracing her face.

"No no, that can't be correct. No. You said he was getting better and that--"

"Doctor there must be a mistake somewhere he was perfectly fine and recovering this morning! He was back to his usual self all I had to do was fetch

him tonight as per your instruction!", she was now volatile and highly emotional. She clicked her heels and stood up from the chair with her hand on her forehead, still listening on the phone, running out of breath. Her lips were trembling from the shock. Muzi looked at her in severe concern waiting to hear to what the actual problem was although he had already put the puzzle together from the pieces he got.

"Okay. Thank you", she roughly said in a low tone and pursed her lips. The phone dropped to the floor and cracked at impact. Muzi wheeled his chair out of his desk and stood up.

"What's going on?", he asked when he reached her and placed his hand on her shoulder. She sobbed and wiped her nose with her wrist.

"Bongiwe?"

"He's gone", she said and looked up to block the tears from flowing with the assistance of her index fingers.

"Your father? I'm terribly sorry", he said and she shook her head in disbelief and scoffed from shock. She couldn't keep it together. She crumbled and he held her before she could collapse to the floor. He placed her head on his shoulder and she

wailed and wept her sorrow out.

Episode 15.

Muzi pulled Bongiwe towards the couch in his office. He sat her down and she sobbed loudly. He pulled out his pocket square and handed it to her. She took it and wiped her face. In that moment, he trivially remembered where he'd left the handkerchief he was looking for. He thought he'd lost it when it was actually left in her office. Once she got a grip, she stood up and said, "I'm sorry for falling apart like this. I know it's unprofessional", she fixed her skirt.

"It's okay. I know exactly how you feel. I also have a fresh wound remember?", he said and fell on his back on the couch. The face of the late and fallen Chief Nkosenye Khumalo rose from his cherished memories like a phoenix. His father's straight and bright smile encircled his mind. The chief was a man of many smiles but when he did smile, the whole house lit up. The man who taught him

respect as the first lesson from a father. The man who taught him that hardwork makes the character of a man. The same man who taught him that a woman is an egg, and that as a man, you should be careful with it.

"You wouldn't want an egg to break would you", the chief's voice resounded in his head. He last heard these words when he was a teenager but he heard them afresh, clearly like they'd just been said. Bongiwe slowly sat back on the couch when she realized that it wasn't just about her from how lost he was in his own thoughts.

"Mr K?"

"Muzi?!"

"Hm?!", he answered, falling out of the memorial service he was hosting in his brain. "I'm sorry. I'm just... my condolences to you and your family", he added.

"You need to see someone", she mentioned.

"You mean a shrink?", he asked with his forehead furrowed.

"Yes. You've said it yourself, it's a fresh wound but here you are carrying on as if nothing happened. You do it as easily that we've all somehow managed to forgot what you're going through",

she commented, wiping the corner of her eyes to get rid of the tears. Her nose was pink red.

"Life has to go on Bongiwe. Ayiqali ngami lento yokulahlekelwa ngumuntu engimthandayo"(I'm not the first person to lose a loved one), he stated and she kept quiet.

"That was insensitive of me I'm so sorry", he apologized wistfully when he realized that his statement somehow meant that Bongiwe was overreacting.

"It's okay. Let me get back to work", she said and stood up.

"Go home. You're in no state to be thinking about work"

"There's a lot of work to--"

"You'll delegate to your team"

She exhaled from defeat. She placed the pocket square on the couch.

"Let me go get my stuff then"

"Call me if you need anything"

Muzi always makes sure that his employees are taken care of it times of need. Be it being involved in a car accident, falling sick or losing a loved one. He's the boss that everyone loves but would never attempt to play skipping rope on the top of his

head. She gave a halfhearted smile, clicked her heels and left. He stood up and went to grab his desk phone.

"Sawubona, I'm going to need transport for Ms Mdletshe?", he informed one of the company drivers, feeling like Bongiwe is in no state to be driving.

...

Enhle rested her head on Manqoba's head as he played with her head. She was drawing invisible hearts, strings and circles on his chest as she enjoyed his presence. The moment felt so effortless and free-flowing.

"What does this mean?", she softly asked.

"What do you mean?"

"Do I still need to expect to be served with divorce papers 'no later than Friday' ", she asked and he laughed.

"If you pull one of your stunts then yes"

He said and she laughed.

"You shouldn't provoke me hoping that I'll keep quiet", she warmed and they shared a mutual laugh.

"So, I've been thinking baby...", she mentioned as she felt him wrap a few strands of her hair loosely

around his finger.

"About?"

"Therapy", she said.

"You want us to go for counseling?"

