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Prologue

Life can be painful, but even more so for a black child. It is so awfully perplexing that we are born into poverty and somehow for some reason the same curses get passed onto our children. Why is that so many family members; more especially parents treat us so badly? Favouritism is a norm in Black families and they just can't seem to hide it. As we grow, we are expected to pay back our parents for doing their duties. We get so entrapped in the so called Black Tax norm, that the first born always gets to care for the younger siblings. At times, no matter how good you are to your parents, you never become the favourite – not even once. Therapy is frowned upon in the black culture yet so many of us bottle things up and only release our victims while we're on our death bed. Once some become ancestors, they become problematic and suddenly want to be a part of your life despite neglecting us while they were on earth.

It is not the pain that we should focus on, but rather the rising thereof. Circumstances differ, but we are all destined for greatness. The tongue can be very vile and can be used as a powerful tool to delay progression in someone else's life, but the key is to rebuke all kinds of curses and pray. I was born into a very dysfunctional family and I only got to realize just how toxic they were until I grew up. Even so, I rose from it all and became the woman I was meant to be. I rose from the timid girl born and bred in Mokopane to the dusty streets of Atteridgeville. My name is Hazel and this is my story.

1

“ The purpose of our lives is to be happy.” — Dalai Lama.

As a young girl born and bred in Mogalakwena in Waterberg, Mokopane which is in Limpopo, life was a little tough. A little could be an understatement, but well, it was what it was. Anyone who knew Limpopo would know that Mokopane consists of 42 villages, Mogalakwena included, which is where I come from. We had a very big yard, which was the norm in Polokwane, even though our house wasn't the fanciest. We grew up using Jojo tanks as a source for water, unlike back in the day when my mother had to go fetch water from the community tap. Being the first born of 8 children, of which two passed on very early in life, I had to assist my mother with raising my siblings.

All in all, we were six; I, Bina, my younger brother, Lesiba, the third born, Matome, the fourth born, Pebetse, then came my younger sister, the fifth born Hunadi and then the last born Malesela. My father died unexpectedly when I was just ten years old, and so, I had to take over the responsibility of helping my mother run the household as the eldest. That included me leaving school and getting a job at the age of 14. A few years later, at 16, I was still doing it. I wasn't happy about it, more especially since I was very intelligent at school, but I had to do

it. It was the norm in black families at the time. It took me a very long time to adjust to the fact that I had left school, watching my friends walk back home from school while I had to sell vegetables around the corner of Mokopane Mall with my youngest siblings right beside me. At first I felt as if life was too unfair, but well, it had to go on eventually. It was too agonizing forcing myself to ignore the stares and glares, and the whispers didn't make it any better. After my father died, we were known by our neighbours as the poor Makwetla family.

Handouts were such a norm, that every one born after the other, would wear the clothes that the elder one outgrew. Withal, my mother was a firm believer in Jesus Christ, along with my grandmother who still lived with us. It was truly exacting growing up because I had to get up early in the morning, prepare Hunadi and Malesela to go sell vegetables with me. Before leaving, I had to assist my grandmother in preparing porridge for the rest of my siblings just before they went to school and off I went afterwards, with Malesela on my back and Hunadi alongside me, with my big vegetable basket on my head. We were taught that “Mosadi o tshwara thipa bogaleng” meaning, no matter how rough it gets

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the woman must always hold the knife with on the sharpest edge.

That saying dug too many graves of young, black women. Too many women stuck around and endured hardships and abuse whereas they could have turned out differently had they been given other choices. I always took a book with me to read, since it could become very quiet outside the Mall, as it was the busiest early in the morning and later in the afternoon. So, it was the usual business for me, as I was busy selling to people early in the morning, and then around 8 am, business was a bit slower, so I carried on reading my latest book. I always headed to the library during weekends to get a new book. I was obsessed with reading, and I mostly enjoyed Science Fiction, so I really wasn't left out much when I had the chance to visit my only friend Selaelo, who lived two houses away from mine. Time passed and I had done the usual chores of looking after my two siblings while selling my vegetables under the scorching sun; I had changed Malesela's diaper twice, and since it was cloth diapers, I had to carefully wrap it away into a plastic bag and wait until I got home to wash it. Hunadi was a bit older, being four years old at the time, she didn't need any nappies.

Before I knew it, it was just after 3pm and since it was a Friday, I knew that a lot of my former classmates were going to pass by the Mall for some ice cream. Some of them of course were there to meet their boyfriends secretively. I had developed a thicker skin ever since I started that job, so I had to block all negativity. Gladys and her friends would make it a point to torture me by coming to buy as many vegetables and fruits as they possibly could, just so they could tell me all about school and how fun it was. Any person who feels the need to destroy your spirit, already sees you as an enemy. My grandmother had her moments, but she knew the Bible very well. She would say; Ecclesiastes 8:6 says; "For there is a time and a way for everything, although man's trouble lies heavy on him."

I swallowed hard as I could see Gladys approaching alongside her skinny friends. Gosh, I was always hoping that I'd one day wipe that smirk off her face.

Gladys: (smiling) “Hallo, Bina! Go reng na, mogwera (How are you, friend)? Long time no see, hey? Ga o so dire tshete ya go lekana gore o boele sekolong, na (Haven't you made enough money yet just so that you could come back to school)?”

Bina: (annoyed) “Hello, Gladys. Nka go thusa (May I help you)?”

Gladys: (laughing) “Bathong (Goodness)! Ashu wa re demela (she is acting funny), guys. Anyway, e re ke reke (let me buy), I know you need the money.”

She and her friends were laughing, but I just kept my cool. I needed the money, yes. She would buy about R100 worth of veggies every Friday, along with her friends. They most probably felt like they were my biggest customers, but deep down we all knew that it was to support their large families as well. They acted as if they were better than I was, but we were actually the same. The only difference between the four of us was that I wasn't attending school any more. They picked up a few items and rushed me like I was some sort of animal.

Gladys: “Phakisa le wena (make it snappy), my word. Tlabe ka shiya ke taxi (The taxi might end up leaving me).”

Bina: “Do you know the verse from Lamentations 3: 25 – 26?”

Gladys: (clicking tongue) “Mxm, ga ka tlela go rerelwa mo (I didn't come to hear you preach). Anyway, tseya (take it) and keep the change. You really could use some.”

They walked away laughing at me, but I kept my cool. I won't lie – it hurt like hell. There were days when I just didn't even want to get out of bed; some days I started questioning God. I mean, are some of us actually supposed to struggle from such an early age?

2

“ Get busy living or get busy dying.” — Stephen King.

I packed my bags along with my basket. I put Malesela on my back once again and I had Hunadi alongside me as I headed to the taxi. I had been doing that for quite some time and the taxi drivers and everyone at the rank already knew me. I had one particular taxi driver, Malome Joel, who would always give me a ride home. I was usually the last one to be dropped off, so he would normally wait for me. He would always save a seat in the front for my siblings and I. You know, Siyaya taxis had a double seat in the front, so it was a lot easier for me to put Hunadi on the seat in between the driver and I, while I had Malesela on top of me. I was very good at Math too, and I didn't need a calculator, so I thought perhaps that was the reason why he didn't mind doing all of that for me. He smiled as I approached and I could tell the rest of the passengers were annoyed, but they knew better than to say anything bad to Malome Joel, because he didn't mind making anyone get off.

Malome Joel: (smiling) “Ao (oh), Bina, Bina. You finally made it.”

Bina: “Askies (apologies), Malome (Uncle). It is a lot harder walking around with two kids.”

Malome Joel: (smiling) “Ska wara (Don't stress), man. You know I don't mind waiting.”

I could tell one of the older ladies right behind me were irritated.

Passenger: (annoyed) “Rena we do mind.”

Malome Joel: (peeved) “Wa bolela (did you say something)? This is my taxi, so if you don't like how I operate, abore gwa (take a hike)!”

She kept quiet instead. By then it was about 4pm. I usually made it to the taxi at 3:30pm, but I got delayed that day. I went in and just kept quiet, while Malome Joel kept asking me questions as usual. Multi-tasking has never been a problem for me. I could listen to him talk the entire trip, while counting the money. The nice thing about him was that he never wanted me

to pay for my trips, so I would save the money for those afternoon rides every single day. I never even told my mother nor my grandmother; I mean they might have ended up getting the wrong impression about him, more especially since they knew him as a family friend, since he was friends with my Uncle.

Malome Joel: "So, tell me about the book you were reading today."

Bina: (excitedly) "Well, it is called The Midnight Library by Matt Haig."

Malome Joel: "Interesting. What is it about?"

Bina: "Well, The Midnight Library is the place where Nora gets to find out. Where, for an hour, a day or a month, she gets to dip into and sample lives where she made different choices, with the ultimate goal of erasing those regrets and finding a life she's comfortable in."

He was so interested as usual and allowed me to delve into the book and explain it all to him. I enjoyed that because no one at home had the time to listen to me talk about novels. I was talking about the book the entire way, while he was listening attentively and also listening to people telling him where they wanted to stop. An hour later, everyone had gotten off the taxi and then there was him and I and my siblings.

Malome Joel: "O tshwere ke tlala (are you hungry)?"

Bina: "Aowa (No)."

Malome Joel: "Bina, you know very well you're hungry. I can hear your stomach growl all the way from my seat."

He was right, I was very hungry, but I didn't want to take advantage of the situation and give him other ideas.

Bina: "Malome Joel, I don't mean to be rude, but I don't want you doing favours for me. People might get the wrong idea about you and I."

Malome Joel: (frowning) “Relax, Bina. I just want to see you o le shap (being okay). I hate seeing you throwing your life away like this when you are so intelligent. I know that you have bright future ahead of you, but you are very brave to take on the role of the provider of the family. Buying you something to eat won't harm anyone. Look at Hilda, she is even sucking her fingers. Let me just buy you food, just this once.”

I was reluctant, to be honest, but I also didn't want to seem rude for rejecting his offer. I mean, he was really nice to me and already I wasn't paying a single dime for all the taxi rides.

Bina: (hesitantly) “Okay.”

He smiled gladly and drove to the nearest Chicken lickin' drive through. He ordered a massive meal, and I felt so horrible.

Bina: “Did you order for yourself as well?”

Malome Joel: “No, this is all for you.”

Bina: (aghast) “Malome Joel, I can't possibly accept this. Ko gae ba tla reng (What will my family say)?”

Malome Joel: “Don't worry, I'll tell them I bought the food. Ska wara (don't you worry).”

I felt a little uncomfortable with the entire idea. It felt as if perhaps Malome Joel saw more than just a 16 year old girl, who happened to be his friend's niece. Perhaps I was just over imagining things, I really needed to stop over-analyzing things, but my mind was not allowing me to stop. We finally made it to my house. I felt so guilty, I didn't even want to touch the food in the taxi. Upon exiting, I wanted to act like I had forgotten the food on the seat, but he reminded me to take the plastic bag.

Bina: “Thank you.”

As I walked out

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my grandmother was right outside removing the laundry from the washing line.

Malome Joel: (shouting) “Dumela, Magogo (granny). Le kae na (how are you)?”

Koko: (smiling) “Hello, Joel. We are fine, how are you?”

Malome Joel: “I am always fine.”

Koko: “Kea bona o hlokometse setlogolo sa ka (I see you are taking good care of my grand child).”

Malome Joel: “Yes, girls her age need to be taken care of really well. Ke mo reketse dijo, o tla le sharela akere (I bought her some food, she will share some with you, okay)?”

Koko: “Oh, dankie, Joel. Ba ko gae ba dumele (greet your family for me).”

Malome Joel: “Oh, I wanted to ask you something. Would it be okay for me to come pick up Bina in the morning? I mean since well winter is approaching, it is not safe for her to travel via train at odd hours of the morning.”

Wow, I wanted to die right there. He just decided to ask my grandmother for permission to pick me up without discussing it with me first. It felt something like he was asking for my hand in marriage or something. I mean the guy was 35, hence I enforced calling him Malome at all times. I had no words, they were casually talking about me as if I didn't exist, or as if I just didn't have any mind of my own.

Koko: “Go siame (It's alright). Banna ba go swana le wena ba hlokega (men like you are needed in this life), Joel.”

Malome Joel: “Alright, ke tla le bona gosasa (I'll see you tomorrow).”

I felt instantly annoyed.

Koko: “Bina, nko o beye ngwana di kobong (please put the baby to bed) and come help me with this laundry.”

My life basically revolved around being the home maker. I had literally just gotten into the house, and already I had to get busy with chores. My brothers had just come back from school and they were not home, which meant that they were most probably outside playing soccer with their friends. I didn't even have it in me to argue or sigh, I just did as I was told. I helped my grandmother with folding the laundry, and straight after that, I had to cook because my brothers heard that I had brought Chicken Lickin' and they finished it way before dinner time, along with my granny. That was a day in my life; and I had to repeat the process daily. I couldn't exactly say that I knew what happiness was, but I could tell that my life didn't have any of it in it because all other kids my age who weren't doing what I was doing were forever smiling. After dinner, my mother had made it home at about 6pm, from doing people's laundry. That is what her day job was. She got cleaned up, along with my brothers who came home at 5, and we had dinner. After that, I had to do the dishes – no questions asked and I still hadn't cleaned up myself. The rest were watching Skeem Saam while I finally had a little bit of time to myself. I went to take a bath

and get into my pajamas. I was about to sleep when my mother called me. Oh, I felt like dying right there.

Mama: “Bina, weh! Come here!”

Bina: “Yes, Mme (mom)?”

Mama: (frowning) “Ke kwa ba re Joel o go reketje Chicken Lickin' (I hear Joel bought you some Chicken Lickin').”

She said that as if I had even the smallest bite when I didn't even eat any.

Bina: “Yes, but my brothers and Koko ate it all.”

Mama: “Ke kwa ba re o tlo go lata mo gosasa (I hear he is going to fetch you tomorrow morning).”

Bina: “Yes.”

Mama: "Okay, le seke la be la nshiya (don't leave me). You guys can drop me off in town. I'll be working for a few clients there tomorrow."

Bina: "Okay."

I rushed to my bed, leaving so confused. I honestly thought she was going to reprimand me or ask me what Joel's intentions were with me, but she was asking me for a lift. I mean, why didn't she ask Joel? I couldn't even thank him for the food properly, as I didn't even have a phone. I counted all the money I had saved so far from the free afternoon rides, and I had saved R350. I made a mental note to get myself a phone. I mean, just because I was basically one of the providers at home, it didn't mean that I didn't deserve nice things. Selaelo had a cellphone, but I couldn't even chat to her during the week because I didn't have one, so I would always wait for Saturday to tell her everything. I worked on Saturdays too, but I would knock off at 1pm. Sundays were church days, so my entire week was pretty much filled come rain, come sunshine. I needed to ask Selaelo what she thought about Joel's intentions. I mean, perhaps I was the one who thought otherwise of him,

but I could never imagine myself dating such an old man. He was too old to even be my brother. I even heard that he was married; although I had never met his wife. I didn't want trouble, all I wanted was to be able to finish my matric some day and possibly go to University. I said my prayers before I went to bed and came across Luke 18:27; "But he said, "What is impossible with men is possible with God." Things seemed really impossible for my family, but I knew that one day my time would come, for as long as I put all my faith in the Lord.

3

“You only live once, but if you do it right, once is enough.” —
Mae West

The following day was just a normal Saturday for me – nothing major. The only good thing about it was that Koko was home on Saturdays, so that meant I could leave Hilda and Masalesa behind and work on my own. It also meant less hours, so I was more than ready to start the day. I got up and heated the water and got ready. I collected all my stock and Mama was already done and waiting for me. The nice part about our house was that every one had their own bedroom – despite us being a little poor. I heard a car bell ring just outside the gate and I knew that was Malome Joel. I mean, he kind of did me a favour when I realized just how dark it was outside. It was almost the end of May month, so that meant winter was fast approaching. My mother seemed a lot more eager than I was to leave.

Mama: “Kuka dilo tseo re tswa (pick up those things so that we can leave).”

She didn't even offer to assist me, but well, I didn't complain. I was just not allowed to. Upon approaching the car, Malome Joel had about two passengers in the back seat. The front seat was saved for me as usual.

Malome Joel: (smiling) “Hello, Bina, Bina. Today o ntletse le moeng (you have brought me a new passenger).”

Mama: “Thobela (Hello), Joel. I am headed to town, so I thought that I could catch your taxi.”

Malome Joel: (smiling) “It is not a problem, Mama. Come sit next to Bina in the front. I always reserve the front seat for her. She is so good at math, she helps me with all my checking.”

I was so nervous, but my mother seemed to enjoy the attention. I just imagined what people would say about me; “Bina is so poor that she dated a taxi driver for money or most probably to feed her entire family”. People already assumed that I had no ambition or that I was just lazy or plain stupid hence I dropped out of school. I stopped explaining myself to

them a long time ago. Mama was about to take out money to pay Malome Joel, but he firmly refused to take her money.

Malome Joel: “Aowa (no), Mama. Your money is not needed. O ska wara (don't you worry).”

Mama: (smiling) “If Bina was a lot older and you weren't married, I'd have made sure you married her instead. My brother never told me you were such a good man, Joel. God bless your soul.”

There she went again, acting like she just had to sell me to Joel or something. They were laughing casually and chatting away. I felt so out of place and I just couldn't wait to get out of there. Mama got off first, thank goodness. When it was my time to get off, I didn't even hesitate.

Malome Joel: “Bina, o chaisa nako mang ke go late (what time do you knock off so that I can come fetch you)?”

Bina: (reluctantly) “At 1pm.”

Malome Joel: "Alright, I'll see you then."

I didn't know what to make of it. I felt so out of place that my mind had wandered around the entire day. One customer came and I gave them the wrong change, simply because I was thinking about the entire situation with Malome Joel. Mama and Koko were already so fond of him. What was the meaning behind it all? I tried not to let it get to me, and before I knew it, 1 o'clock had struck. I looked around and didn't see Malome Joel anywhere, I breathed out a sigh of relief as I packed up. I was about to take a walk hoping I'd find another taxi along the way, when Lo and behold, Malome Joel emerged out of nowhere right next to me.

Malome Joel: (smiling) "Hao (goodness), Bina, Bina, wa ndocha (are you avoiding me)?"

Bina: (nervously) "No, why would I do that?"

Malome Joel: "I told you I'd come fetch you. I never break my promises, bjale (so) why are you trying to walk home?"

Bina: "I just wanted some fresh air, that's all."

Malome Joel: "Get in."

I looked around and there were no passengers in the taxi. I reluctantly got in and sat right at the edge of the passenger door in the front.

Malome Joel: (frowning) "Bina, o shap (are you okay)?"

Bina: (fidgety) "Ja (yes)..."

Malome Joel: "Do I make you uncomfortable?"

I honestly had no idea how to even answer that.

Malome Joel: (frowning) "I get it. This is about the conversation I had with Koko (granny), isn't it? You're thinking

that because I am married, ke batla go go etsa speke saka, neh (I want to make you my side piece, right)?”

I shook my head while looking down.

Malome Joel: “The truth is, Bina, I care about you, that's all. I would never take advantage of a young girl like you. I just have a very soft spot for you. Besides, your uncle would kill me. Don't ever think of me like that, okay?”

I nodded in relief. That was out of the way; so I guess I was wrong. Malome Joel didn't want to make me his concubine or anything like that. I could now be free around him once again. He started the car and drove off. He was the one chatting away for a change that day and as usual, an hour later, I arrived home.

Bina: (smiling) “Dankie, Malome Joel. O nthositse (You have helped me a lot).”

I was about to get off, but he stopped me.

Malome Joel: "Wait. Can I have your number? I mean I just want to contact you and have your number in case you have an emergency or something."

I felt so embarrassed.

Bina: (discomposed) "I don't have a phone."

Malome Joel: "Okay, no problem. I'll see you on Monday."

Bina: (faint smile) "Sharp."

I got into the house and found Koko had already made food for my siblings. I wasted no time; as I put my basket down and freshened up, then I left the house to go see my friend Selaelo before I was given another chore to do. I found her mother outside, sipping wine in a mug. She always did that because apparently her husband hated seeing her drink.

Bina: (smiling) “Thobela, Mma (Hello, Ma). Le kae na (How are you)?”

Selaelo's Mom: (smiling) “Hi, Bina. Re gona ra lena (I'm alright, thanks, and you)?”

Bina: “I'm okay. Is my friend home?”

Selaelo's Mom: “Yes, she is. You can go in.”

I was about to enter, when she stopped me.

Selaelo's Mom: “Bina, ke fela ke go rapedisa, ngwana mma (I'm praying for you, my dear). You have the entire world on your shoulders at your age. I wish for you to just get your matric one day.”

She just always had a way of being randomly deep. I smiled faintly, I mean if only she knew that was my dream as well. I knocked and entered the house. The family knew me, so I wasn't a stranger. Selaelo was the only child, yet there were

rumours about her father having other children outside of marriage, yet the mother still stayed. I could never understand why, but I was most probably too young to understand other people's problems. I had problems of my own. She was a teacher, while the husband was a mine worker, so he would hardly be home, so it was always her and her mother. They were so close, and I just envied that relationship, because my mother and grandmother were just never transparent. I couldn't ever recall a conversation where they had prepared me for life – ever. So, how was I to even start a conversation about them with Malome Joel and what they actually thought about him? I mean I once even tried to engage in a meaningful conversation with my grandmother about a book I once read, *Things Fall Apart* by Chinue Achebe. I mean, that book really spoke to me and I was only 14 at the time. I could honestly relate to it, but as usual, she rendered it rubbish and told me that reading would not feed us – yet my brothers were afforded the opportunity to go to school. I wondered if Hilda would be expected to handle the household like me one day or if she would be able to go to school. My mother's siblings were also like that; she being the first born herself, had to go work so that she could look after her own siblings, and they managed to go to school. My mother never went back to get her matric, while her siblings had nice life problems. They were all educated to some extent, while she wasn't.

Eight children later, they treat her like trash, while my grandmother didn't say anything to reprimand them. They hardly helped us with any food or money, yet my mother sacrificed her entire life for them to be where they were. My cousins were all well off and had nice clothes, and I never liked it when they came to visit for the holidays. They were just condescending and they would always flash their gadgets and nice clothes in our faces. They hated the fact that I was rather intelligent, so they would always talk about school and going to University soon just to spite me. Anyway, I found Selaelo on her bed, browsing through a magazine. She was excited to see me as we hardly ever got the chance to even bond. She was literally my only friend, and she never judged me whatsoever.

Selaelo: (excitedly) “Mogwera (friend)! Kgale ke sa go bone (I haven't seen you in a while), man!”

She gave me a warm hug.

Selaelo: “How are you?”

Bina: "I've had better days, wena (you)?"

Selaelo: "Ke shap (I'm okay). What is wrong?"

Bina: (sigh) "Ag, life fela (just life), chomi (friend). Tell me about you. How was school this week and what did I miss?"

Selaelo: "Ag, school is school, man. M'am Mashaba says she misses you. She is hoping that you come back to school one day."

Bina: "Ja, I also miss school as well."

Selaelo: "What about night school, mogwera (friend)? I mean, you could always attend evening classes."

If only she knew just how tired I got after each day. It wasn't easy.

Bina: "Maybe in a year or so. I mean, I'm turning 17 soon, and once I turn 19, Lesiba and Matome would be in University, giving me some time to bounce back. They are a year apart but you know they started school at the same time."

Selaelo: "Hmm, I still hope you consider it one day."

Bina: "Ja. Anyway, I wanted to talk to you about something."

Selaelo: "Yes?"

Bina: (sigh) "Eish (oh)

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well, I don't know if I am overreacting or what."

Selaelo: "Keng mogwera (what is it, friend)? You're scaring me."

Bina: “No, man. It's just that, Malome Joel is awfully nice to me nowadays. I mean, he has always been nice, but now he is just being extra, you know what I mean?”

Selaelo: (frowning) “Did he do something to you?”

Bina: “No, well, not really. I mean, he waits for me every day after I am done at the mall and he even saves a seat for me in his taxi mo pele (in the front). He bought me Chicken Lickin' just the other day, and he even asked Koko for permission to fetch me in the morning from now on. I was so uncomfortable and he must have noticed because he said to me that just because he is married, does not mean that he wants me as his side piece. I don't know if I should be worried or not.”

Selaelo: “Hayi (No), friend. I heard a few stories about him. I mean, word out there is that Joel is into young girls. You do know that his wife can't bear children, right?”

I had no idea.

Bina: "Aowa (No)..."

Selaelo: "He is a good guy in the eyes of everyone in the community, hence your family also like him. I mean, he just flashes money and everyone adores him. Just make sure he doesn't cross the line with you. I want to see you prosper and leave bitches like Gladys speechless. I don't want you to be another statistic."

She was right, I just had to be careful. She didn't elaborate on the entire story about Malome Joel and younger girls, but I guess it was also a rumour she heard.

Bina: "I hear you, chomi (friend)."

Selaelo: "Good, now tell me what book you have been reading today."

I smiled as I told her about the book I had read that week, and we chatted away. At about 5pm, I went back home and did all my chores. I went to bed and it was an end to just another day

in the life of Bina Makwetla. The following day, was Church day. We were not going to be fed Sunday lunch if we decided to miss church. That was the rule in my grandmother's house, so we just had to do it – whether we liked it or not. We got up early and I had to bath Masalesa and Hunadi, while Mama helped the rest. Lesiba, Matome and Pebetse were teenagers, so they could do pretty much everything for themselves. My grandmother only helped herself as usual. Whenever my mother used to ask her why she didn't assist her, she would tell her that she had her fair share in raising her own children, and that she didn't send my mother to go and have so many children, yet when a woman didn't have a lot of children, they were ridiculed. So, my mother stopped asking my grandmother for any assistance. She only helped whenever she felt like it. And so, we were ready and good to go after breakfast. The Makwetla family were on their way to church. We were about to walk as usual, and just then Malome Joel was approaching us. He was becoming a bit of a nuisance if you had asked me.

Malome Joel: (smiling) “Thobela ba ga Makwetla (hello, the Makwetla family). A na le siame (are you okay)? My wife and I are on our way to church, so I was hoping to give you a lift as well since we're all headed to the same place.”

Thank goodness he wasn't alone. It was the very first time I got to be so close to the wife. She was so beautiful, a little dark skinned, but she looked like a model. She was a bit tall and had the most beautiful skin I had ever come across. I was very light – almost pale like my mother, yet one could never really see the beauty of my skin since I was always working in the sun.

Koko: (smiling) “Rea leboga (thank you), Joel.”

They wasted no time and got in, and Malome Joel was smiling at me as usual. I ignored that, I didn't want his wife to have her own ideas about me. I couldn't even get what Selaelo said to me about him being into younger girls out of my mind. From then onwards, I noticed the strangest things about him and every offer would make me feel as if indeed it was true and that I was next on the list.

Malome Joel: “Koko (granny), Mma (mama), le sa mo gopola mogatshaka Portia, akere (you still remember my wife, Portia, right)?”

Mama: (smiling) “Ee (yes), re ka mo lebala bjang Mma sebotsana (how can we forget such a pretty face)?”

Portia smiled and greeted us all. She was so sweet; that made me wonder why on earth they didn't have children. I didn't want to ask, it was just inappropriate.

Portia: (smiling) “Mma (mom), your children are so beautiful. Indeed you were blessed with a big family. Some of us wish we could just have one. I'd truly be grateful.”

Koko: “Ah, go no swana (it's all the same). Go thusa eng (What does it help) having so many children but no money?”

My grandmother just had a tendency of shaming my mother – even in the midst of people. She also loved the bottle, so I knew she had probably drank one or two before we left.

Portia: “Aowa (No), Koko, children are a blessing from God. God would never give you children you can't take care of. Am I right, Joel?”

Malome Joel: (smiling) “Yes, my love. You are absolutely right.”

Koko just clicked her tongue, leaving my mother embarrassed. I felt horrible for her, I just wanted to dig a hole and just stay in it. Portia was very nice, she made conversation with us while Mama just remained quiet. We were finally at church and just when I thought we would dodge Malome Joel and his wife, Portia, they followed us and sat right next to us. Portia really seemed drawn to children, so she put Masalesa on her lap and had Hunadi right next to her. Malome Joel wasn't bothered, he also seemed to be going to church, just because his wife made it a requirement in their marriage. Other than that, he wasn't fazed and looked absolutely bored. The choir started to sing and they usually took about thirty minutes of our time. Church was nice, but it was a bit of a chore because it would last quite some time – from 9am until 1pm, from there we were forced to make small talk with other members of the congregation. Koko was right next to me, and she took a piece of bubblegum to ease the smell of alcohol from her breath. Thirty minutes later, the pastor started with his sermon.

Moruti: “Bagaetso (My people), today is a very special day just like any other. It is special not because of any occasion, but because we are here and alive. That is reason enough to celebrate.”

Congregation: “Amen.”

Moruti: “I'd like to take a moment and talk to you all about generational curses. A lot of us know of it, but how many of us are actually doing something about it? And please, don't get me wrong; I am not talking about those curses you have to go to a sangoma or prophet to heal and get rid of, but I am talking about the power of the tongue as well as the power to destroy one's soul. Many of you are not even aware how much power you hold within you. Proverbs 18:21 says; “Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruits.”

How many of you can actually raise your hands and say that no one in your family has ever told you something so hurtful, that til today it is so hard to forget, and possibly even forgive? Mothers, how many of you can actually tell me right here, right now that you have never cursed your own

children? A lot of you, curse your children, more especially even before you die. Those who enjoy saying; “A ka se lokelwe ke selo santse ke phela (Nothing in his / her life will ever come right for as long as I live). Le direla eng sona seo (Why do such a thing)? Then you wonder, why so many of you are swarming in poverty, it is because you are consumed with so much hatred. If your fellow sibling does not want to give you money, you say; “Re tla bona o tla fella kae (we will see where they end up). You even go as far as passing on that horrible tendency unto your children's children. Pelo e mpe ga e nyakege, bagaeso (an evil heart is unwanted, my people).”

Congregation: “Amen.”

They were acting like they were listening, but I knew that a lot of them were just not bothered. They weren't ready to go on a journey of being humble and nice to their children any time soon.

Moruti: “Proverbs 15:1 says; “A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.” Why do you think that a lot of your children don't get along? Why do you think that a lot of them don't even bother visiting you or even sending you any

money? A lot of you hardly even see some of your grandchildren – it is because of your tongues! Leleme (the tongue)!”

Congregation: “Yes!”

Moruti: “Now, tell me; do you think that a lot of you are where you are right now because God doesn't love you? Because God favours those who have cursed you?! No! I say no! Matthew 12: 36 – 37 says; “I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.” I say to you today, bagaeso (my people), guard your tongues and watch what you say. A lot of people today are suffering because they struggle to get past their parents' vile and atrocious words! Proverbs 12:18 says; “There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.” Now, you cannot tell me that you don't know how to fix anything you have done wrong! Bagaeso (my people), the same way God forgives us is the same way he encourages us to forgive and ask for forgiveness. How will you inherit the kingdom of God if you do not want to soften your heart? Le re le batswadi ba ba right (you claim to be good parents), with good parenting skills yet you push your children

straight into depression! Curses are not the end of you! For God plans everything and when He says yes, nobody can say no! So many have bewitched and killed family because they were even more successful than them or their own children! I say unto you – you can defeat any curse! Lamentations 3: 25 – 26 says; “The Lord is good to those who wait for him, to the soul who seeks him. It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord.”

I felt chills down my spine because it felt as if Moruti (pastor) was talking straight to me. I had just read that verse two days prior.

Moruti: “Now, when you leave this church today, leave with a different mindset. No one changes overnight, but put the past in the past and make sure that you change your ways and live a life God intended for you. Money is not everything, but your actions as a parent can either scar or build your children.”

4

“Many of life’s failures are people who did not realize how close they were to success when they gave up.”– Thomas A. Edison

Church gave me serious goosebumps. I was not really in the mood for it, really, but it brought a lot of calmness to my soul. Pastor really spoke to me. Church was over, and everyone was hungry, but we just had to do the usual nonsense of making small talk with neighbours. Portia was so nice, she held Masalesa the entire sermon and ensured that he was covered. He didn't become restless once nor did he even cry. She really had a natural hack for children, so she walked out carrying Masalesa with along with Hunadi by her side. It was most probably hard for them to conceive, but God always listens. His timing is not ours. We walked out and I chose to wait in the car along with Portia and the children while Malome Joel chose to take a smoke right outside the taxi, while Mama and Koko were catching up with some of our neighbours. Portia was so nice, she even bought some snacks for us while we were waiting. After yet another thirty minutes, they came to the taxi and Malome Joel started the car and drove off. Just before he stopped at the gate, Koko invited them over for Sunday lunch. I had no idea where she even thought we got

the money to host so many people, I mean the grant money that Mama got for us plus Koko's pension money was sustaining us all. My grandmother didn't work; I mean her other children sent her money but she never bothered giving us a dime. I could have been far in life by then and actually gone back to school, but instead, I had to suffer for my mother's choices – according to her.

Koko: “Joel, why don't you and Portia stay over for Sunday Lunch?”

Portia: “Aowa (No), Koko (granny), we don't want to impose.”

Koko: “Nonsense, impose ya somang (for what)? You guys are always welcome. E tlang (come in).”

Well, they couldn't say no even if they wanted to. She would have probably told them that it would be wasteful to make Sunday Lunch for just the two of them since they had no children. They went in and I was about to start cooking as always, when Koko started again.

Koko: “Bina, take this and go buy us some drinks.”

She took out a heap of money from her breasts, leaving me stunned. She always said she never had money – yet she had a number of notes stacked up for alcohol?! And as for us, she had included Joel and Portia in it as well.

Malome Joel: “Koko, that is perfectly fine, we can buy our own.”

Koko: “Nonsense, you are my guests. Portia, o nwa eng (what do you drink)?”

Poor Portia, she couldn't even refuse free alcohol practically being shuffed down her throat.

Portia: (shyly) “Wine e tla ba shap, Mma (Wine should do, Ma).”

Koko: “E tla wena, o senya nako (Come, you're wasting time).”

She handed me the money and I counted it with a knot in my stomach. I could even get a glimpse of my mother and she was less than impressed.

Bina: “Ke reke eng ka tshalete e kana, Koko (What must I buy with so much money, granny)?”

Koko: “Nna wa tseba ke nwa eng (you know what I drink), Joel, o nwa eng (what are you going to drink)?”

Malome Joel: “Aowa, nna Heineken e tla ntokela (No, Heineken should suffice for me).”

Koko: “Reka wine (buy wine), with the rest of the change, buy an equal amount of Heineken and Castle Lite Quartz.”

I felt so much anger creep up within me. I mean just a few hours ago she was chanting in church as if the pastor was speaking to her and yet there she was, giving me money to buy alcohol with. I just kept quiet because should I have started

complaining, I was going to be reminded that we were living in her house and that my father should have built us an appropriate house just before he died, when she knew very well that his family chased Mama out of the house soon after his burial. I went to the back and took the bottles I needed. They were about twenty, I mean that meant she and Joel were going to drink ten bottles each. So much greed – it was insane. She didn't even offer to buy the rest of us juice or cold drink at least. That was just how evil she could be. I took the paper bags filled with all the empties, when Malome Joel offered to go with me.

Malome Joel: “Let me go with you.”

Koko: “O tla ba shap, oo (That one will be fine). I always send her there.”

Mama Joel: “Yes, but the car is here, Mma. Let me rather help her carry.”

Koko: “Okay.”

He smiled as he took one of the bags from me without even needing to ask. I just walked alongside him in silence.

Malome Joel: "Is your grandmother always like this?"

Bina: "I don't know what you mean."

Malome Joel: "Does she always offer to buy visitors drinks?"

Bina: (chuckling) "No, it is just you."

Malome Joel: "Okay."

We made it and bought what she had sent me to buy, and Malome Joel bought four bottles of Cold drink.

Bina: (frowning) "Who are you buying those for?"

Malome Joel: “Did you honestly think we could drink while the rest of you don't?”

Bina: “No, Koko will think I used her money to buy them.”

Malome Joel: “Don't worry, I'll sort it out.”

I just let him be. We walked back to the house and Mama was halfway with the cooking. I had to help her; Sunday cooking was always a feast. I saw the pain in her eyes but she was so good at masking it – most probably for the sake of her children. I helped her chop the remainder of the vegetables set for Sunday Lunch as she was fighting the tears back. She wasn't really a communicator, so I never bothered to ask her things. We cooked and once we were done, we dished out for everyone. Only then I actually realized that my mother also never really had time to rest. She was always tired and overworked, yet she just kept going. She never said anything to her siblings whenever they disrespected her or looked down on her. She just kept going; I didn't understand what her narrative was or if she was just going with the flow of being a “strong, black woman”. By the time food was being served, Koko's voice had reached new heights; she was getting even more tipsy

while Joel was also rather all right. Portia on the other hand looked as if she was just taking small sips of that wine. We were all forced to eat outside, like a family – which was something we never really did. My mother was quiet the entire time, while we ate. I was pondering my mind the entire time, trying to figure out what was going on in hers. After the lunch, it was time to do the dishes. I usually did them just to let my mother rest, but she decided to help me. I figured I'd get her to start talking to me some how and that perhaps that Sunday's sermon got through to her.

Bina: (anxiously) “Mama, can I ask you something?”

Mama: “Of course, my child. What is it?”

Mama: “What happened to you? I mean you used to be such a big dreamer and you wanted to be a Nurse one day. Then what happened?”

I was a bit worried because we never really had deep conversations. I didn't want to upset her or cross the line.

Mama: “Okay, let's finish washing the dishes and I'll tell you all about it afterwards. Is that fine?”

For the first time in years, my mother actually had a conversation with me. She was talking to me and she had given me hope about actually trying to be open with me. I was too excited. It was a huge milestone for me.

Bina: “That's fine.”

We finished washing the dishes and I was so afraid of pushing her, but she was the one leading me.

Mama: “Ga re bethe stroll (Let's take a stroll).”

We left Mama, Joel and Portia outside while they were still drinking, while Portia was so in love with Malesela. Hunadi could also not stay away from her. Mama told Koko that she was coming back

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but she was too drunk to even hear her. As we walked out of the yard, she took my hand in hers. She was never someone affectionate, so that made me really nervous. I could feel my entire body shaking and I just wanted to cry, but I kept it together. I had always felt as if my mother was just trying to hold it together, by burying her emotions deep within her. After about five minutes of just walking hand in hand, Mama started talking.

Mama: “I know what you're thinking. You're thinking that I am such a useless failure who had no ambition, who decided to have all these children, and to make matters worse, I added you to my misery. I made you work for us instead of going to school and getting an education.”

That was quite a powerful mouthful from my mother. We hardly even spoke at all – ever. I was happy.