"Yeah. I feel like we need it"

"I don't understand the concept of taking your problems to another person for fixing like they're a faulty refrigerator or something"

She knew she was taking a mammoth of a chance.

"Don't just shut it down. Think about it first", she pleaded and kissed his chest.

"Okay ke", he agreed to thinking about it, not the actual therapy.

"I have another request"

"Weeee", he exclaimed and she laughed.

"Ufunani? Imoto?"(What do you want? A car?)

"No baby man. I just--", she got stuck.

"You juuust??"

"Please allow me to go back to work?"

He exhaled slowly.

"I thought sikhulumile ngalo lo ludaba?"(I thought we've already spoken about this?)

"It's necessary that I do. We fight a lot when I have nothing to do"

"I bought you a sewing machine?"

"That's a hobby!"

"You can always change that"

"Baby?!"

"Ha ah Enhle", he disagreed and her head fell back on his chest as she sulked.

...

"I'm at our spot by the rocks. Please come", Melokuhle read the text with a side eye. The phone was placed on the side of the table as he studied with a mechanical pencil in his fist, against the side of his forehead. He quickly took the phone when he realized that it was from Busi. He'd been waiting for her to text him. He didn't bother taking off his school uniform when he came back. He just loosened his tie and threw his blazer and bag on the table, then hit the books. Manqoba always says that he's a combination of his twin brothers. Stubborn and naughty but hardworking and nerdy at heart. He got up from his chair and slid the phone in his pocket. He used the small gate at the back of the house and walked towards the trees guarded by huge rocks. The place is simple yet so refreshing and beautiful. It's like somebody walked around placing the rocks in between the trees purposefully, whereas it's all natural. The breeze

under them gladly and immediately sits on your skin after you've been scotched by the sun.

He got there and found her sitting on one of the smaller rocks, wearing black tracksuits and white sneakers. She zipped up the track top to her chin and pulled the hood over her head. She immediately stood up when he arrived and he separated his arms so she falls into them. She cried so heartbreakingly on his shoulder. The sound of that pierced him deeply. Her tears were like acid dropping on the outer layer of his own heart.

"I'm sorry baby", he begged. She couldn't stop. He pressed her to his neck by the back of her head and allowed her to offload the pain in drops and sobs on his white school shirt.

When she finally calmed down, he placed a kiss on her forehead.

"Talk to me", he whispered sympathetically. She sobbed and wiped her nose with one of the sleeves of her top. A nervous smile escaped her lips.

"You have such beautiful eyes", she said. She's random like that. He huffed out a very brief laugh.

"You tell me everyday. What's going on Cakes?",

his hands were now on her waist.

"I'm not going to stay long. They'll be back soon"

"Are they punishing you or something? Why didn't you come to school?"

She rubbed her fingers and looked up briefly. Her eyes were bloodshot. Her long ashes were wet with some strands sticking together. He pushed the hood off her head and exposed her black short hair, and a fresh new scar on her forehead. His mouth hung open as he felt his heart beginning to race.

"Who did this to you?", he asked and she stared ahead, her eyes moving past him.

"Forget this. I have to go soon. I just needed to see you", she confessed and wrapped her hands around his neck. He never hugged her back. He was waiting for her to explain.

"Busi who did this to you baby?"

"Are you honestly going to waste this moment discussing a scar that won't matter a few days from now? You might not see m--", she abruptly cut herself short. Then deflated her chest so she calms down.

"You might not see me for a while", she said. He exhaled from defeat.

"Please hold me?", she whispered. He stared into her eyes before bending a little so he hugs her tightly and properly.

"Thank you"

"I'd hold you anytime you need me to. I meant it when I said got you"

"I mean for everything. Thank you Melokuhle Makhosonke Khumalo. Thank you for loving me so much that I had no choice but to love myself. For helping me find and see my self worth. I grew up thinking that I was not worthy. That's what my aunt would tell me...", she confessed, still holding onto him. He kept quiet. He always knows when she's not done.

"I lived my whole life on survival. Trying to prove something to them each time. Even the high marks were not enough. High marks I only started getting after you came into my life and showed me that I was not as stupid as I grew up believing. The word was as good as my second name but you came in and changed all of that. You took care of me. In every aspect of the word...", she went on with tears streaming down her face. Melo felt himself getting emotional.

"Uhm...", she sobbed.

"Thank you baby. For all the times you'd wake up at ungodly hours of the morning to answer my calls so I could vent. For all the times you drove out in those hours to come see me when you felt it was too much for me to handle. For accepting this pregnancy with responsibility. I don't regret falling pregnant for you. I'd do it all over again given the chance. You're a man amongst boys uyangizwa?", she said and pulled back on the hug to wipe her tears. He bit his lower lip trying to compose himself.