Mama: “Do you know why your father and I named you Bina? It is because we just wanted you to continue making us happy. Bina means to dance, you made us dance ever since we found out that I was pregnant ka wena (with you). Your father loved music so much, if you can remember. Every Sunday we

used to dance to his favourite music as a couple and as a family. His children – you; meant everything to him. You see, I grew up similarly to the way you're grown up right now. I tried by all means to ensure that you never fall into the same trap I fell in, but life just had other plans. When I found my husband, I ensured that I'd never come back here, but he died. There is a lot you don't know, Bina, and some I just can't tell you right now. I might tell you some day, if I ever get the chance to.”

I had no idea what she meant by that because she had many years to live. She was only 40.

Mama: “I was young and ambitious like you; I too was very good at Mathematics. My dream was to be a Nurse, yes, but well, my father also died unexpectedly like yours and I was heartbroken. My mother didn't have a job – no income and my siblings were also still very young. So, I had to go work; just like you are doing. I made a promise to myself that I'd never let you fall into that trap ever. Well, I met your father and he took really good care of us. He built that house for us, we spoke about it and we had a big family out of choice. Everything was in place; he had a really good job and I didn't have to work at all. He even left me a life cover and his pension fund for all of you. We were sorted in case anything happened to him. We

came home for Salome's birthday lunch, and it was okay. Once we got home, your father started falling ill.”

Salome was my mother's younger sister.

Mama: “He started having a fever and vomiting. I wanted to take him to the hospital, but he refused. He promised me he would go to the doctor the following day if he wasn't getting any better. Well, that was when he didn't make it. Instead of getting better, he got worse and passed on.”

The tears were slowly falling down her face; I could tell it had been years of agony she had buried deep beneath her soul. She continued while I listened attentively.

Mama: “A few days before the funeral, I had a dream about him. He told me what had happened and he revealed the responsible culprit to me. I vowed to protect you along with your siblings, but his family threatened to burn me down along with the house he had built for us if I didn't leave. You know just how cruel people can be. I went to his workplace to claim for his pension, but for some reason, they told me he changed

his beneficiaries to his sisters just before he died. I didn't understand it at all, but I had to just pack my bags and leave with just the few clothes I had of you. Once I returned home, it was never the same. My own mother treated me like I was an animal. I had to surrender all of your grant money to her and she forced me to get a job. Do you want to know what she said the night I appeared on her doorstep?"

I swallowed hard.

Mama: "She said, "O nagana gore wena le di rathane tsa gago le tlo ja eng (What do you think you and your brats are going to eat)? Ke ge o ka ema ema ka maoto jwale ka mosadi o nyaka moshomo (It is time for you to get up on your own two feet and look for a job).I cried the entire night that night and I vowed to never cry ever again. My siblings treated me like a worthless piece of shit. None of them offered to help me out until I managed to get on my own two feet. Salome managed to go to College and become a Nurse, just like Celia, while your Uncle Frans tried his best to help me whenever he could. He got lucky and became a business man, so he is into tenders. They all became successful; I don't want to take the credit for it all, but I feel that I don't deserve to be treated like this, for someone who ensured that they could go to school. You know,

I remember I had no money to buy you all Christmas clothes, and I asked Celia for some money just so that le kgone go swana le bana ba bangwe (you could be like other children). Hehe, she just told me that she was not the one who told me to go and have all those children and hung up the phone. I have been praying to God for a breakthrough, but I am just tired, my child. If only you knew what I am going through, you would just break down. Each day is just a struggle, I can deal with all the stares, whispers and insults, but leaving you and your siblings behind all alone in this cruel world, just worries me. It will break me.”

Mama was speaking to me as if she was saying goodbye. I didn't understand. That actually made me even more worried, so much that I was also in tears.

Bina: “Mama, you are not going to leave us. Lesiba and Matome will go to University and help us out. I will then be able to get my life back on track. They will help us out; I am sure of it.”

Mama: “Bina, ngwana wa ka (my child), don't ever think you know someone. Don't ever put all your hope on

people. People will show you flames; they will turn on you like you are some kind of villain and you never even did anything for them. I have tried to do my best for you, but I have failed you, ngwanaka (my child). Just promise me one thing.”

Bina: “Anything.”

Mama: “Promise me that should you get the opportunity to improve your life at all costs, you will take it. You will learn to choose you for the sake of your brothers and sister and that you will grab it with both hands.”

Bina: (crying) “Okay, I promise. But, Mama, you will still be here to see me succeed one day, won't you?”

Mama: (crying) “Only God knows, my baby. Only God knows. I am so proud of the person you become. I act like I don't notice whenever you are reading your books, but I do. I just feel a pang of guilt whenever I see you do that because I know you can do much better at school. You are smart and God has your back. Don't make the same mistakes I made. Try to be there for your siblings, but you are not solely responsible for

them. They too need to find their own selves. Don't ever sacrifice your own life for them – ever. God will see them through. Le wena o motho (you are also human). I have already forced you to take away so much of your own life; your own future. I can't let you sacrifice even more.”

Bina: “Okay, Mama but promise me that you'll be there. Promise me.”

She hesitated for a moment.

Mama: (crying) “I promise.”

God never promised an easy life, but he promised us a fulfilling life. For Jeremiah 29:11 says; “For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.”

5

“If life were predictable it would cease to be life, and be without flavour.” – Eleanor Roosevelt

Two months later...

Ever since the conversation I had with my mother, life was pretty good. We made it a point to have a chat even if just for thirty minutes before bed time. Monday was her day off, so she would go to town. I had no idea where she went to, but she would come back at about 4pm every Monday, often exhausted, but I never questioned her. Koko was still the usual, she drank each and every day, and I still had to get up and go to the Mall to sell along with my siblings. Since it was winter, and I had enough money to save up because I didn't need to pay for Joel's taxi rides, I offered to pay Koko R100 per week to stay with Masalesa and Hunadi, while I went to sell at the Mall. Of course, she was delighted for the extra money – despite her cheating our mother out of our grant money. Joel was still himself, he would pick me up in the morning and drop me off in the afternoon without fail. I actually enjoyed it and felt so safe around him. I was so excited because I was turning 17, on the 31st of July. My birthday was always an occasion when my

father was alive, but my mother always tried to ensure that our birthdays were special, by simply buying a cake and a few snacks. She never wanted me to work on my birthday – no matter what. It was my day – no exceptions. She always woke me up along with my siblings singing happy birthday, but that day, I was oddly surprised when she didn't make it to my room. It was 6am and still, there was no sign of my mother. I was about to leave my bedroom, when I heard the door open. I was excited, but my excitement soon turned into disappointment when it was just my siblings.

Lesiba: (shouting) “Happy Birthday, sesi (sister)!”

Bina: (faint smile) “Thank you, but where is Mama?”

Matome: “O ka di kobong (She is in bed). She asked us to come and sing for you since she isn't feeling well.”

I became puzzled immediately, but I tried not to show them.

So, they sang for me without fail and I thanked them.

Afterwards, I immediately went to my mother's bedroom. I

knocked first and found her still in bed. That was very unusual;

my mother was always an early bird and it was a Friday nonetheless, so she had to go to work. Malome Joel knew that it was my birthday and that I wasn't working. I made sure to notify him before I got off the taxi.

Bina: (frowning) "Mama, are you okay?"

Mama: "Bina, my baby. I'm okay. I'm just tired. I think I am coming down with flu."

Bina: "Ke go direle lengana (Should I make you some African wormwood)?"

Mama: "No, I'll be fine. This is your birthday, remember? No work – no exceptions."

Bina: "I know, but you are my mother. If you're not well, then I'm not well."

Mama: "Nonsense. Bring my back, I have a gift for you."

I was excited, because all I ever got for my birthday was just cake and snacks. I carefully brought her the bag and she went through it. She took out a medium-sized red gift bag and handed it to me.

Mama: "Open it."

I opened it and there was a book, *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald. Thankfully, I had never read it before. Me owning my own book meant the world to me.

Bina: (Excitedly) "Mama, thank you so much!"

Mama: "There's more. Check the bag."

I carefully inspected the paper bag and noticed a small, brown envelope with my name on it.

Mama: "Open it."

I slowly tore it open and I was overwhelmed with immense tears. It had a few notes in it and I slowly counted and it was a total of R1000.

Bina: (crying) "Mama, I can't accept this."

Mama: "You don't have to worry about a thing. I got a job as a helper in town. I now work for Mr. van Tonder and his wife, and they pay me at least 3500 a month. That is more than enough."

Bina: "But, we need this money, Mama. This is enough to cover our groceries for the month."

Mama: (shaking head) "Bina, you know my rules about birthdays. We hardly celebrate anything in this house, so that is your money. It is not much, but you can buy a cellphone. You are 17 now, and almost a woman. Come on, you deserve to be spoiled."

Bina: (smiling) "Thank you, Mama."

I got up and gave her a long hug, assuming we were done.

Mama: “Another thing, I went to your school and met up with Ms. Mashaba and your Principal. I notified them of our situation and they were delighted to accept you back at school. Instead of you repeating Grade 9, you can go straight to Grade 11, provided you write an entire exam before you return. It wasn't easy, but the Lord favours you, ngwanaka.”

I was so delighted that I just cried. I had wanted to go back to school so badly.

Bina: “What about the business, Mama? Will we manage?”

Mama: “I don't spend a single cent for transport all thanks to Joel. So, the entire R3500 goes straight to my bank account. Come on, you should be happy. You will now get to join your peers again at school and finally finish your matric.”

I was overjoyed, I mean words couldn't even express what I felt that day. It was the best birthday gift I had ever received. My mother was the best to be honest. A lot of people including Koko wouldn't be pleased about me going back to school, because that would mean that she had to do all the chores by herself or wait for me to come back and serve her. Mama was too happy to be working for the van Tonders, and just like that, I was able to get my life back. I was so excited, I couldn't even wait to see Selaelo later on. I got up early and made Mama some Lengana tea, despite her refusal earlier that morning. She needed to get better. I made breakfast for us all and Koko went outside right after cleaning up and wasted no time before she sent me for her daily dose of alcohol.

Koko: “Bina, weh! Go buy three beers for me.”

I went to her and I stared at her for a while. I mean I didn't expect a gift, but a simple Happy Birthday from her would do just fine.

Koko: “Keng (what is it)? Tshalete e ya shorta (Is the money short)?”

Bina: "No, it's my birthday."

Koko: "Ao (Is it)? Happy Birthday."

She didn't really mean it at all, so I just kept quiet and went to the back and took the bottles. I walked out and took a walk to the bottle store. Upon arrival, I found Malome Joel right there, sitting with a few of his friends drinking.

Malome Joel: (smiling) "Ao (Oh), Bina, Bina! E tla mo (Come here)."

I really didn't like being around a group of men. It made me so uncomfortable. After the woman handing me my change, I came up with an excuse.

Bina: (nervously) "I have to go, Koko o jagile (Granny is waiting)."

I hurried out, but he rushed after me.

Malome Joel: “Bina

ema pele (wait a minute). Did you honestly think that I wouldn't get you something for your birthday?”

I looked at him frowning. He chuckled and took out a few notes from his pockets.

Malome Joel: “Here.”

Bina: “No, Malome, I can't take your money. What would people say? Besides, it is not right and my mother didn't raise me that way. It would just be too inappropriate.”

Malome Joel: “Please, take it. I want you to buy yourself a phone for your birthday. I mean, your mother told me you'll be going back to school, so I thought it would be the perfect gift for you.”

Bina: “I don't mean to be rude, Malome Joel, but I just can't accept your money. I have to go.”

I left him standing right there in wonder as I hurried on home. What would people think? Imagine if his wife or someone who knew his wife saw me accepting money from him in broad daylight. That wouldn't be right. I headed on back and gave Koko her R100 change. For the first time in my life, she gave me a gift.

Koko: "Tseya (take). Consider this a gift for you only because you help me so much and only because you are so obedient."

I smiled in awe, I mean my grandmother would have rather died than to give any of us money.

Bina: "Kea leboga (thank you), Koko."

Koko: "Ja."

I went back into the house and did my duties, and then took a bath and got dressed. Mama had managed to get up that day and was not pleased to see me working.

Mama: “Ke rileng go wena (what did I tell you)? No work on your birthday.”

Bina: “Sorry, Mama. I was just about to leave, but I had to make sure you were alright first.”

Mama: “Bina, I'm not a child. Go, I'm fine.”

I smiled and kissed her cheek as I left. I said goodbye to my grandmother and went to Selaelo's house. I found her ready to go even.

Selaelo: (smiling) “Mogwera (friend)! Happy birthday, baby girl! Ke kwele taba tse monate (I heard the good news) and my mother told me to congratulate you on her behalf as well!”

Bina: “Thank you, chomi (friend).”

Selaelo: “This is a cause for a big celebration. Let's go.”

Bina: "Wait, re ya kae (where are we going)?"

Selaelo: "It's a surprise. Come on."

We walked hand in hand while excitedly conversing about how school was going to be for me from Monday onwards. I didn't even think my old uniform fitted me any more, but that would have to be the next day's worry. We got into a taxi and stopped by the mall. Selaelo took me to the movies and we watched *Acrimony*. Taraji P. Henson was one of my favourite actresses of all time. I enjoyed that movie, although I found it a bit hard for a woman to stay with a man for that long. But then, what did I know? Afterwards, we went to Ocean Basket.

Bina: "Selaelo, Ocean Basket, ka nnete (really)?"

Selaelo: "Chomi (friend), this is your day. We're going to eat anything and everything we want to. Have some oysters, man. We can even have a cocktail or two."

I had never even had alcohol in my entire life.

Bina: "Selaelo, we're only 17 and besides, I've never had a taste of alcohol in my entire life."

Selaelo: "They don't know how old we are. Besides, if you don't like the taste, you don't have to drink the entire thing. I steal my mom's wine sometimes ke te fe glass nyana)and have a glass or two)."

She ordered some cocktails for us.

Selaelo: "May we have two Mojito's please?"

I thought we were going to get caught out for being minors, but the waiter just said okay and he brought the drinks a few minutes later.

Selaelo: "Cheers to success and to living long, healthy lives."

We raised our glasses and toasted. I took a sip of mine and it tasted sweet and a little bitter at the same time. It tasted a bit nice, though. We ate and halfway down the glass, I felt really nice. I guess that is what my grandmother felt each and every single day of her life.

Bina: "Friend, can you believe Malome Joel offered me money just this morning? He told me it was to buy a phone for myself."

Selaelo: "Hayi, hayi (no, no), friend. Don't ever take money from that guy. I heard that he got Meikie pregnant."

I was so shocked that I choked on my drink. Meikie was one of our fellow classmates as well, but she dropped out the previous year due to her pregnancy and moved away from our village.

Bina: "Are you sure about that?"

Selaelo: "Have I ever lied to you? I mean come on, haven't you ever asked yourself why he never had children with his wife? Being on the road all the time and always drinking, you

honestly tell me that you never thought he would cheat on her?
Bula mahlo (open your eyes), Bina. Just be careful.”

I felt a bit uneasy that Joel could actually sleep with someone my age. If he could get Meikie pregnant, I was perhaps next on his list. It was time for the bill and I offered to pay, but Selaelo blatantly refused.

Selaelo: “This is your day, man.”

Bina: “But even when it is your day you pay for everything.”

Selaelo: “I do it out of love. Save that money. One day you can pay for me too. Ska wara ka yona (don't worry about it).”

I smiled even though it just didn't sit well with me. I hated feeling like a charity case, but saving the money would have done me really well. I didn't even buy myself the phone as my mother had intended me to with that money. She was most probably not going to be pleased with my choice, but I just felt the need to save it for a rainy day. We went window shopping

and headed back home at about 5pm. By then, I saw Malome Frans, the last born and the richest one in the family. He was standing right outside our gate talking to one of the neighbours. He most probably was telling them about his next business venture and how he made his first million, if he even had one. You know how such family members are. I greeted him and tried dodging him, but it seemed as if he was waiting for me.

Malome Frans: “Bina, ema pele e tla mo (wait a minute, come here).”

I turned around and looked at him. He reached for something in his car and took out a plastic bag.

Malome Frans: “Mmago o mpoditse gore (your mom told me that) it's your birthday. You're turning 17, so I assumed you might want a new phone.”

I mean, that very same man hardly even helped mama with anything – except when he really wanted to. Koko hated it when he bought me or my mother anything at all.

Malome Frans: “Tshwara (Take it).”

I opened the plastic bag and was in serious shock. He had bought me a brand new iPhone 6s, I could never understand that about black people. He didn't mind buying alcohol and things for us, but ask him for food he would blatantly tell you stories. I was very happy, indeed.

Bina: (smiling) “Dankie (Thank you), Malome. I really appreciate it. This is my very first cellphone.”

Malome Frans: “You're welcome, I have a new tender and we supplied them with cellphones, ka re e re ke go ngwathele e one (so I thought I should take one for you).”

I should have known better. He also never did anything for anyone without bragging.

Bina: “Thank you.”

Malome Frans: “It has R500 worth of Airtime loaded on it. You can use it within a month.”

I got the message, though.

Bina: “Kea leboga (Thank you so much).”

Malome Frans: “Ja, ke rekile (I bought) you a cake and a few snacks le (and) school uniform. I heard your mother telling me that you're going back to school. Wise choice, you should take a few tips from Vanessa.”

I was instantly annoyed, Vanessa was his first born daughter, who was a little older than me – 20 to be exact. I mean, she failed her first two years of Varsity but we didn't talk about that. Afterwards, she fell pregnant and dropped out and was now working for Parliament. Of course, she managed to do that with her father's connections, and suddenly I had to take notes from her.

Bina: (faint smile) “Okay, Malome (uncle).”

Malome Frans: “Ke tla le bona (I'll see you). Tell Koko I left.”

He got into his Mercedes G63 and left. Well, that's family for you.

Jeremiah 9:23 says; “Thus says the Lord: “Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches.”

6

“The whole secret of a successful life is to find out what is one’s destiny to do, and then do it.” – Henry Ford

Four months later...

It had been a blissful few months. I was back at school and I had fallen into a routine as if I never dropped out. I was studying until late at night instead of coming home late and burnt by the sun. I even managed to get my complexion back, thanks to my facial products. Life had gotten almost back to normal and my mother was working full time with the Van Tonders. She was staying there, so we would see her only on weekends. Koko was not happy about me leaving the vegetable business, so she tried to open her own little veggie stall right there in the yard, but that didn't last long because she ended up spending all the profit and eventually had no money to stock up. Malome Joel used to take me to school and fetch me, so I'd always take Selaelo with so that it wouldn't be too awkward. He didn't show any signs of trying to make me his second side piece, so I was safe. I had neared the end of my Grade 11 year and my results were fantastic. My mother was ecstatic about that. She looked a bit frail and had lost a bit of weight, but she came home with

some good news. Mr. van Tonder and his wife gave her double her salary for Christmas, so that she could enjoy her money with us, her children. So, we were so happy that life was favouring us for a change.

With it being December holidays, Lesiba and Matome could finally focus on going to Grade 11 the coming year, while I was looking forward to being in Matric. My Tenderpreneur uncle, Malome Frans, had invited us to his house for the holidays. We'd be there for two weeks and also spend Christmas and New Year's at his house. He lived in Woodhill Estate, just near Mall of the North. We never went to his house unless he invited us, so we didn't waste time debating. It was a free holiday, where we'd swim and eat for days and then come back home. I knew that I'd find my cousins there, although my aunt Celia, one of my mother's younger sisters had no children. My grandmother would always say bad things about her, most probably because she wasn't so giving when it came to money and would call her "nyopa" (barren) whenever it suited her, but she'd never insult her in her face. We packed our bags and Malome Joel, being Malome Frans' best friend from back in the day, he offered to take us there. We all got in and off we went. My brothers never rested when it came to road trips because they enjoyed watching all the beautiful cars pass us by. My

mother was enjoying the gospel music being played by Malome Joel, while Koko decided to sit in the front and have a few beers as we were driving. I kept myself busy on WhatsApp, talking to the only friend I had and I browsed through some Facebook.