"What happened this time?", he asked. She laughed nervously.

"They... they said I'm a disgrace. That... my parents did well by dying so they wouldn't be here to spectate the disappointment they gave birth to", she let out. Melo's already cracking heart crashed against his ribs and broke into several pieces. He just stared into her eyes, biting hard on his lower lip. She forced a smile through the pain.

"Let me marry you?", he finally said. She laughed in breaks from disbelief.

"What?", she asked, still laughing and sobbing at the same time.

"Yeah. Let me marry you. You'll come live at home

at with me"

"Melo we're still kids. Still in grade 12. We're too young to be husband and wife"

"There's no such thing. We'll be done with school soon. I was gonna marry you in the future so kyafana. Why delay it when it's gonna happen anyway?", he rambled. Her phone rang. Panic blessed blessed her whole face. She was too scared to even answer. She silenced the call and it stopped ringing. She held the sides of his face and swallowed.

"I love you. Okay? Ngiyak'thanda Makhosonke. Never forget this", she announced, kissed him in a rush and ran off. He tried grabbing her but she was already gone. Something about that moment didn't feel right to him.

...

Mxo picked up the bowl of amasi and left over pap that he had prepared and headed to his room.

Ndalo finally replied to his text, asking her if he could call. She allowed and he dialled her number as he pushed the door to his room.

"Hello", she answered.

"Did I catch a wrong number yin?", he asked and she laughed. She knew exactly what he was on

about.

"Askiies. Hi baby", she shyly said in a low tone.

"That's better. Are you okay?"

"I'm fine. How are you?"

"I'm okay. Busy?"

"I'm cooking. Wenzani wena?"(What are you doing?)

"I have a test to study for and I don't know where to start"

He complained.

"What subject?"

"Physical sciences"

"I'd help you if I was near", she said and Mxo found this adorable.

"It's just a lot of work. I've been piling it up now it's finally here to bit me in the bxtt", he said and she laughed.

"I think I'll just get to that test room and freestyle my way into it"

"That's not a very safe way of doing school", she warned.

"It works for me. I just wanna pass and get the fxck out of there"

"That's not enough", she remarked.

"What do you mean?"

"You don't sound like you like school much"

"You're correct. I really don't"

"I didn't think of you as a brat", she gravely stated in a voice full of unmasked disappointment.

"It's not like that. I just want to do this life thing differently. We can't all be successful via school", she explained, realizing how much her opinion of him means to him.

"There goes my daydream of us going to the same university", she blurted out and planted the idea in his head. It immediately started sprouting. He took a spoonful into his mouth and pulled his laptop open.

"What and where do you want to study?", he asked as he logged onto his Instagram.

"Actuarial sciences at Wits", she informed.

"Sorted then. You'll be the rich wife and I'll be a house husband"

A sudden laughter erupted from her end of the line.

"Is there even such a thing?", she asked, still laughing.

"Ngiyadlala. My dad would castrate me and make biltong out of my nxts", he said and she laughed even harder.

"Ngobani?"(Why?)

"Does it make sense to you? My job is to get you to submit , take care and provide for you", he asked and she smiled to herself.

"Just because you're a man? Psh"

"Wee Ndalo, I am not marrying no feminist mina uyangizwa?"(...do you hear me?), they both laughed.

"I'm not a submissive and subservient type"

"You can be an independent woman and submit at the same time. All I'm saying is, I can't sit at home ngikhamise waiting for you take care of me and the kids"

"Listen to you sounding like a husband", she said and laughed.

"Awungikholwa mengikhi ngizokushada angith"(You don't believe me when I say I'm gonna marry you).

"I'm gonna remind you before I raise your veil to kiss you", he said and those familiar butterflies got violent in her stomach, his partners in crime. His eyes popped at what he was seeing on the screen. He dropped the spoon in the empty bowl and got closer to the screen to see properly. Lwandile was being exposed.

"O serious ngalento yakho neh?, Ndalo said and Mxo didnt answer. He was trying to make sense of the screengrabs on the Insta stories.

"Baby, I'll speak to you later okay. I have to go", he said and cut the call. He pulled the laptop closer to read the screengrabs of a WhatsApp conversation between Lwandile and Quinton. Quinton was pursuing Lwandile. From the screengrabs, their relationship was getting still getting off the ground. Mzwanele somehow got a hold of their conversation and posted the shots.

Mxo ran out of his room to go find Lwandile. He barged into his room and found him covered up sheets, on the phone.

"Mzwanele how could you? You were supposed to be Que's bestfriend?", he said and Mxo grabbed the phone from him.

"Get those screenshots off your page before I fxck you up!", he shot out.