When we arrived, we already saw a few cars in the driveway and that was an indication that Aunt Salome had arrived along with Aunt Celia. My mother was actually happy to see them, which wasn't something that happened quite often. She had this mysterious smile on her face, while Koko was already drunk when we got there.

Koko: (shouting) “Lesiba! Matome! Tla le nthuseng ke fologe (Come help me get off here)!”

As much as they were annoyed, they helped her out of the taxi. He had recently upgraded his taxi to a Quantum, all thanks to Malome (Uncle) Frans. It is always amazing how some people would rather raise the bar for friends, instead of family. It is what it is, I guess. We got into the house, and my fake cousins were so happy to see me. I mean, they hardly had real friends, so all they wanted to do was to just brag to me about their fabulous lives. Vanessa, was Uncle Frans' First born and only

child, while Aunt Salome had three daughters. She was still married, while Malome Frans was then living with his second wife, who was not Vanessa's birth mother. Aunt Celia, was unmarried and childless. As we entered, of course she was the one to come out first.

Celia: (smiling) “Oh, family! Frans weh! Ba fihlile (They have arrived)! Hehe, sesi (sister), wa ba botse so le gono (you look so good today). What happened?”

My mother's smile slowly faded away while she left a sour taste in my mouth.

Celia: (laughing) “Kea te tshamekela fela (I'm just joking), man. Why are you so serious?”

I hated people who made such jokes – they low key always mean every word and disguise it as jokes.

Celia: “Hmm, Bina, o tsamaya ka iPhone (you have an iPhone)? Ngwanesho o go zamile, neh (my brother tried his best with you, hey)?”

Mama: (firmly) “Celia, that is enough.”

Celia: “Ai, you're always so serious.”

Salome also came out to greet us, at least she was fake, but nice to us.

Salome: (smiling) “Sesi (sister), le sa emetse eng ka ntle (what are you still waiting for outside)? Tsenang (Come in), hao (goodness). Frans is braaing us meat. Lona (You), go put the bags in the bedrooms upstairs and go take a swim. Lea kgona go swimmer, akere (you can swim

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can't you)?”

Lesiba: “Ba re rutile kwa skolong (They taught us at school).”

They rushed upstairs along with our bags, while Malome Frans's wife approached us. She was a darling, to be honest. I had met her once or twice and she was never mean to us at all. Her name was Constance, but they called her Connie.

Connie: (smiling) “Hao, family. Ke kgale le fihlile (have you been here for long)?”

Koko: “Re tla reng Celia a re emisitse (What can we say when Celia has been making us stand out here)?”

Connie: (frowning) “Celia, why did you do that?”

Celia: “We were just talking, ai le wena (gosh).”

She hugged Mama and then me and greeted Hunadi and Masalesa. She too, like Portia, adored children, but never had any of her own. I still think that Malome Frans married her deliberately, and ensured that they had no children together. She respected Mama being the eldest of the siblings, and I

admired that. Malome Joel walked alongside Koko and helped her in. As we walked in, Koko just had to start.

Koko: (praising) “Yoh (Oh)! Ntlo ya ngwanaka e botsana, lona (my son's house is so beautiful, guys)! Ai (oh), Badimo ba nratile (My ancestors love me).”

I just tried so hard not to roll my eyes at that statement.

Connie: “Bina, you can go meet up with your cousins in Vanessa's room. I'll keep your mother company.”

Bina: “Are you sure?”

Mama: “Bina, go and enjoy yourself. I'll be fine.”

I smiled and walked up towards Vanessa's room. I just had to mix with them because we were going to be there for two whole weeks straight. I could not possibly hide in one of the bedrooms for the entire stay. That just wouldn't have been appropriate. I took a deep breath as I prepared myself for the

plastics. I called them that. I knocked on the door and opened slowly. Vanessa smiled and jumped right on top of me as soon as she saw me, while the other three, were not so excited. Vanessa was a spoilt brat, but she had her moments. She had her limits too. Just like her father, she didn't tolerate disrespect towards anyone – especially family. She hated fights and she just loved to brag about her rich life.

Vanessa: (smiling) “Come in. Wow, you have grown so much and look at you. Bona o mo yellow bone jwang (look how light you are). Gosh, I wish I had your skin. O berekisa eng (what do you use)?”

She was also a chatterbox, and hardly gave anyone a chance to speak.

Bina: (nervously) “Oh, Vaseline le (and) green Sunlight bar.”

She chuckled while the other three were less pleased to see me. I was very happy that she was at least trying to accommodate me.

Dimakatso Makwetla

My name is Dimakatso Makwetla, I am the daughter of Stephina Makwetla. I have six children, the eldest being Bina. I have failed my daughter so much, that I am about to leave this earth and fail her even worse than I already have. The world can be so cruel, and your family can even be more cruel. I had to learn that the hard way. When my husband was still alive, everything was just amazing and I had found solace in the man of my dreams yet someone very close to me chose to cut his life short and ensure that I suffer even more than I already had. I practically raised my siblings and I ensured that they got the chances I never had. My younger sisters were fortunate enough to live a life I had always wanted, a life of being a Nurse, a caregiver and healing lives, but I never got to be that. I let that all go when I found my husband.

My life was in tatters once again and I had to go back to poverty – except this time, I had been offered no assistance by my siblings. The very siblings that I helped my mother to raise. You know, in life we always strive to do our best for our family and once they make it big and you remind them of what you had done for them, they'll tell you that they didn't ask you to do that. Of which is true, yes. Some of us here on earth suffer

more than others to get what we really want. We go through so much for those we love, only for them to stab us and break our spirit with their words and actions.

The sad thing is that, those who treat us like we are nothing, don't ever succeed because God sees everything. In the end, the very same people who see you as nothing, see you as the only person who can save them when they lose everything. Money is not everything, truly, but others love money with every fibre in their being. I decided to spend my last Christmas with my family – no matter how hard they always made every moment with them. I wanted to have a good holiday with them, and I only hoped and prayed that God would spare me long enough to see my daughter succeed, but I knew that wasn't possible.

I found out months prior to Christmas that I have Breast cancer, and unfortunately it had already spread to my liver and my ovaries. With each day that went by, I was getting worse and much closer to my maker. All I wanted was to remind my siblings of the hard times we had to endure, but we made it through. I wanted to remind and show them the brittleness of life. Life is so easily created and even easier to lose. Each day we live here on earth, is a day lend to us. We all live according

to God's plan, so basically we sign a contract with Him the moment we are born. Some contracts last longer than others, but at the end of the day, we are all just temporary residents here on this earth. Romans 14:8 says; “For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's.”

7

“Not how long, but how well you have lived is the main thing.”

— Seneca

Dimakatso Makwetla

I was having such a pleasant day, with Connie tending to me so well. I didn't even feel left out, and my mother was too busy drinking. My brother Frans was so happy to see me. He literally stopped braaing and came straight to greet me from what I gathered.

Frans: (excitedly) “Dimama, man! Kgale le tla, waitse (you took so long to arrive).”

He gave me a warm hug and frowned as he took a good look at me. I swallowed hard as I grew anxious thinking that he could see right through me. I hadn't told anyone my secret and I wasn't prepared to tell them until my last days.

Frans: (frowning) “Dimakatso, keng o kare ga o shap (why do you look a bit frail)?”

Dimakatso: “Hai (no), I'm okay.”

Connie: “You know, perhaps working for her entire family all these years is finally taking its toll on her. Frans should really find you something less strenuous, I mean I also have a lot of contacts, so - “

I didn't even wait for her to finish. The last thing I needed was a handout job. I never liked bothering Frans, and I knew he just didn't like handing us jobs for free like that. Unfortunately, he had to be the only one who shined in the family.

Dimakatso: (interrupting) “No, thank you. I really appreciate it, but I'm okay.”

Connie: “Well, think about it.”

She gave me a wide smile, and I just changed the subject.

Dimakatso: “Did you guys renovate the kitchen? It looks so different.”

Celia: (laughing) “Hehe, I had no idea you could identify taste.”

I won't lie, I was so hurt. I just didn't think that she would still try to be so petty even during a family function.

Malome Frans: (annoyed) “Celia, o tla ka go ntena (you are about to annoy me). I called you all here so that we could all spend the holidays together. You know just how much I hate disrespect. Dimakatso is your eldest sister, man. Have some decency or at least pretend to have some!”

Frans was the youngest and the only male – yet everyone was afraid of him. I just wish they could give me an ounce of the respect they had for him.

Celia: “Askies (sorry), I was just joking.”

Frans: "Don't forget that I can still send you away. It doesn't mean that this holiday would be nothing without you. Remember that."

As always, Celia just saw it fit to start a fight.

Celia: (angrily) "What are you trying to say, Frans? Just because I'm the only one without children, doesn't mean I don't have anything to contribute to this family."

Salome: "Ai (oh), Celia. You just always choose the best occasions to start a fight. Is it our fault that you didn't have children? You are the one who said that you didn't want to get married and didn't want children because your career was too important. Akere wena o career woman (you're a career woman, aren't you)? So now, why do you always have to throw it in our faces whenever shit hits the fan?! Aowa (No), man! Re lapile ka wena (We're so tired of you)!"

Celia just didn't take well to being ganged up on.

Celia: (fuming) “Oho (oh), so this is how it is now?! All of you just decide to gang up on me like this?! At least I don't bother anyone for food or clothing unlike Dimakatso! You guys never take me seriously! I mean even Mama insults me whenever I'm not around!”

Koko: (frowning) “Nna (Me)?!”

Celia: (shouting) “Yes! O nagana gore a ke tsebe, Mma (You think I don't know, Ma)? Ka tseba o mpitsa nyopa ko di khoneng (I know you call me barren behind my back)!”

I was so annoyed, to be honest. I was truly heartbroken. So many negative emotions were running through my mind. My own siblings just hurting each other whenever they had the chance. I didn't understand how they even lived. I mean, their way of thinking was just too materialistic and they were swimming in vanity. Life is so futile, you know. It was as if they just forgot about that part and actually forgot that they would not take that money or their assets where they were going after death. We are all going to have the same sized grave and no exceptions will be made for those with money. I felt a strong

headache coming my way and I just didn't have the energy for conflict any more.

Dimakatso: (softly) “Constance, so sorry for being such a party pooper, but may you please show me to my room?”

They all kept quiet as I was speaking to Connie.

Connie: (smiling) “Of course, follow me.”

She had Masalesa on her hip as she led me to one of the bedrooms. I just tried my best to hide the threatening tears while we were walking up the stairs. I could tell that Connie felt so sorry for me. Part of the reason why she was always so nice to me, was most probably out of pity. She knew just how mean my siblings as well as my mother were to me – with and without my presence.

Connie: “Here it is.”

As soon as she opened the bedroom door, I just let the tears flow. I didn't mean to cry, but it just happened. You know, when you have been carrying years of guilt, regret, heartache and immense pain, you will literally cry for no reason at all. That is why people suffering from mental illness were never taken seriously. Some people were called needy just for being so soft and crying for basically anything. I had reached that stage and it was not a pretty one.

Dimakatso: (teary) "Thank you."

Connie closed the door behind her, and put Masalesa on the bed as she came close to me and held my hand. Her warmth always felt like home. I never received that from any of my siblings. Frans was helpful only when he wanted to be, so I just never took him seriously.

Connie: "Dimakatso, I know just how hard this must be for you."

She was most probably saying that just to make me feel better.

Connie: “You know, I never told you my story. I grew up just like you; I had siblings who were my mother's favourites while I, was just not. I was constantly on the receiving end of negativity and hatred. I was always the cursed one, and I could never understand why. One day, when my mother was on her death bed, she called us all in. I had had a very distant relationship with her at that point. She started with me and told me that she didn't mean to be so vile towards me throughout the years and that she blamed me for my father walking out on her. I am the last born of the family, and I didn't look like the rest of them; I am very light compared to them and my hair is quite silky and curly. Rumours would emerge and they'd say that I wasn't my father's child – that is what made him disappear. Only to find out when my mother was dying, that I looked like her grandmother. That was when I realized just how backwards black people were and still are. We are a long way from being nice to one another. My siblings hated me for that – my skin tone. Imagine that.”

Her story was painful, but I couldn't understand how one's siblings could hate you for the way you look, honestly.

Connie: “I know, you're probably thinking it is one hell of a crazy story, but you know, your story is a lot similar to mine.”

Dimakatso: (frowning) “How so?”

Connie: “Your siblings despise you – and I'd like to tell you why.”

I raised my eyebrows in disbelief as I awaited her response.

Connie: “You see, you are the strongest one, believe it or not. You are the smartest one – believe it or not and you are the prettiest one. You are the only one who had the heart to withstand poverty just so that they could be where they are today. People know – everyone knows that they are where they are because of your sacrifices. Your mother despises you because you actually became better than her. You see

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you have been focusing so much on the negatives – that you never actually looked at the positive. All you hear is how neighbours gossip about you and your children, but you have never heard or paid attention to those who literally applaud you and wish they could be just as amazing as you are. Last year, we spent New year's at Mama's house, and after church, I

heard a few of your neighbours talk about how strong you are. It is always so difficult to see through the pain, the tears you have wasted all those years, the guilt you felt because you feel as if your children will suffer while their children are well off, but you know, I will tell you another secret.”

I listened further in disbelief.

Connie: “Frans worships you, but he feels so guilty. He feels that as the man, he should have been there for you – that he should have gone to look for a job instead of you. He is so successful, but deep down, he just can't enjoy it because of the guilt that is eating him up. He does not buy you food or anything, because he assumes that you guys are sorted. He gives your mother money – every month for basics and utilities and he just never understood why Bina had to leave school. Even though, I still feel that Celia and Salome influence him otherwise, he has a good heart. All you have to do is just take it easy, Dimakatso. God is with you. He has pulled you through so much, and I know he will do miracles for your children.”

I cried as she was talking to me. I just wailed and let it all out. I could never cry like that in front of Bina, I mean she would just be extremely worried and I always felt a bit weak if I did that in front of my children. I really didn't have anyone to vent to, so I had just kept everything bottled up. I didn't have the heart to tell anyone that I was nearing the end, but Connie just made everything feel so right.

Connie: "Don't you worry, you must have such a headache now after all that crying."

Dimakatso: "Connie, thank you so much for listening. It really means so much to me."

Connie: "That is what family is for. Listen, how about I go get you some pain killers, some wine or Amarula or even both and we can just chill on the balcony?"

I wasn't much of a drinker, but it sounded like a good idea.

Dimakatso: (smiling) "I'd love that."

Connie: "Cool, I'll be right back."

She walked out and headed downstairs, and I just knew that my sisters wouldn't like the idea of Connie hanging out with me alone. She came back literally after five minutes, with a bottle of water, a bottle of red wine and a bottle of Amarula, an ice bucket and two glasses in her hands.

Connie: (smiling) "Here are some pain killers. They won't make you sleep, I mean you and I still have a whole lot to talk about."

I chuckled as we went to the balcony, just next to the bedroom I would be sleeping in. It was a cosy room used for relaxation as a balcony lounge. Connie poured us some drinks, while Masalesa was sleeping at that point. She lay him on one of his blankets on the floor while we sat right at the edge of the balcony.

I tasted some of the Amarula and it tasted really nice, the wine was also nice even though it felt a bit too strong for me. So, Connie went back to the kitchen to get some Ice Cream and

mixed my Amarula with it. Apparently it was called Dom Pedro. After about two glasses, I was feeling a lot better. I guess that was the reason why my mother used to drink so much; alcohol numbed her pain. I was just guessing because she was a very mean woman.

Connie: (laughing) “Gosh, you are so fun to be around. You are so much better than your sisters, to be honest.”

Dimakatso: “I thought everyone wanted to be around well achieved Nurses.”

Connie: “Most definitely not me. I mean, I earn way more than they do and I am still very humble. All they want to talk about is what they bought and what they still want to buy. It could never be me.”

Dimakatso: “Can I ask you something?”

Connie: “Anything.”

Dimakatso: “How come you never had any children with my brother?”

Connie: (sigh) “Well, to be honest, Frans didn't want any children when he married me and he made it very clear, but I was actually born without a womb. I am able to have children via surrogacy, but I just vowed to myself that I'd never have children of my own. I didn't want to turn into a mother like mine. You know, she still visits me in my dreams but I forgave her a long time ago.”

That was a shock to me, I mean I just thought that she didn't want to have children by choice or that she was respecting Frans's wishes. She was being so open to me, so I felt like doing the same.

Dimakatso: “I have stage four breast cancer. I don't have much longer to live, so I was hoping that this coming two weeks would be the best.”

She just couldn't believe it. She shed a few tears as she looked at me with disbelief. It actually felt a bit nice to tell someone about my pain and share that with them.

Connie: (teary) "Are you sure? I mean what about chemo? Radiation?"

Dimakatso: "I just found out two months ago. It had already spread, so I just want to die in peace."

Connie: (crying) "Dimakatso, what about Bina? Oh, Modimo (God)."

Dimakatso: "Please, don't tell her – or anyone."

Connie: (nodding) "How long?"

Dimakatso: "A few months if I'm lucky."

Connie: “You will be okay. I don't know what will happen, but I have hope.”

It felt so good to just be embraced and cry in someone's arms. I just felt so safe around Constance. We were so wrapped up in our emotions, when Salome just barged in.

Salome: (loudly) “Oh, there you are. Kgale ke le nyaka lona (I've been looking all over for you).”

Dimakatso: “O batla eng (what do you want), Salome?”

Salome: “Ah, ne ke re e tla o tlo re direla bogobe (I just wanted you to come and make us some pap). The meat is already done.”

I was so saddened by Salome's behaviour towards me, and I saw just how angry it made Connie.

Connie: (angrily) “Salome, ga o swabe (you have no shame). Why don't you go make it yourself?”

Salome: “Because Dimakatso can make it. She is used to cooking and cleaning after people, isn't she?”

Connie: (shouting) “Fokof (fuck off), Salome! Voetsek (Piss off)!”

Salome: (shocked) “Ko botsa (I'm going to tell) Frans!”

Connie: “Tsamaya (Leave) before I beat the shit out of you!”

Salome was just as shocked as I was and she hurried downstairs. I mean, Connie was one of those soft spoken people and I had never seen her tell someone off before that day. It felt a little good to have someone in my corner for once. I was just happy. Constance showed me that even people who aren't your blood can show you real love.

1 Corinthians 16:14 says; “Let all that you do be done in love.”

8

“The way I see it, if you want a rainbow, you gotta put up with the rain” - Dolly Parton

One week later...

Bina

It was finally Christmas day, and to be honest, I was actually starting to miss home. Malome Joel never left, and he had been attending to my mother and I way too much, it even made me suspicious. My mother still looked a bit frail and she would wake up a bit later than usual, so I ensured that I made her a flu mixture every morning. Usually flu clears within a few days, but she seemed to have been coughing quite a lot. I couldn't understand because it wasn't even cold at all, the weather was quite favourable throughout the entire week. I wasn't planning on getting up early, but the wonderful aroma of delicious food woke me. I headed downstairs and found my mother had made a large, scrumptious breakfast. Everyone in the family knew that my mother was an excellent cook, and she could make a meal out of just about anything. We could never really enjoy a feast except for Christmas and New Year's

because we always had to save some food for the coming days, but she had access and was allowed to do anything she practically wanted. The world was her oyster and the kitchen was my mother's favourite place in the house.