"Don't push me Mzwanele you won't like the outcome. Take those shots down Lwandile will come out when he's ready you inconsiderate punk!"

He looked at the screen with exasperation and realized that Mzwanele had cut the call. He shot

out of the room and Lwandile followed him.

"Where are you going?", Lwandile asked as he followed Mxolisi to their parents' room. He opened the drawers looking for Muzi's gun. He didn't find it. He left them open and rushed to the study.

"Mxolisi please don't do anything stupid. What's done is done"

Mxolisi didn't answer. He tried opening the drawers to the desk but they were all locked.

"Dammit!", he shot out. Lwandile had his hands on his mouth. He knows him. There's nothing he can do once he gets like this. He charged to the safe and tried a few combinations to open it. All failed.

"Nxn!", he exclaimed before running downstairs. Both their parents were still at their respective offices. He grabbed the keys to their car and rushed out. Lwandile saw it fit to call their mother. He even forgot the fact that the news of his sexuality might possibly get to their dad before he could tell him himself.

...

Mxolisi eventually got to Mzwanele's house. The woman who was busy polishing the stoep stood up with difficulty and watched him as he walked

towards her.

"Sawubona ma"

"Yebo sanalwam", he said to a sweating Mxolisi.

"Ukhona uMzwanele?", he asked and Mzwanele came out of the house.

"Ngiyabonga ma", Mxo said and charged towards him before he could hear what the woman had to say to. He grabbed him by his t-shirt and vehemently said, "You thought I was joking?!"

"Mus' ukungibamba kanje Mxolisi angiyena umngani wakho" (Don't manhandle me like I'm your friend)

"Ngithe susa la masimba la uwafake ku Instagram before I knock your teeth out" (I said take down those screenshots...)

"Haibo!! Yehlisani umoya kanti kwenzenjani nkosiyam" (Calm down) the warm said in her soft but panicked voice.

"Take your filthy hands off of me", Mzwanele threatened with his eyes and Mxolisi thinned his at him in a stare. He jerked him in his direction and pushed his away so much that he staggered but he never fell. After gaining his balance, Mzwanele charged towards Mxolisi and sent a punch flying to his face. The woman was now crying, throwing her

hands up and down.

"Vusimuzi!!", she yelled for Mzwanele older brother to come out. Nobody heeded to her call. Mxo touched his mouth with his middle finger when he smelt blood. He raised his face at Mzwanele, who was also standing firm waiting for him to attack. Mxo charged back at him and threw three consecutive punches into his stomach. Mzwanele spat out blood. Mzwanele threw another punch to his neck and the pain ran through very sensitive nerves. When Mxolisi caught his breath, he screamed as he ran towards him to push him to the wall. The collision between Mzwanele and the wall caused his mom to come out. Vusi was evidently not home.

"Myeke!!"(Let him go), she screamed as she dialled on her phone. Mxolisi strangled Mzwanele and punched him at the same time. Mzwanele managed to attack Mxolisi's stomach and Mxolisi intensified the grip on his neck. Mzwanele began popping his eyes as he ran out of breath. The woman got to them and tried to pull them apart. Mxolisi surrendered when her cry pierced his eyes. He let Mzwanele drop down and backed off. The police van parked abruptly at the gate. Mzwanele

was coughing out blood. Only then did Mxolisi feel the burning and throbbing pain on the side of his neck where Mzwanele's fist landed. He placed his hand against his neck. The police greeted and the woman pointed to Mxolisi as she kneeled in front her son. He was still very much alive, just out of breath.

"Mshana, ni lwelani?" (Nephew, why are you fighting?), one of the policemen directed this to Mzwanele.

"Young man, you're under arrest for the assault of Mzwanele Mbele. You have the right to remain silent. Anything you say or do will be used against you in the court of law. You also have a right to a lawyer. If you cannot afford one, the state will provide one for you", the other policeman said as he handcuffed Mxolisi. His jaws were tightened but he didn't protest.

...

Melokuhle's phone rang when he was about to walk out and leave it on the bed. He fixed his watch before turning back to go get it. The screen displayed that Mthokozisi was calling. He shook his head and rejected the call. He called again. Melo got curious and slid his thumb reluctantly across

the screen.

"Yes?"

Silence.

"Did you call to breathe in my ear?"

"She's gone",

"What are you talking about?"

"Busi bro. She overdosed on cyanide", Melo's head began spinning. A sudden cold hit him as his blood froze. His lower lip began trembling as he tried to make sense of it all.

"I'm sorry...", Mtho added to the deafening silence. Melo blinked a couple of times and dumped himself on the bed. With his phone still against his ear.

"Melokuhle?", Mtho called out and Melo threw the phone to his pillow and put his fist against his mouth, shocked beyond description.