Bina: (smiling) “Hmm, go nkgga monate ka mo (It smells so nice in here). Why are you up so early today? Are you feeling better?”

Dimakatso: (smiling) “Yes, my baby. You know just how much I love Christmas. It is my most favourite holiday of the year. I just felt like making my family some breakfast.”

I still couldn't understand why my mother was so patient towards her siblings; I mean she literally never scolded or reprimanded them. My grandmother always remained quiet whenever my mother's sisters were ganging up on her. I could see the toll it had put on her body throughout the years. She had aged so fast, that one could barely see her beauty. They were jealous, to be honest. I heard Vanessa slip the other day and tell me that she had heard my Aunt Celia say that my mother always thought she was the prettiest just because she was the lightest of them all. I mean, honestly, she was a bitter

and envious woman. I had always heard stories about evil family members, but I had to see it with my own eyes – both my paternal and maternal families were just full of shit. I mean, we did not choose to look the way we did, so basically they were mocking the work of God.

Bina: “How are you feeling today? Are you better?”

Dimakatso: “A lot better, my baby. You know holidays bring out the best in me. Come, sit and have some food.”

She made everything from pancakes to all kinds of eggs and muffins of all kind with juice and fruits galore. She had gone all out and I was sure to remember that Christmas for a long time. As I was about to dig in, more and more members of our dysfunctional family came down.

Connie: (smiling) “Dimakatso, you know how I feel about guests. You really shouldn't have to make us breakfast. Come on, now.”

Frans: (excitedly) “Aowa (no), I'm most certainly not complaining. Dimama, you were always so good with the pots, o phala Salome le Celia (you are way better than Salome and Celia).”

Celia: (annoyed) “Wa nthoma (You're starting with me), Frans.”

Frans: “Just being honest.”

My mother was so happy, while Salome was really upset by Malome Frans's comment. It really showed on her face. She looked at all the food on the table with absolute disgust, while the rest of us were enjoying every bite.

Salome: (frowning) “Hmm, o zamile (you tried), sesi (sis). I mean, ke tla reng (what can I say)? Ga wa di tlwaela tse, akere (You're just not used to such things, right)?”

My mother's beautiful smile faded once again and was replaced by pain – yet again. I had honestly had enough of my Aunts toying with my mother's feelings; they were nice to her on

some days and then mean to her on others. She was not some toy, but she was a human being who also deserved kindness and respect.

Bina: (angrily) “Bo mmane (my aunts), this is really enough now. Ka nnete, go lekane (honestly, it is enough now). You have treated my mother like an old, useless dish rag ever since I have known you. You have treated her even worse these past few weeks – despite her not looking well at all. You have been treating her like nothing but a slave this entire time. I don't think you are happy deep down because if you were, you wouldn't be reminding us of how much money you make every single second. If this is what rich people do, then I don't want to be rich.”

Salome: (angrily) “Wa reng, wena (what did you just say)?!”

Celia: (shouting) “Ngwanenyana o wa telela (this little girl is so disrespectful)!”

Bina: “Le nkwele gabotse (you heard me well). Disrespectful or not, the truth must be told. This is my mother; your elder

sister. If you feel that you can't respect her for whatever reason, then just keep quiet, please. You are honestly disgraceful for treating her like this, and if you think that God is enjoying what you're doing – think again. Jeremiah 9:23 says; “Thus says the Lord: “Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches. Proverbs 27:1 says; “Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring. Yes, you may both be blessed with money and this fancy life, but if you were really happy – you wouldn't be doing this. I mean, my mother has never asked for a cent from you – any of you because she just knew you would ridicule and humiliate her even more. Be very careful of the way you treat people, for when the wheel turns, you won't have anyone else to blame but yourselves.”

I was in tears as I said that. I was fuming, but heartache overruled my anger. Her sisters still saw no reason, but a surprising member decided to stand up for my mother and I for the very first time in my life that day.

Celia: (fuming) “Ga o bone nna ke sene bana (This is the reason why I just don't have children)! O tla nya bana ba go tella net

so (You'll birth children only for them to disrespect you like this)!”

Koko: “That is enough, Celia. Wena le (You and) Salome.”

Salome: (shocked) “Mma (mama)!”

Koko: “Ever since we have gotten here you have been nothing but harsh and just vile towards your sister. Haowa bathong (no, man). We have had enough. Can we ever have a peaceful holiday – ever? Re duma go swana le malapa a mangwe (We also would like to be the same as other families). At times I become ashamed of being a mother to you because of such behaviour.”

They both didn't expect that, and neither did my mother and I. We were both astounded, and most certainly not sure if she was being genuine or not.

Celia: (angrily) “Mma (mom)!”

Koko: (reprimanding) “Hayi (No)! I said that's enough! Dimakatso made us a really beautiful breakfast and I didn't even hear anyone of you say thank you. Yes, she might have a lot of children, but so what? So fucking what? Le nna ke nyele lena mos (I also birthed all of you, didn't I)?! At least she takes care of her children despite being poor. Se se salang ga le kgopele selo (At the end of the day she asks nothing of you). Now, we are going to sit right here and enjoy our breakfast like a semi-normal family. I don't want to hear any of you talking shit for the next few days. If you start – you'll deal with me.”

I could sense the hope glimmer in my mother from within. She was absolutely honoured to hear her mother speak about her like that. She was elated, to be honest and I could see her quickly wiping off her tear. I think that is exactly what she waited for – all those years. It wasn't exactly an apology, but the fact that her mother validated her and everything she did for us, made her day. I still call that day an Unforgettable Christmas. We had a peaceful breakfast with my aunts biting their tongues the entire morning and the rest of the day was really great. My mother had been making us food and feeding us galore the whole of the following week. She seemed so happy and I hardly heard her cough at all. It was as if I had seen

an entirely new her. Of course, my aunts were fake happy and they were nice to her as well, but that was most probably because they were afraid of my grandmother.

New Year's finally came and usually I'd be extremely excited for a new year approaching, but on that particular day

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I woke up with a very disturbing feeling. I felt as if my heart was so heavy and I actually felt as if something horrible was about to happen on that day. I don't know what it was, but I call it intuition. God didn't give us a sixth sense for no reason. I immediately thought of my mother, so I got out of my bedroom and rushed to hers.

Bina: (worried) "Mama?"

As I feared, she was in bed and she could barely hear me. I felt my entire body freeze for a moment; I felt as if my heart sunk right to the pit of my stomach.

Bina: (distressed) “Mama?! Mama, wa nkwa (can you hear me)?”

She was so still – even when I rushed to her side. Her breathing was very slow and I started to panic. I had no idea what to do, so I started screaming.

Bina: (shouting) “Thusang (Help)! Thusang (Help)!”

Immediately, Aunt Constance was the first to arrive.

Connie: (worried) “What is it? What happened?”

Bina: (teary) “It is my mother, she seems – I don't know. O kare wa lwala (she seems ill). Even her breathing isn't right.”

I don't know what it was, but I saw something in her eyes. Constance looked as if she was sort of expecting what was happening, you know. She looked as if she knew something that I didn't.

Connie: "Calm down. She'll wake up soon."

Within a few moments, Koko and Vanessa as well as Malome Frans came rushing.

Frans: (worried) "Keng (what is it)?"

Koko: "And then? Dimakatso keng (what is it)?"

My mother was lying on her side, but she finally managed to open her eyes as much as it looked like a bit of an effort. I was so shocked, that I just started crying silently.

She looked at me and forced a smile as she pulled out her hand so that I could hold it. I did it without hesitation.

Dimakatso: (smiling) "Bina, my baby."

Frans: (shocked) "Dimakatso, what is happening?"

Koko: “Eh (oh), keng o kare wa lwala (why does it seem as if you're ill)?”

I was just baffled. No one was even planning on taking her to the hospital or calling the paramedics or something. She looked so pale, her mouth was so dry and her eyes looked so weirdly sunken.

Bina: (angrily) “Go reng le sa fonele (why aren't you even calling the) ambulance?”

Dimakatso: (softly) “No, no ambulance.”

Connie held my mother's other hand as she had tears running down her face as well. Something was not right. My entire body felt it. I literally felt as if my body was about to fail me. How on earth did I miss the signs? Was my mother dying?

Bina: (crying) “Mama, what is happening?”

Dimakatso: (smiling) “My beautiful Bina. Please, forgive me for not being totally honest with you. The truth is... I'm dying.”

There it was – the nail in the coffin. I felt my heart tore so quickly as if a bandaid was being ripped with full force from an oozing pimple on my body. My life was about to change for the worst and I wasn't even prepared for it.

Bina: (crying) “How, Mama... Why... I don't understand.”

Dimakatso: “I have breast cancer. I found out a few months ago and I just didn't have the heart to tell you. It had already spread to my liver, so I just didn't want to add to anyone's burden. The only person I will forever worry about is you, my child. I know, I have most probably failed you as a parent, but please, bear with me. Forgive me before I leave. One day when you're also a parent, you'll understand my reasons.”

My grandmother started wailing like the bloody heartless dog she was. She was most probably faking her sadness.

Dimakatso: “Connie, please bring my children. I want them around when I leave.”

Constance nodded. I couldn't believe that she hid that from me for so long. My uncle Frans was so speechless, he just stood there crying along with his daughter. Only when Connie had brought Masalesa, Hunadi, Matome, Lesiba and Pebetsi with her, my two aunts came as well as Salome's daughters. It always baffled me how funerals would bring families together – even those who just never got along. Sadly, the unity just never lasts. As soon as reality strikes yet again, they all go back to their normal lives. Of course, Salome and Celia were so shocked to see my mother in that state. I knew that deep down they were happy that my mother would be gone from them. They were most probably thinking who was going to look after us – my mother's brats once she was gone.

Celia: (shocked) “Dimakatso! Why o sa re botsa gore wa lwala (didn't you tell us that you are sick)?”

Salome: (wide-eyed) “Dimakatso, wa shwa (are you dying)?! Why would you want to die now?! Who is going to look after your children?!”

Yep, as I predicted.

Dimakatso: “My sisters, I would like to say a few words before I leave this earth. I don't have much time. Badimo ba ka ba ntatile (my ancestors have come to fetch me).”

We all stood there so flabbergasted and we just kept quiet out of respect. The dying should always be respected and when their final hour comes, they should never leave this world while in fear, angry or regretful.

Dimakatso: (smiling) “I know, you two have never loved me. I never expected your money in return for taking care of you. It was my duty after all, but all I asked for was respect and sadly I just never received it. I need you to know that I have forgiven you – all of you. All I ask from you all is that you give me a decent funeral. It doesn't have to be the fanciest, because even during my days of need – you were never there. You couldn't even spare some money for bread so that I can feed my children. As for my children, please – treat them well. You don't have to give them money, but please – be kind to them so that they don't endure the heartache and pain that I did. I have

yearned for a family life for so long, and I thank you for giving me that for these past two weeks. Even though it was not very real – it was all fake, you have given me something that would make me rejoice in the spiritual world. I repeat, be kind to my children if you want me to be a kind spirit to you all. Frans, I am not angry at you for anything. You have tried your best and I am proud of the man you have become. Mama, you and I never saw eye to eye, but thank you for being so nice to me these past few weeks. Please, take care of my children and you shall be rewarded with the best of your final years here on earth. Bina, my baby. Life is tough, it is just tougher for some of us and all I ask of you is that you stay strong. Whenever you feel as if you just can't soldier on any more, call upon me, call upon your father and call upon God so that you can be able to fight the demons in this world. Life is tough, but if you stay headstrong in faith, you can be the best version of yourself. Please, mourn me but do not cry forever, for we are all bound to leave this earth eventually. I didn't want you to spend one of your favourite holidays like this, but all I ask of you is that you never think of this day so negatively. One day, everything will make sense to you and believe me when I say this; this day will bring you so much joy one day; it all depends how you see it. I love you so much, along with all of you my children. Do not be sad, for I am going home. I am finally reunited with my husband and everyone who have done me

wrong, shall reap what they have sown. I ask of you – those of you who haven't repented to do so or else you shall face the consequences.”

I was crying so much, that I felt as if I was about to drop dead right there.

Dimakatso: “I have to go now, my family. I love you all – remember that.”

I felt my mother's firm grip become less firmer and I could tell that her soul was about to leave her body. The room was filled with such a deafening silence and all the tears and sniffs that had visited us on that day were a painful reminder that death was visiting us yet again.

Bina: (wailing) “Mama! Mama! Don't leave me – please!”

My mother gasped for air as she took her last few breaths and then she was gone. Her eyes were not blinking any more and her chest was not moving any more. She was finally gone, and I

felt a bit of warmth around the room and something that felt like wind brushing against my skin. I knew then that her ancestors were fetching her – they were in the room with us.

Celia: (screaming) “Iyo (oh), Sesi (sister)! Ntshwarele (forgive me)!”

Salome: (wailing) “Dimakatso! O re shile (you have left us)! Modimo (God), why are you so cruel?!”

Koko: (chanting) “Modimo le Badimo (God and our ancestors), amogelang ngwanaka (accept my child). Ka tshepa le tlile go mo tseya (I trust you came to fetch her). Lead her safely towards her new journey and ensure that she becomes a good ancestor to us and to her children. Badimo ga ba na swele (ancestors have no spite), so please be kind to us.”

I couldn't believe what she was spewing from her evil mouth. Even during times of sorrow, she still felt the need to add some hurtful words in her chants and prayer. My family was so cruel and the moment my mother left this earth was the day I knew that I'd never experience a mother's love ever again.

Matthew 7:13 – 14 says; “Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few. “

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9

“You only live once, but if you do it right, once is enough.” —
Mae West

Bina

Everything had just gone out of control on my side. I felt as if God was just against me. First, He took my father from us and we lost everything and now, he took the very last person that I had – my mother. I was so close to finishing school and all that just seemed so bleak. I knew that my grandmother would most probably not allow me to finish school any more. My life was a mess and a thousand thoughts were running through my mind. I felt as if indeed Things do fall apart. I knew that my life was over; I felt it before it even transpired.

That day, Malome Frans called a mortuary to come and fetch Mama's body and I spent so much time next to her body. I refused to leave her side until they came and I kept praying and hoping that she would wake up and tell me that it was all a prank. The longer I stayed with her, the colder her body became; and that was when reality had sunk in. The mortuary took so long to arrive because it was a holiday. I couldn't even

hear what everyone was saying. I felt as if I was in another realm and that a new, horrible chapter of my life had begun. It was almost like Season 2 of my horrible life. My mother's sisters were so supportive, which was really funny. They were so nice to my siblings and I throughout the entire week. They offered to pay for the funeral – despite Mama having a funeral cover of her own. I had wanted to go and cash out on her policy at the funeral parlour instead, but my grandmother had beaten me to the chase. She told them that I was a minor and that she was my legal guardian, so they gave her the money instead. It was as if a horrible repeat of my father's funeral was happening. I still had Mama's December salary and the R1000 she gave me on my birthday months ago. I had saved that money just in case of a rainy day. I tried to be there for my siblings, to be honest, but I just couldn't. I hardly ate and I lost weight rapidly in a very short space of time.

My mother's funeral was nothing like she had wished for. My aunts had gone all out – ordering the biggest marquee one could ever find and the best casket I'd ever seen. It was white in colour, and most probably cost a bloody fortune. A fortune they would never spend on my siblings and I. The program was even so distasteful; they were selling everyone who had come to the funeral a dream. They made it seem as if we were a good family

and that we got along just fine. My heart was aching, but I had no voice. I couldn't just tell them where to get off, I mean I was just a pauper's daughter according to them. Despite the pastor delivering a really good sermon, I just couldn't even hear him. The community came in numbers and they all said heartfelt words about my mother, words I had never heard them utter. It was actually nice to hear strangers say such good things about my mother for a change. I didn't want to feel as if her entire life had gone in vain. A few people who even claimed to be her friends, of which surprised me but I was glad. Funerals can either bring out the best or the worst of people. That is when we get to see people's true intentions, much like weddings. I kept thinking about what life would be like now that she was gone. I was orphaned and nothing made sense. People even gave us so much condolences money. See what I mean? People will never raise money for you to buy bread or take your children to school, but they will always find a way to raise money for you at a funeral. Of course, my grandmother took it all. People looked at me with so much pity and I just knew they were predicting my future already; a sad orphan who'll end up leaving school and most probably fall pregnant and marry some guy. I didn't want to be a statistic. I was born into poverty and I was so determined to get out of it. Everything felt so rushed; my mother was buried a few days after she died and then, five days later it was her ten days ceremony. I was forced to take

out my mother's belongings and clothes so that family members could share them. It was custom, apparently and had to be done whether I was ready or not. I took a few of her items that I wanted to preserve for myself, while the rest of the relatives took the rest. I could even hear how Celia and Salome were bashing my mother's memory.

Celia: “Nna a ke batle selo (I don't want anything). Dimakatso didn't have any taste, so why am I supposed to take her clothes?”

Koko: “Ke molao wena (it is custom). You have to take something – even if it is just one item. That is how we do things.”

Salome: “Ah (Oh), I'll just take something and stash it far away where I won't see it. I don't want her spirit haunting me.”

Celia: “Imagine wearing her torn and worn out clothes. People will think ke wele bathong (I no longer have money, my goodness).”

My heart was being shredded each and every day. Selaelo was there for me and didn't miss an opportunity to make me feel better. My brothers were old enough to understand death, but it still knocked them hard. They were expected to be strong since they were males and they carried on with life as if nothing had happened. I was breaking inside, but life had to go on. I was detached from the world but I kept my faith alive. I needed to make my life a success. My matric year finally commenced and I went back to school. Everyone at school was looking at me with pity and I hated it. My teachers were trying to be there for me, and I appreciated it. Gladys and her little clique wasted no time and tried to pull me down. One day, I was minding my business when she came at me and started insulting me. I could never forget her words; "Bjale o tshuwana ya go sokola ka nnete (Now you're really a poor orphan)". I had been bottling things up for so long, that I just lost it that day. I grabbed her with both my hands and I was enraged. I beat her up so badly that she was bleeding profusely. Of course, her parents wanted me to get suspended, but luckily she wasn't a lot of people's favourite and I had witnesses, so the case was closed. She provoked me and I was let off the hook. Ever since then, she didn't bother me at all. I was respected for beating her up, but that didn't matter to me. Malome Joel was still giving me rides to and from school, though, while my grandmother was a little nice to my siblings and I. We had food each and every day and

all I had to do was cook and do laundry as my chores and clean from time to time. My aunts and uncle had been gone ever since the ten days ceremony and I hadn't seen them ever since. I wasn't surprised, I mean, I knew that their act would not last forever. The only adult who was extremely supportive to me was Constance, and she would call me often and drop by whenever she could.

Three months later...

I was three months into my matric year, and I wasn't performing as well as I usually had been. My mother's death had taken a huge toll on me. I didn't want it to affect me, but trauma is just inevitable. I was minding my own business in the yard, sitting under our big tree, when Constance walked in.

Connie: (smiling) "Bina, how are you, my baby?"

Seeing her always made my day. I could never forget the care she gave my mother and she just treated us so well.

Bina: (smiling) "I'm well, how are you?"

Connie: "I'm okay. I came to visit you guys. I hope that is okay."

Bina: "It is always okay."

Connie: "Come, help me. I have brought you some groceries."

She was the only person who cared and didn't make us feel like a charity case. I didn't want to get my hopes up with her constant presence because people always get tired of giving. I mean, I didn't expect her to always leave some room in her pockets for us. We weren't her biological family and most certainly not her adopted children. I just smiled and walked alongside her as she began telling me about what was news. She had brought tons of groceries, and my grandmother always enjoyed it whenever she was at our house. She always stayed and ensured we were fine; she asked the necessary questions to ensure that we were being treated well. My aunts never liked her, I mean they despised anyone who was looking out for us. It was such a shame. I could escape the reality of not having my mother around whenever Constance was around. She was

so warm and had that motherly nature. While she was making us food that day, I was shocked to see my aunt Salome walk in.

Salome: (frowning) “And then, family?”

Koko: (smiling) “And then eng, wena (what do you mean)? Is this how you greet us now, Salome?”

Salome: “Aowa (No), I am just surprised, fela (only). Connie, go bjang (how are you)? Have you adopted my sister's children now?”

Connie: (annoyed) “Hello, to you too, Salome.”

Salome: “Go thoma neng le ja dijo tse bose so (since when do you eat such nice food)?”

Connie: “Since there are people who care about these kids, Salome. You should try that at times.”

Salome: “Wena man (you go girl), chesa (Go), Mother Theresa.”

Koko: (irritated) “Salome, stop being so jealous. If you could bring us food like Constance, you wouldn't need to act like this. She cares about us, unlike my own children. This is why God just doesn't bless you enough.”

I could tell my aunt Salome always expected good things to happen to her and her children only. It was school holidays, but I just didn't understand why she was even there.

Salome: (clicking tongue) “Anyway, ne ke tlile go le begela taba (I came to tell you some good news). My first born is graduating and she is getting married.”

Koko: (frowning) “Getting married ya eng? Is she pregnant?”

Salome: (annoyed) “Koko, mona ke wa eng (what is with the jealousy)?”

Koko: “O nyalwa neng ke sa botsiwa (when is she getting married when I wasn't even told)?”

Salome: “Ka go botsa gona bjanong akere (I am telling you right now, aren't I)? Anyway, please, organize the uncles because they want to bring lobola by next week.”

It seemed as if she wanted me to feel a bit upset or something. I was not bothered at all, I mean I had my whole life ahead of me. I had no plans of getting married. I didn't even have a boyfriend. My aunt was quite a sad person, despite the mask she was wearing on a daily basis. She wanted everyone to feel as if she was the only person who had achieved anything in her life. With my mother gone, she had no one to torture, so she channelled all that energy on me. I mean, wow, an entire Registered Nurse who was above 40 years of age felt the need to make a 17 year old feel small. It baffled me, but well, such is life.

Koko: “Okay.”

Salome: "So, how is school going, Bina? I mean now that your mother is gone, you know that the world will be against you. You need to work twice as hard if you want to be like my daughters."

I just tried so hard not to roll my eyes. Not everyone wanted to be like her daughters. The comparison was just horrible. I hated it.

Bina: "School is fine."

Salome: "That doesn't sound very convincing."

Connie: (irritated) "She just told you that school is fine. You really don't have to rub her mother's death in her face every time you see her, you know."

Salome: (frowning) "You just think that you are better than us all, don't you?"

Connie: "Salome, surely as a mother you should know better."

Connie: “You wouldn't know anything about being a mother, now would you? I mean when did you even give birth to any child for that matter? Oh, wait – never.”

She always felt the need to target poor Constance about her not having children, but she was always unbothered. She didn't have any children – by choice.

Connie: “That is so old, try new insults next time. Now, if you have nothing else to say, you can leave. Or you can stay, but you need to behave. We are having some family time.”

My aunt was baffled; she was fuming. She looked towards her mother's direction hoping that she would get some support from my grandmother, but she wasn't having it.

Koko: (frowning) “O sa emetse eng (what are you still waiting for)?”

She took one look at Connie, it was a rather spine-chilling look and left. I didn't like that look, because it felt as if she was thinking of something bad. She was a vindictive person, so I just didn't want to think of the worst. I had heard rumours that someone at her work place was forever clashing with her, and they had a fight as they exchanged words. A few days later, the woman fell ill and died. Word had it that she did something to her. Everyone at my aunt's workplace feared her and she would never get into trouble for anything she did. I just never understood, but I had no evidence so I couldn't follow heresay. We had a good day that day – despite my aunt Salome trying to ruin everything for us. My brothers were always so happy whenever she was around as she would also buy them some toys. Lesiba and Matome were teenagers – they were almost men

so they enjoyed getting money from her that they would give their girlfriends. Nonetheless, we got along just fine. They respected me and I returned it. I really wanted us to live a different life to that of my mother and her siblings. Throughout that entire week, Constance kept telling me that she had good news for me and she would tell me the coming Saturday when my uncles would come for Salome's daughter's lobola negotiations. It was a great week and I was able to study again without any mental disturbance. I was excited about the surprise Constance told me about, but I was also rather

disturbed by the constant dream I kept having. It kept repeating itself every night and it would just not continue or end. I kept dreaming of a wedding, and I was the one getting married and I was eating red meat. My mother would always tell me that those meant a funeral was on the way. Oddly, I just never had a weird dream before my mother passed, yet I was dreaming of such. I brushed it off because I didn't think anyone near me would die then.

The lobola day came, and yet again, I woke up with the same feeling I had when my mother passed on. I felt as if my heart dropped to the pit of my stomach. I just didn't understand what was happening. I had to get up early to help everyone cook. Of course, Salome kept ordering me around. I was the one doing basically everything as if it was my daughter that was getting married. Her daughter was asked to remain in my bedroom and not do anything, while I had to slave around. I was infuriated, but what could I have done? Constance was there and she was happy to see me as always, but strangely she couldn't look me in the eye. Every time she would try, she would quickly look away and speak to me without looking me right in the eye. That was a bad sign, according to my mother's old wives tales. She would say that whenever a person doesn't want to look you in the eye like that, the person was going to die. Everything felt

very ominous that day, and yet Masalesa, being the youngest of them started crying for no reason. My grandmother loved alcohol, so she never saw it fit to care for my siblings.

Koko: “Yoh (Oh)!, no man! Bina! Come and take your brother! Make him shut up! We can't ruin this day.”

I went and took him from her and carried him on my back. Despite him crying and being restless, I had to carry on cooking and doing all the duties I was assigned with him on my back. I hadn't even taken a proper bath that day, but I was still expected to do my “duties”.

Bina: “Kopa go ja nyana fela (Can I at least just eat a bit), Mmane (aunt) Salome?”

Salome: (annoyed) “There is no time to eat, Bina! Keng (what is it)?! You don't want to assist in making your sister's day special? I mean maybe you wish you were the one getting married today!”

Oh, there she went again.

Connie: "Let me take the baby, you go eat and I'll continue."

I was grateful for Constance. She still wasn't looking me in the eye and I just felt so dizzy and hungry. I only realized then that I hadn't eaten since 6am. It was about 12pm and almost time for the negotiations. While was eating as fast as I could, Salome came storming into the house.

Salome: (frantically) "Ba fihlile (They have arrived)! Wena (you), Bina! Go get your blanket and remain in your bedroom with my daughters. Wait for us to call you out."

I was annoyed, but I did as I was told. I went to my bedroom, and I could already tell that my grandmother was right about it all. Salome's eldest daughter, the one who was getting married that day, looked really weird. Her face was fuller than usual, and she was eating non-stop. I had to tend to her all day as part of my duties, while her sisters were busy on their phones the entire morning. Such inequalities in black families are the real reason that so many don't get along. They just ignored me

unlike Vanessa. She was talkative, but she was never mean to me. They were even complaining about my bedroom, saying that it was a bit smelly. They were obviously lying because I was a lot cleaner than they ever were. I cleaned my room every single day and I was a Domestos fan. I could not clean without adding some Domestos in my water. I just ignored them as well and went to my wardrobe and got my blanket, when I was startled at what I found.

Bina: (irritated) “Who the fuck decided to put a used pad in here?!”

Salome's 2nd born: “Oh, that was me. I forgot to wrap it and take it outside. We're not supposed to leave the bedroom, remember?”

I was so upset. I mean, it was only their eldest sister who was not supposed to leave the bedroom, but they decided to join in on the abuse. They were all so dirty and untidy – and my mother would always say that men loved untidy women for one reason only; they were excellent in bed.

Bina: (shouting) “Bjanong why o sa e tate gona bjale o e lahla (so why don't you wrap it right now and throw it away)?!”

Salome's 2nd born: (rolling eyes) “Gosh, Bina, why do you enjoy embarrassing yourself like this? You are just a little maid like your mother was, so just do us all a favour and throw it away.”

I was so angry that I just saw red at that moment. I gave her one good look, hoping that she would say she was joking, but she was dead serious. What angered me even more was the fact that she found it amusing. Clearly she didn't hear about what I did to Gladys. I knocked out four of her front teeth. My eyes were probably dilated and I just felt so hot. Before I knew it, I jumped at her. I ripped her stupid Brazilian weave off her head while she was screaming out in pain. I started punching her while I was on top of her. Her two sisters were also screaming, calling for my aunt Salome, but I just didn't care. I wanted to teach her a lesson. I was most probably going to get into trouble for doing that, but fuck it. I just wanted to show her that she was wrong for messing with me. Before I knew it, my aunt Salome came rushing into the bedroom.

Salome: (shocked) “Go diragala eng (what is happening)?! Hey, wena (you)! Get off my daughter! Who do you think you are?!”

I got even more angered and I just didn't stop, until she pulled me away from her and gave me a big, fat slap across the face. I didn't care – I wasn't even in pain, but I was so happy to see that disgusting satisfied look wiped off her daughter's face.

Salome: (angrily) “Why are you beating my daughter up like this?! You're an animal!”

Bina: “She put her used pad in my wardrobe and didn't even try to take it away.”

She gave me another slap.

Salome: (screaming) “I don't care! Are you trying to ruin my daughter's day, Bina?! O nale swele ga kana (are you that miserable)?!”

Bina: “Ga ke na swele (I'm not).”

Salome: (shouting) “Shut the fuck up! Get into your blanket and compose yourself. I'll deal with you once our guests are gone.”

I was not pleased nor surprised that she wasn't on my side. I was the only one who didn't have a mother to back me up, so of course I'd always be the scapegoat for every little thing. I smiled in pride because I knew that she would take a few days to heal. She would never forget that day – either way. Only the last born, the bride and I had to take part in the lobola process because the second born was bleeding then. She couldn't even leave the bedroom because the guests were already in the house. I enjoyed every moment as I chuckled silently. They called the last born out first. She had to walk out with a blanket covering her and leaving a little space off her face, so that she could see. The groom's family had to try and identify their bride like that. She came back after about two minutes, so I guess they knew that she wasn't the one.

Salome: (irritated) “A reye wena (let's go).”

She called me out to go through the same process and I knelt down.

Salome: (smiling) “Ke o makoti wa lona (is this your bride)?”

I could see a few people from that family. They looked so sophisticated; the men were dressed in really good suits and I could smell their expensive cologne from a mile away. The grandmother had to identify the bride. She took a good look at me and squinted for a while.

Grandmother: “Ee, ke ena (Yes, it is her).”

I smiled a little and died of laughter internally. I knew that Salome was deeply annoyed.

Grandmother: “Reveal yourself, my dear.”

I slowly took off the blanket from my face, and they all gasped in shock, while Salome was reeling in disappointment.

Grandfather: “Ga se ena (It is not her).”

Grandmother: "Are you sure?"

Grandfather: "Yes."

Grandmother: "Bring the real bride."

Salome nodded and brought my cousin to kneel next to me.

Grandmother: "Reveal yourself."

My cousin did as she was asked, and they all started gasping in shock. It was a different kind of shock as to when I was revealed.

Grandfather: (surprised) "Hao (Wow)! That one looks way more beautiful than this one."

He said that pointing at me.

Grandmother: "Are you single, my baby? I have another son - "

Salome didn't even wait for her to finish and interrupted her rudely.

Salome: (interrupting) "She is our maid. She is off the table."

Grandmother: "Ao (is it)? You look so alike."

Salome just wasn't interested in anything the poor old woman had to say.

Salome: "Bina, you can go now."

I walked away feeling so satisfied. I knew that I managed to hurt them both a little bit. It was no consolation, but it made me feel a lot better knowing that I could hurt them the same way they always hurt me. We went about our day and I went back to Constance as soon as the negotiations were done. I had

to dish up for our guests and they were so intrigued to see me. They kept trying to engage in a conversation with me and every time they did that, Salome would take me away from them. Constance was so helpful and when it was about 6pm, she started complaining of a stomach ache. So, I suggested that she go home to rest. While I was washing the dishes that evening, Masalesa had finally calmed down. He had been crying and restless all day. As I was busy in the back yard, I felt a really horrible slap across my face. I landed on the floor in disbelief and saw Salome standing right before me; enraged and holding a belt in her one hand.

Salome: (angrily) “Who do you think you are, Bina? Hmm? You beat up my daughter and tried to ruin my other daughter's day?! Is it my fault that God doesn't favour you, you little piece of shit?!”

She looked so scary, and I was actually so frightened. I was even too afraid to say a word.

Salome: “Mmago wa masepa (your shitty mother), left you and I am so glad. I thought I had one less trash to deal with, but then you actually turned out worse than she was. You little

fucker. I wish nothing good to come your way, and tonight I am going to show you not to mess with me ever again.”

She did the unthinkable; she started beating me with the belt as I screamed out in pain. I cried for help and even called out to my grandmother.

Bina: (screaming) “Koko! Koko! Thusang (Help)! Wa mpolaya (you're killing me), Mmane (aunty)!”

Salome: (shouting) “E no swa (just die)! Die like the dog you are! Go and meet your mother!”

My grandmother emerged from wherever she was and pulled Salome away from me.

Koko: (shouting) “Wa gafa (Are you crazy), Salome?! Do you want this little bitch to report you to the police?!”

Salome: (angrily) “I don't give a fuck! Why are you so worried? You never loved her anyway!”

She looked at me and stood right on top of me and stared me in the eyes. Little did I know that I came face to face with Lucifer's wife that night.

Salome: (livid) “Wa bona wena (you know, you). You think you're so special, don't you? Just because you are light you think you are better looking than my daughter?! Wa loya (you are a witch)! All those people thought you were so beautiful, keng (what is it)?! Did you use muthi (witchcraft) on them?!”

Bina: (crying) “Aowa, Mmane (no, Aunty)!”

Salome: (smiling) “I am so glad I got rid of your father when I had the chance. You honestly thought that you could live the dream, didn't you? Your mother thought she could get everything good coming her way? Wa bona wena (you know you)? You will never amount to anything and I curse you and your future children! A gona ngwana wa Dimakatso a tlo phalang bana ba ka (I refuse to let Dimakatso's children excel better than my children)!”

Wait, what did I just hear?

Bina: (shocked) "What?"

Koko: (worried) "Salome, no."

Salome: "Keng, Mma (what is it, mom)?! Are you afraid that she will find out you were in on it too? Ga se wena o nkisitseng ngakeng (aren't you the one who took me to the witchdoctor)? Wena (you), are not special. You are poor and will always be poor. Don't even think that just because you are light you can find a good man. You will die poor and if I ever hear that you are doing better than my children – I'll personally cut off that filthy, white pussy of yours!"

I was so shocked. My head was spinning in different directions. I felt as if I was literally living a dream. A nightmare even.

Bina: "This can't be happening. This can't be real."

Salome: “Believe it, sesi (sis). As of now on, you will no longer go to school. You are going back to being a street vendor – or else I will kill you just like I killed your useless father.”

Koko: “Salome!”

Salome: “Wena Mma, ema nyana, man (you, mother, wait a minute). I give you money – I give you a comfortable allowance, so unless you don't want to lose out on that – you'd better keep a leash on this bitch. As of tomorrow, nape o namele train o rekisa (you'd better get on a train and go sell)!”

Isaiah 5:20 says; “Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter! “

10

“Your time is limited, so don’t waste it living someone else’s life. Don’t be trapped by dogma – which is living with the results of other people’s thinking.” – Steve Jobs

Bina

My entire body was on fire, but that was the least of my pain. The pain that worried me most was the emotional scars that I endured during that evening. Never in my life would I have thought that Salome would have done something so horrific. I mean, I remembered my mother told me that someone close to her did something really bad to her, but it never occurred to me that that is what she was talking about. How dare Salome do that? How dare she play God with other people's lives? I was crying; crying because I felt as if God only heard the rich. I mean, Salome's life was flowing instead of her dying the same way my father died. Yes, I knew that the Bible said that every dog gets its day, but that day takes forever to come. I was so angry, bewildered and torn. I hated her even more than before and as for my grandmother, I despised her for keeping such a secret. I had heard about witchcraft in families, but I never thought in my wildest dreams that I'd be

on the receiving end. I couldn't stay there – something within me just told me that I shouldn't spend another night there – or I'd most probably never make it out there alive. I heard a familiar voice speak to me as I was crying myself to sleep in my bedroom.

Dimakatso: “Bina, ngwanaka (my child). Get up. You can't sleep here. Get up, take all the money you have and leave with your siblings.”

I was so frightened; I felt goosebumps and the entire room felt heavy; but not in a bad way. It felt as if there was some entity present in my room.

Bina: (frightened) “Mama?”

Dimakatso: “Yes, my baby. Get out of there. You don't have much time.”

Bina: “What do you mean? How come I can hear you?”

Dimakatso: "Because I am here – I am always here. Do you think I would enjoy seeing you suffer? Get out of there."

Bina: "Where will I go? I mean, Constance stays so far and it is already night time."

Dimakatso: "Don't bother, she passed away an hour ago."

My heart sank yet again. I felt as if I had been carrying the entire world on my shoulders even before my life began.

Bina: (crying) "I can't do this, Mama. I can't."

Dimakatso: "Life isn't for the faint hearted, Bina. You have to get up and face life head on. Or else, you will lose out and be someone's slave for the rest of your life. Get up and leave. Take my children with you."

I don't know where I found the strength to do that, but I got up. I was still in tears and they were blinding me because I just couldn't stop crying. I immediately took out a big bag and

packed all the clothes I could; my uniform and my books. I tiptoed around the house and luckily, my grandmother was passed out on the couch. I saw a few beer bottles around her, so she was way out of it. I took out my hidden box that I used for all the money I had. I counted the money and I had about R8000. I saved all the money I got from Mama's December salary, the money she gave me for my birthday as well as the little money Malome Joell would give me for some lunch. I had no idea where I was going, but I just had to leave. My mother wouldn't just appear out of nowhere and warn me for nothing. I went to Lesiba and Matome's bedrooms. I found them asleep, but I woke them up. They were frightened to see all my bruises. I had even forgotten all about them. Once I explained the situation, they didn't hesitate – they packed all they could and headed out with me. We took the rest of our siblings with us and walked out. Halfway towards the gate, Lesiba stopped us.

Lesiba: “Emang pele (wait a minute).”

I could see the rage in his eyes and I knew he was planning something.

Bina: "Lesiba, we don't have a lot of time – let's go."

Lesiba: (shaking head) "Nka se tloge (I can't leave) without teaching this witch some manners."

He stormed back into the house, leaving me worried and came back out with my grandmother's purse. It had so much money in it.

Bina: (shocked) "Lesiba, o searchitse Koko (you searched Koko)?"

Lesiba: (nodding) "We need all the money we can find right now. A re vayeng (let's go)."

I wanted to laugh, but the situation just didn't allow me to do that. It was about 9pm and the taxis were quite finished. It would take a while for us to find a taxi at that time of the night. We walked together, not knowing where we would sleep that evening, but because I serve a living God, I knew that a miracle would somehow happen. After about half an hour of

walking to who knows where, we saw a taxi stop right beside us. The driver opened the door and it was Malome Joell.

Malome Joell: (worried) “Eh, bana (hey, kids). Le ya kae ka di bag ka nako e (where are you headed off to with bags in your hands at this time of the night)?”

Bina: “Hi. We... I don't know where we're going, but we're going.”

He took one good look at me and then at my siblings and just knew that we were in some kind of trouble. I had absolutely forgotten that I had bruises all over me. That must have triggered him.

Malome Joell: “Get in.”

We didn't hesitate, I mean by then we had already known him for so long and we were fond of him. I had no other feelings of him other than that of an uncle. He said nothing, but I could see his face was hardened and he kept glancing at me via the

rearview mirror. He was clearly upset about my bruised body, and we all didn't say a word the entire ride further. I knew my siblings were angered; and knowing how temperamental Lesiba and Matome were – they wouldn't hesitate to take out revenge on my aunt and grandmother should they have gotten the chance. None of us even bothered to ask where we were going, but after a few minutes, Malome Joell stopped and walked out to open the gate. It had only dawned on me that he had taken us to his house. I felt so horrible; I mean the last thing I wanted was to burden people with my life including my siblings. We weren't anyone's problem. Malome Joell came back into the car and drove in.

Bina: (anxiously) Malome Joell, we can't stay here. We can't possibly inconvenience you like this.”

He just gave me one stern look and said nothing else. He walked towards our side and opened the door.

Malome Joell: “Follow me.”

We didn't protest; we walked right behind him. We found Portia cooking and she smiled as soon as she saw us. I could see that she knew immediately what the problem was, but she just didn't want to ask.

Malome Joell: “Mogatshaka (my wife), the kids need to stay with us for a while.”

Portia: (smiling) “Of course. There is more than enough room.”

Most people in the villages build big houses; so their house had about ten bedrooms, so we were sorted, but I didn't want to burden them like that. It would not have been fair. She showed us to the bedrooms we'd be sharing, and even though Lesiba and Matome were so worried about me – I reassured them that I'd be fine alone. Portia finally had a one on one with me as soon as she closed the bedroom door.

Portia: (teary) “Are you okay?”

It dawned on me at that moment that I actually had no one in my life. No one cared about me and I had to face the world alone. I had to take on the role of a mother to my siblings and I just had no idea where to begin. All those thoughts were so consuming and just cried.

Bina: (shaking head) “No.”

She embraced me so warmly and brushed my back. The pain of all those bruises was slowly subsiding and were replaced by her warmth.

Portia: “It will be okay. Listen, let me run you a warm bath to ease those bruises. Then you guys can come and eat.”

I guess she was used to eating dinner that late because her husband had worked until late. She was such a darling. I got into the bath tub and she had put in some savlon. She offered to bathe me and disinfect the bruises. I only realized once I took off my clothes that I had been bleeding profusely. Portia nursed me back to health that evening and dished up for all of us. She was so in love with Hunadi and Masalesa, that it just

felt so natural. Malome Joell was quiet the entire time during dinner. I had no idea what he was thinking, but I was grateful that he found me that evening. After dinner, I offered to help Portia with the dishes – I insisted actually despite me having to go to school the following day. The holidays were over and that was a rather distasteful end to our March holidays. We went to our respective bedrooms, and I knelt down for the very first time ever since my mother died. I had lost so much hope and faith, but having her visit me like that showed me that she was and would always be with me.

Bina: (praying) “Father God, I thank you so much for the life I have. I know, I haven't been very grateful and I most probably don't deserve your mercy, but you have been quite good to me. My mother gave me a good life, and that was all because of You. You have been there for me and I haven't been repaying you for your kindness towards me. Despite my hardened life, you have shown me so much mercy. Hebrews 4:16; “Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. I need you now more than ever, oh, Lord. I pray and ask you that you please protect my siblings and I. Help us to achieve our dreams and show our enemies that hatred brings

nothing but greater blessings upon those they hate. That is all I ask of you, God. Amen.”

I felt so much lighter after my prayer, and just as I was about to doze off, I heard a stern knock on the door. I assumed it was Portia, so I just asked the person to come in.

Bina: “Come in.”

I was a bit alarmed when it was Malome Joel. I was in my pajamas, and it was a dress pajama. I never really walked around anyone looking like that – let alone a man. I quickly covered myself with the bedding.

Malome Joel: (firmly) “Are you okay?”

Bina: (nodding) “Yes.”

Malome Joel: “Who did this to you?”

He looked so aggravated and I hesitated telling him. I asked myself what exactly he would do to someone who had hurt me. I got the feeling he really adored me, and most probably thought of me as his child. I don't know.

Malome Joel: "I won't ask you again."

Bina: (hesitantly) "Salome."

Malome Joel: (nodding) "Sleep. You have school tomorrow. I'll take you."

He switched off my light and said goodnight as he walked out. I felt a bit uneasy, but I just let him be. I took him as a father figure and I just appreciated having him in my life. I got the feeling that everything was going to be just fine. The following morning, Portia woke us all up so that we could get ready for school. The house had two bathrooms and all the bathrooms had a bath tub and a shower. My brothers were able to share a bathroom, while I took a bath on my own. Portia was so nice to us, she made us lunch and ensured that she stayed with Hunadi and Masalesa while the rest of us went to school. Pebetsi was

only in Grade 8, but he was old enough to understand everything that was happening. Malome Joel got us all in his taxi and we had to drive past my grandmother's house to fetch Selaelo. She had no idea what had happened and sadly my face was still a bit swollen.

Selaelo: (frowning) "What happened to your face?"

Bina: "Re tla bolela (we'll talk)."

She just nodded and I appreciated that she understood me just as much as I understood her. When we got to school I still had a hard time processing it all. Within the course of the day, I received news that indeed Constance had died. She died of food poisoning. That gave me chills down my spine because I knew that the only person who was capable of that was Salome. I mean, did she really hate me that much as to kill innocent people? Why didn't she kill me instead then? It would have saved her a lot of trouble had she just killed my siblings and I, honestly. My heart was aching and when I re-enacted the entire scene to Selaelo, she was in disbelief.

Selaelo: "I knew it! Ke tsibile (I just knew it)! I told you that all those stories about her were true. Yerr (wow)! She must have a pretty solid deal with Lucifer himself. So, what now, friend?"

Bina: (raising shoulders) "I have no idea. All I know is that we can't be staying with Portia and Malome Joel forever. That just wouldn't be right at all."

Selaelo: "Hear them out. I mean, your mother wouldn't rock up and make you meet up with Malome Joel if he wasn't a good man. I had my doubts about him, but I do hope he takes good care of you. You are vulnerable, Bina and anyone can take advantage of that situation. Just be careful. You are almost there, my friend. Soon, we'll be going to Varsity and we will be career women."

I felt a bit saddened by that, I mean I had absolutely no money nor the means to go there.

Bina: "You know very well I don't have the finances."

Selaelo: "Don't be so negative. You are smart, so you will get a bursary. I'm here, you and I need one another. We'll be okay."

I smiled as she consoled me. I just knew that God loved me. He gave me a really good friend who adored me just as much as I adored her. She never judged me once and that was the one special thing about Selaelo. We were basically sisters. After school, Malome Joel fetched us and we had to drive past Koko's house yet again to drop off Selaelo. I felt so uneasy whenever we drove past her house. She waved at us, but Malome Joel gave her a stern look and he stopped right at her gate.

Malome Joel: "Selaelo, do you mind if I drop you off here today? I have something I have to do."

Selaelo: "Sure, Malome Joel. Bye

Advertisement

friend. Bye, guys."

We greeted her goodbye and Malome Joel made me feel very uneasy. He looked so pissed, and I could only pray that it would

end well. The last thing I needed was to be an accomplice to murder.

Malome Joel: "Stay here, guys. I'll be right back."

He got out of the car, while we just watched anxiously. Koko thought he was most probably having a bad day as she walked out of the yard and met him at the gate. We could hear everything they were talking about.

Koko: (smiling) "Hao (goodness), Joel. Ga wa mpona ke go dumedisa (Didn't you see me greeting you)? I see you took my grandchildren. Ba boa neng (when are they coming back)?"

I saw Malome Joel roll his left hand into a fist. I only noticed that day that he was left handed. He pulled Koko by her hair right there and slapped her a few times. She was screaming, but he didn't care. That left me so stunned. I had never seen him hit a woman before.

Malome Joel: (angrily) “Ke utlwe gape ba re sefebe sa gao sela ba reng ke Salome (If I ever hear that that bitch of yours Salome) beat Bina up like that ever again – you will have me to deal with! I don't take lightly to witches who kill their sons in law and their daughters in law, but mostly I hate abuse with my whole heart. You don't deserve to live and if I were God, I'd have taken care of you a long time ago. You'd better stay the fuck away from Bina and those kids, and do me a big favour – bring all their documents and their SASSA cards or else, I will get you arrested, pay for your bail and set you alight myself. Do we understand each other?!”

Koko: (frightened) “Ye... Yes, I understand you.”

He slapped her a few more times before he roughly pushed her towards the ground and kicked her right in the face. She was wailing and cursing while on the ground, but he didn't care. People were watching but they weren't doing anything at all. I even wondered if it wasn't because they knew just what he was capable of. He got back into the taxi as he was breathing heavily and drove off as if nothing had happened. He drove around and I thought we were going back to his house, but he went to the mall instead.

Malome Joel: "Are you hungry, kids?"

Of course, my brothers said yes without even thinking twice. He bought us a bucket of KFC and some cold drink and we went back to his house. My brothers couldn't stop raving about how Malome Joel taught Koko an unforgettable, valuable lesson. Of course, Portia wasn't too pleased about her husband being so violent towards an elderly woman in broad daylight.

Portia: "Joel, how many times must I tell you not to lose it like that?"

Malome Joel: "That woman is evil, I have been biting my tongue, but go lekane (it is enough). I can't let her treat these children like a vile pile of shit."

Portia just nodded and I sort of felt that we were adding to their unknown list of problems. They didn't need to feel obliged to care of us as their own. So, without any further ado, I addressed the issue.

Bina: "I'd like to thank you both for taking my siblings and I in. I mean, you weren't and still aren't compelled to do that. We'll be out of your hair as soon as we find ourselves a place to stay."

They both looked so shocked to hear me say that.

Portia: "Bina, please, stop talking like that. No one ever said anything about you guys moving out of here. Did you hear Joel or I say such?"

I shook my head in embarrassment.

Bina: "I wasn't trying to be rude."

Malome Joel: "We understand, believe me we do. But Portia and I spoke about this. You all have no reason to feel as if you're over burdening us. You are more than welcome to stay here for as long as you need. You all deserve love, and we believe we can give you that. My wife and I still hope to have

our own children, but that does not mean that you are not a part of our lives. We have known you for so long, Bina and you have been through so much. No one deserves such constant pain especially at your age. Let us help you.”

I felt so humbled to hear that straight from the horse's mouth. I mean, I never actually thought that I'd get a break like that. Perhaps it was God's way of letting me know that He was indeed with me.

Bina: (teary) “I... I don't know what to say.”

Portia: “You don't have to say anything. This is your home now and we will ensure that we do our best to be good parents to you – all of you. I don't want you to worry any more. You focus on your matric year, while I take care of Masalesa and Hunadi. I think it is high time they started creche. And please, I don't want to hear you speaking of getting a job. We vowed to take care of you. You just ensure that you get your grades up.”

I cried so much with relief instead of pain for the first time in a very long while. I just got up and hugged them both. I felt

home; I felt loved and I felt at peace. That is what I had been yearning for. My brothers really appreciated it as well and we hit it off just like that. My grandmother wasted no time as she gave Malome Joel our documents and cards the following day. I asked Portia to keep them for us, and she even took me to Home Affairs to get an ID, along with Masalesa and Lesiba. We were starting to feel home and as if we actually had a real family. They were so loving and caring and we were even having family dinners every single night. The house was no longer empty and cold, instead we filled it with laughter and joy. Portia and I did everything together and it felt really good. Constance was buried within a week of her death, and I heard that my uncle wasn't taking her death too well. I was also so heartbroken, but I told myself that God would punish those responsible. A month later, it felt as if my life was getting right back on track. I was able to focus more on my school work, and I managed to push my grades up to the level I was used to. I ensured that I studied harder than I used to just after my mother had passed on. I decided to pin my entire life on my goal – to become a Medical doctor. I was so set on showing all those against me that God's plan wasn't their plan. One Friday, Selaelo invited me to a party.

Selaelo: “Mogwera (friend), I've been invited to my cousin's party. Do you want to come?”

Bina: “Parties aren't really my thing, Selaelo. You know that.”

Selaelo: “I was actually telling you – not asking you. Come on, it will be fun. I mean, you never ever go out. This is your time to take a breather, man.”

Bina: “I don't know.”

Selaelo: “Come on, you know me and I'll be right by your side the entire time.”

I wasn't really set on going, but it was the following day and I just told myself that I'd feel a lot different and more psyched about going 24 hours later.

Bina: “Okay.”

Selaelo: "Good. I'll see you tomorrow then. A re tsamaye (let's go) before Malome Joel starts complaining."

We greeted Malome Joel and he was really excited. I guess Fridays did that to a lot of people.

Malome Joel: "So, any plans tomorrow, girls?"

Selaelo: "Well, my bff and I have been invited to my cousin's party."

Malome Joel: "Your cousin mang (who)? Raymond?"

Selaelo: "Wa mo tseba (You know him)?"

Malome Joel: "Yes, I am friends with his dad. We go way back."

Selaelo: "See, B? I told you we'd be safe."

Malome Joel: "I can take you guys there if you don't mind."

Selaelo: "We'd absolutely love that."

Malome Joel: "I was also invited and I thought I'd stay home, but seeing that you will be going, I might just go to keep an eye on you two."

I wasn't really feeling the whole party thing, but I guess Malome Joel was looking out for us as always. We went home and went about our day. I decided to take a break from studying and thought about the upcoming party. I had no idea what to wear for a party, so I decided to ponder Selaelo's mind about my fears and anxiety.

Bina: "Selaelo, what do people wear to parties?"

Selaelo: "Lol, Bina, you just enjoy overthinking everything, you know. Wear whatever you want. A simple jean and Tshirt, but with that body, I'd go for a gorgeous maxi dress – perhaps a short one even."

I was never one to reveal my legs in clothing. Even when I wore dresses in summer, I ensured to wear long dresses or skirts. I just felt really uncomfortable wearing short clothing. Perhaps it was because I had never tried it.

Bina: "Ai (oh), ke tla bona (I'll see)."

Selaelo: "Tell you what, I can come over a few hours before the party and we can try out a few outfits. You might even get you a nice boyfriend."

Bina: "You know very well I have no time for boys."

Selaelo: "Come on, you are too pretty to be single next year, man."

Bina: "We'll talk tomorrow. Good night."

Selaelo: "Just think about it. Night."

I put my phone away and prayed and dozed off almost immediately. I got up the following morning feeling a bit weird. I couldn't explain the feeling, but I just didn't feel like my usual self. I felt as if a weird knot was stuck in the pit of my stomach and it made me a little uneasy. I tried ignoring it and every now and again it would emerge and make its appearance again throughout the day. Selaelo came a few hours before the party as she promised and we did try on a few outfits. I was happy with a simple jean and Tshirt, but as soon as she saw me in a Maxi dress, she went crazy.

Selaelo: (excitedly) "Ja (yes), that's it. That's the one."

It was not very short, it was about knee-length, but it still felt a bit short for me.

Bina: "Aowa (No), it is too short."

Selaelo: "Bina, you're way too beautiful to dress like an old lady, come on."

She had a point, but I had no idea how to navigate it all.

Selaelo: “Come, sit. Let me do your make-up.”

Bina: (surprised) “I have never worn make-up in my entire life.”

Selaelo: “Duh. I know that. You and I have been friends since birth, remember?”

I chuckled and let her be. She did her magic and for the first time in my life, I wore make up. She did my brows and added some eye shadow. I was even wearing lipstick. I looked like a completely different person. She even curled my hair. It was long enough, and she did it so well.

Selaelo: “Hehe! Introducing Bina Makwetla! The hottest bitch in town.”

Bina: (amazed) “Wow, Selaelo. I have never looked this good before in my entire life.”

Selaelo: “That's why I'm here, boo. We most definitely have to take a picture of this moment.”

She took a few good pictures of me and I still didn't like the idea of me wearing a dress that short. I took my denim jacket with as I was wearing a pair of slippers. I just felt comfortable covering my arms. I felt a bit naked whenever I didn't wear something that covered my shoulders. She also wore a short maxi dress and had a denim jacket as well. We looked so good, even if I had to admit it myself. As we walked out of my bedroom, Portia saw us and complimented us. She even asked to take a few pictures with us, and well, Malome Joel joined in as well. On the way to the party, he just couldn't stop raving and complimenting us. That infamous knot in the pit of my stomach emerged yet again, but I decided not to let it ruin my day. I vowed to enjoy my day no matter what the outcome.

Psalm 4:23 says; “Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.”

11

“Life is not a problem to be solved, but a reality to be experienced.” – Soren Kierkegaard

Bina

We finally arrived at the party at about 3pm. I could hear the noise all the way from inside of the taxi. I wasn't sure how I felt about it because I was not a noisy person. Even when playing music, I just wasn't into noise. Selaelo could tell how uneasy I felt, but she was right there by my side, as promised. She held my hand and we walked out with Malome Joel right beside us. As we entered, Selaelo greeted a boy who looked our age if not a little older than us. I assumed that was Raymond, Mr. Party.

Selaelo: (excitedly) “Raymond, I'd like you to meet my best and only friend, Bina.”

He looked so hot to be honest. I never even thought that I'd look at someone of the opposite sex and think of them as hot. He had cornrows, which was a bit corny for me, but he was tall and chocolate coloured. My goodness, his body looked like that

of a movie star. He looked at me and I felt myself feel hot for the first time in my life. I couldn't believe I was blushing. I felt all sorts of butterflies within my tummy mixed with that uncomfortable knot.

Raymond: (smiling) "Hi, Bina. I'm Ray. Nice to meet you."

He kissed the back of my hand and Selaelo stopped him immediately.

Selaelo: "A ka re ke go tlišetsa cherry, neh (I never said I am bringing you a girlfriend, hey)? She is too sweet, too smart and way too kind for you."

Raymond: (chuckling) "Okay then."

He led the way for us and just before we disappeared into the crowd, Joel called out to us.

Malome Joel: "Selaelo, Bina! Be careful. If you need anything; I'm right here."

We just nodded and went about with our business. We were introduced to other people our age. They weren't really people I'd consider to hang out with, but we gelled. They were nice to us. I kept pulling my dress down as I felt it was too short and was revealing a little too much, but after trying the cocktails that Raymond kept bringing, I was starting to relax. I was even feeling a bit hot, so I had removed my denim jacket two hours later. I wasn't feeling too good about drinking alcohol while living in Malome Joel's house, but he assured me that it was okay. The music was flowing and so were the drinks. I kept trying to drink water in between the drinks, but for some odd reason I just felt a little too drunk than usual. I mean for a person who wasn't used to drinking alcohol at all, I was bound to get drunk quicker than others.

Bina: "Selaelo, I'm feeling a bit tired. Can I sleep a bit?"

Selaelo: "Are you sure you don't want to go home?"

Bina: "Yes, let me just sleep it off. I'll come back."

Selaelo: “Okay. Ray, can you please take Bina to one of the guest rooms or something? She'd like to take a nap.”

Raymond: “Here, take my room key. There are too many people going in and out of the house, she will be a lot safer there.”

Selaelo: “Thank you.”

By the time Selaelo and I headed into the house, I felt a bit dizzy. The house was so beautiful and it was a double storey. His room was right at the corner up the stairs. I didn't want people to see me like that so I tried my best to walk as normal as possible. I didn't understand. I only had about three cocktails yet I felt as if I had drank an entire 5litre bucket of alcohol. The moment we walked into the bedroom, I landed straight on the bed. My head was spinning and I just thought a nap would do me good.

Selaelo: “Hey, I'm going to lock you in and keep the key. I'll come check on you every 20 minutes, okay?”

I just nodded while her voice was sounding fainter as she kept talking. I tried opening my eyes, but all I saw was blurred images. I saw her closing the door and that was it. I dozed off. After what felt like about an hour maybe two, I didn't keep count, I tried getting up. I slowly opened my eyes and my head was incredibly heavy. My eyesight was still blurry and I could hardly see. I heard a sound that sounded like a key turning inside of the keyhole.

Bina: "Hello? Selaelo? Is that you?"

I saw a distorted image of someone opening the door. It didn't look like Selaelo because she was wearing a white dress. All I saw was a tall person, who had what seemed like a white Tshirt and perhaps a jean. I just couldn't tell.

Bina: "Hello? Who are you?"

The person closed the door and I heard the sound of the key turning into the key hole yet again. That was when my heart started racing as I feared what was about to happen. I tried

getting up, but my body failed me. I felt so weakened. I could hardly move, I couldn't see but I could hear the person speak.

Man: “Shh, I have been waiting such a long time for this, Bina, Bina.”

Bina: (scared) “Please, whoever you are – let me go.”

His voice sounded so distorted, but the more closer he got to the bed, the heavier he felt. His breath was tainted with whiskey and his body weight overpowered me. He touched my face, making me cry.

Bina: (crying) “Please... Please, stop. I'll do anything... Just stop.”

Man: “My Bina, all I wanted was to show you just how much I love you.”

He slowly put his hand in between my legs and slightly removed my panties to gain access to my privates. I tried screaming, but I

failed. I felt as if I was slowly fading away. I would feel as if I was passing out on and off, while catching glimpses of the man's distorted face. My legs felt as if they were spread apart, but I had no energy to even put them back together again. All I felt was this man, this heavy man on top of me breathing heavily into my ear and planting horrendously dirty kisses on my neck. I closed my heavy eyes and remembered nothing else.

Selaelo: "Bina! Bina! Bina, wake up!"

I slowly opened my eyes and it felt as if a huge truck had run me over. I looked around and I saw Selaelo right in front of me.

Bina: "How long have I been here?"

Selaelo: "You've been asleep for two hours. Here, I brought you some water and a pain killer."

I took it and drank the water, but my body felt so weird. I could smell whiskey on me, but then I could hardly remember even drinking any.

Bina: (frowning) "What did I drink?"

Selaelo: "You had three cocktails just like me, but I guess you aren't that used to alcohol."

I felt as if my vagina was a bit painful. I couldn't really tell because my entire body was just painful.

Selaelo: "Come on, let's get you home."

I nodded and she helped me walk. It was about 6pm by then and Malome Joel was already waiting for us outside his taxi. He was smoking and smiled when we appeared.

Malome Joel: (smiling) "Did you guys have a good time?"

Selaelo: "Yes, but Bina doesn't feel too good. I just hope that she is just reacting to alcohol. I should have never let her drink."

Malome Joel: "It's perfectly okay to experiment. She will be fine. Come, let's go."

I must have dozed off in the car ride home, because before I knew it I heard Malome Joel telling me to wake up.

Malome Joel: "Bina, tsoga (wake up). We are home."

I tried walking, but my legs felt so shaky and weak. Luckily Malome Joel caught me just before I landed on the ground. It felt as if the entire car ride was longer than usual

but nothing of that day even made any sense. He helped me into the house and luckily Portia was not around. I didn't want to disrespect her like that by arriving home drunk. I just couldn't feel anything, so I just wanted to sleep. I landed on my bed with the help of Malome Joel.

Malome Joel: "Can I get you anything?"

Bina: "No, I just want to sleep."

Malome Joel: "Okay. Good night then."

I drifted off to sleep. I felt as if I was pressed and that I needed to go to the toilet. I checked the time and it was about 10pm. I must have been seriously out of it. I still felt a bit light headed, but much better than how I felt earlier. I couldn't understand how I didn't remember anything that happened from the time we started drinking. I still could smell the whiskey on my neck and the smell of cigarette smoke on my clothes. I thought it was most probably because Malome Joel smoked a lot around us and also, a lot of people were smoking at the party. I rushed to the toilet when I felt as if I wanted to urinate. I went to the toilet and indeed, I was pressed, but as soon as I wiped myself, I was astounded. I saw a whole lot of slimy liquid on my toilet paper and I felt uneasy immediately. I checked my underwear and saw a blood stain. I started panicking because I wasn't even on my period. I put a finger inside of me and it felt so unnatural down there. It felt as if something was done to me. I took out my finger and my worst nightmare was confirmed. I saw more white liquid on my finger. Right after I removed my finger, the liquid just flowed down my legs and I started panicking. I felt as if I was getting a panic attack. Was I really raped?

I spent the entire night tossing and turning. I couldn't even sleep. I took a bath right after noticing that liquid coming out of me and the moment I got into the water, I just knew that I had been penetrated. I cried silently; I had failed myself to be honest. How could I allow myself to get so drunk when I was just a mere amateur when it came to alcohol? How would I even start such a conversation with Selaelo? I had no idea what had happened to me. I kept smelling the clothes and indeed, I could smell a scent that was not mine on it. Who could have been so cruel as to rape me? Did I really deserve such misery? I didn't even know where to start or who to trust with that kind of information. Before I knew it, it was already morning. It was time for church and I honestly didn't feel like going anywhere. I was so tired, but I couldn't say that I didn't want to go to church because Portia would have gotten the wrong idea of me. She would have thought that I was hungover and I didn't want to make time for God, or that I most probably was starting to act like a spoilt brat in her house. So, I got up and took a shower. My body was physically present, but my mind was far away. I had so many scenarios in my head like what if I had contracted HIV or even STDs or the worst possible scenario: what if I was pregnant? We all got ready for church and they tried engaging me in conversations. Malome Joel was rather quiet for the first time ever. He barely said a word to Portia, and she was just chatting away. She didn't ask me anything nor did she push me

to talk and I appreciated that about her. I couldn't even hear what the Pastor was saying; but I heard something about mistakes and how they weren't a deal breaker. He even said that God has forgiven us a long time ago, although it takes so long for one to forgive themselves. My grandmother was even so afraid to look at us, but I just didn't care. My life was at stake and I couldn't even tell anyone – not even my best friend. She tried calling me a few times but I ignored her calls. I texted her an hour later, telling her that I felt like shit. She just thought that I was hungover and blamed it on alcohol. I needed to come up with a plan on how to fix it all. I needed to think of an excuse as to why I couldn't go to school the following day.

Bina: “Mmane (Aunt) Portia, kgopela go ya clinic gosasa (May I please go to the clinic tomorrow)?”

She stopped what she was doing for a second and looked at me.

Portia: (frowning) “Is everything okay?”

Bina: "Everything is fine, I just don't feel so good. I think that I might be coming down with flu. I'm just not sure."

Portia: (raised eyebrow) "Okay, but you do know that you can tell me anything, right?"

Bina: "Yes, I know."

Portia: "Okay, I'll give you money to go to a doctor. I don't want you wasting your entire day at the clinic. You know how long one can wait there."

I thanked her and went to my bedroom. At least I didn't need to get up early. I had contemplated telling Selaelo the truth, it was eating me up and I didn't feel like going through such hell all on my own. Malome Joel was quiet the entire day, but on that particular night he knocked on my door and sat right at the edge of my bed.

Malome Joel: "I hear you want to go to the doctor tomorrow. Is everything okay?"

Bina: "Yes, everything is fine. I think I am coming down with flu."

Malome Joel: "Hmm, okay. You know you can tell me anything, right?"

Bina: "Yes."

Malome Joel: "Do you remember anything from yesterday?"

I was a bit taken aback as to why he would ask me that.

Bina: (shaking head) "No."

Malome Joel: "Okay. Don't beat yourself up about it. We all have drunk stories to tell."

I had no idea how to respond to his statement, so I just nodded. He bid me good night and that was the end of our awkward conversation. The following day, I didn't go to school. I told Selaelo that I had developed flu and was heading to the doctor. She sent me her regards and I waited for 8am. The doctor's office was opening at 8:30, so I wanted to be the first person there. I was a bit thankful that Malome Joel was not around. Portia had gone out and had left me with enough money to go to the doctor and take a taxi. I was truly thankful for her. I had mixed feelings about going to the doctor, but it was their job not to make us feel like shit. And I knew all about Doctor-Patient confidentiality. So, I ensured I was the very first one in the queue and I was finally called in.

Doctor: "Hello, young lady. What can I do for you?"

I had no idea how to tackle the issue, so I just put it out there.

Bina: "I went to a party and had a few drinks. I didn't feel well after that. I felt dizzy and my head was spinning, my entire body was painful. I hardly remember anything about that day, but I saw semen come out of me later that evening. My privates still feel sore and I feel as if I was penetrated."

It felt a bit relieved saying it out loud. I guess it is true what they have always said; The truth shall indeed set you free.

Doctor: “Okay, it sounds as if you were drugged. Have you ever heard of the date rape drug Ruphelin?”

Bina: “Yes.”

Doctor: “Okay, I am going to test you for a few things; HIV, STDs and I will draw some blood from you. I will also give you pills called Post-Exposure Prophylaxis, otherwise known as the PEP. This is given to rape victims quite often as we fear that you may have been exposed to HIV. You need to be consistent and take the pills for 28 days.”

I just nodded in relief as he tried making conversation while he drew my blood. He also tested me for HIV but I was negative – until further notice. He examined me down there and indeed he confirmed my worst fears.

Doctor: "I am afraid you are right. You were penetrated. There are traces of semen in your uterus as well."

I wanted to cry, but my eyes were too dried up.

Bina: "How long do I have to wait til I test for pregnancy?"

Doctor: "You need to come back in two weeks' time. In the mean time, I am going to refer you to a psychologist."

Bina: "No need for that."

Doctor: "It is standard procedure. You can keep it and use it the day you feel ready to go visit one. However, I strongly suggest that we open a case."

Bina: (shaking head) "No! I mean, I don't know who did this to me, Doctor. So please, let this stay between us. I know very well about Doctor-Patient confidentiality."

Doctor: (nodding) “Very well then. But the day you feel as if you are ready, we can open a case. I'll be right here.”

I nodded.

Doctor: “Take my number. I'll call you to notify you about your STD results within the next 24 hours.”

I thanked him and left. I had walked for so long, that I didn't even notice I was halfway home. I was so stressed, so ashamed that I had no idea what to think or even do. I had no energy left to cry – except think of the possibility of being pregnant. Once I got home, I checked the calendar and realized my period was due at the end of that week. The entire week was so draining and filled with so much anxiety. All I wanted was to get the next two weeks behind me. Selaelo noticed how different I was acting, but she decided not to push. I wasn't even concentrating much at school and I had withdrawn from all social activities. By the end of that week, my period never arrived, leaving me even more stressed than I was before then. The following week, I had to go for my follow up at the doctor. I chose not to tell anyone about it and use my own money. Once I was at the doctor, a huge bomb was dropped on me.

Doctor: "I'm afraid you are pregnant."

Bina: "Are you sure?"

Doctor: "Positive. You have options. Abortion is - "

Bina: (interrupting) "Thank you for your help, Doctor."

Just like that I left his practice and walked swiftly towards a direction I didn't even recognize. Tears were burning my cheeks and all I wanted to do was just die right there. I felt my chest closing in on me as I tried breathing more, the faster I walked – the more I just couldn't breathe properly. I gasped for air and felt as if something was just restricting my breathing in my throat. I tried to scream, but I collapsed right in the middle of the road.

Malome Joel: "What happened to her?"

Portia: “I don't know. I received a call from a stranger who said that she had collapsed in the middle of the road.”

Malome Joel: “Do you think she's sick? She's been behaving funny for the past few weeks.”

Portia: “She's probably a bit too stressed, that's all.”

I could hear Malome Joel and Portia talking about me. They had so much faith in me and yet there I was – lying on a bed they gave me and I was such a huge disappointment. My thoughts were agonizing and all I wanted to do was disappear or die. How was I even going to start telling them that I was pregnant with a stranger rapist's child?

Jonh 8:32 says; “And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

12

“The unexamined life is not worth living.” — Socrates

Bina

With each day that went by, it meant that my secret grew even bigger and it became even harder to keep it. I grew more and more depressed with each day, until one day at school. By then it had been about two weeks since I had found out I was expecting, which meant I was about 4 weeks pregnant. I felt like complete shit – emotionally and physically. I slept a lot and I could hardly keep anything down. The smell of cigarettes and some perfumes set me off and I vomited nearly every second of every day. I was at school and I asked Mrs. Mavuso to be excused. I rushed to the toilet and I vomited profusely. I felt so weak because everything I had ingested came right back up. It was basically pointless eating.

Selaelo: “Bina, open the door. I know you're in there.”

I flushed the toilet and opened the door for her.

Selaelo: "What is wrong with you? I know something is up and I am not leaving until you tell me."

I contemplated telling her, yet I was quiet. I was searching through my mind for the correct way to tell her.

Selaelo: (frustrated) "I know you're hiding something from me. Ever since the party you have been completely different and distant, Bina. I don't know what - "

Bina: (interrupting) "I'm pregnant."

I felt a bit relieved yet I cried. I cried because it felt good to finally share my darkest secret with my best friend. My tears were consuming my eyes and so were guilt and shame.

Selaelo: (aghast) "Wa reng (what do you mean)? Bjang (how)? I don't understand, I mean you don't even have a boyfriend."

Once again, I had to relive that awful day.

Bina: (crying) “That day at the party... I couldn't understand why I suddenly felt so dizzy and exhausted. I don't remember anything beyond the point of drinking those cocktails, apart from...”

I could tell just how guilty she felt.

Selaelo: “Except what?”

Bina: “I... I saw someone enter the bedroom – the very same bedroom I was sleeping in. I couldn't see him clearly, but... I heard him speak to me. He said... He said that he'd been waiting for too long for that moment. All I remember is that I felt him on top of me and I had no power nor energy to remove him from me. I kept slipping in and out of consciousness, and I would feel him kissing me and his hands... his hands were in between my legs. When you came to wake me up, I felt as if my vagina was just too painful. I felt as if something or someone was in there.”

Selaelo: (deplorably) "Bina..."

Bina: "I went to see a doctor that Monday and he said... He told me that I was drugged and raped. Ruphelin."

Selaelo was gobsmacked to put it lightly. She had no idea what to say or even do and I didn't blame her. She just cried lamentably as she embraced me so subtly. We cried together for a short time yet it felt like forever. I felt a little better; since the burden that had been consuming me had been taken off my shoulders. I was able to share my pain with my best friend.

Selaelo: "Do you have any idea who it could be?"

Bina: (shaking head) "No."

Selaelo: "We need to report this, Bina. You have to tell someone. For all we know it could not have been the first time this man has done such to a girl and he probably has his next victim on the list."

Bina: "No, Selaelo. You promised you wouldn't tell anyone."

Selaelo: "So you're just going to let him get away with it? Just like that?"

Bina: "No one will believe me. It could have been anyone at that party."

Selaelo: "I should never have forced you to go to that party. I just don't understand, really, I don't get it. I ensured that I locked and I had the key on me the entire time."

Bina: "Don't do that to yourself. You're not to be blamed for any of this."

Selaelo: "So, are you going to keep the baby?"

Bina: (shrugging) "I honestly don't know, I mean aborting it would mean murder, right?"

Selaelo: “Personally, I think God would understand. I mean, it won't be easy raising the child.”

Bina: “It's something I have to think long and hard about. I mean, it is an entire life and he or she did absolutely nothing wrong.”

Selaelo: “Yes, but you have to bear the scars of the entire incident for the rest of your life whenever you look at the child. Henceforth, I will support you no matter what you decide to do. I'm with you every step of the way.”

Bina: “I really appreciate that, friend.”

Three months later...

It had been a daunting few months and honestly I hated every moment of it. I was so conflicted, I mean on the one hand, I kept thinking that there were women like Portia who had been dying to have children and yet they weren't getting their deepest desire. Yet, there I was – a child was conceived

through rape. A child I never even planned on having. Wasn't it reiterated to us that children were a gift from God? Psalm 127: 3 – 5 says; “Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the children of one's youth. Blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them! He shall not be put to shame when he speaks with his enemies in the gate.”

My academics were suffering and my mental state was deteriorating slowly but surely. I couldn't keep anything down at all. I kept vomiting every chance I got. Selaelo was very supportive and so hands on. I was so perturbed because people already started having their suspicions about what was wrong with me. I was forever sleepy, I had already started gaining weight rapidly and I kept asking to go to the toilet almost every five minutes. A lot of my class mates even complained of being sleepy during every lesson and that could only mean that one of the girls were pregnant. Ever since my incident with Gladys, no one bothered to whisper shit about me to my face because they were afraid of getting a beat down. Fellow learners were already spreading rumours about me anonymously of course, and I could see that Portia was also having her doubts.

I didn't even feel like celebrating my 18th birthday. It was rather sombre; it being the very first birthday I had to spend without my precious mother, and yet another unwanted problem of pregnancy was added to my list. So, in conclusion – there was absolutely nothing to celebrate. I had no future and judging by the shit I wrote during the June exams, I could just as well kiss my dream of being a Medical Doctor goodbye. I had gone to bed early because I constantly felt lethargic. I could barely keep my eyes opened for any reason at all. I rushed to the toilet as soon as I felt nauseated yet again and I vomited all the dinner I had had earlier that evening. Upon exiting the bathroom, I found Portia standing right at the door.

Bina: (shaken) “You startled me.”

Portia: “I'm sorry. Can we talk?”

I felt so anxious – she looked so serious and I just knew what she was about to ask.

Bina: (edgy) “I... I am really tired, perhaps another time - “

Portia: "Are you pregnant?"

There it was – the bomb was dropped. I couldn't lie to her. She gave my siblings and I a warm house full of love and if I lied to her then it just wouldn't have been right at all. I looked at her and she was dead serious, causing me to feel so ashamed. I was panicking – my entire body betrayed me, I couldn't even move. I felt my palms start to sweat.

Portia: "I asked you a question."

Bina: (teary) "Yes."

Portia: "Who is the father?"

Bina: (ashamedly) "I don't know... I was... I was raped."

Portia started crying right on the spot.

Portia: (crying) "I have failed as a mother to you. I should have never let you go to that party."

What she said startled me because I had never told her anything about what happened that day.

Bina: (frowning) "What do you mean?"

Portia: (crying) "You have been behaving so weird ever since that party. You were never the same Bina again. I didn't have the heart to ask you about it, so I asked Joel about what could be the problem, and he said to me that he thought something traumatic might have happened to you but you just didn't want to talk about it."

Her statement about Joel sent a chilling shiver down my spine. How did he know that something traumatic had happened to me? Was he perhaps just a concerned father figure or could there have been more to it?

Portia: (crying) “Oh, Bina. I am so sorry, I should have been more observant. Now you have been going through this all by yourself. What kind of a mother am I?”

Bina: “It is not your fault, Mmane (aunt) Portia, really.”

Portia: “I should have done better. I just should have. Have you decided what to do about the baby?”

Bina: (shaking head) “No... I don't know...”

Portia: “I'm willing to take care of the baby. People don't have to know that it is yours – if you let me. You have your whole life ahead of you, Bina and it won't be easy taking care of a child. More especially a child you never planned on having.”

She was right; I knew she was, but I just didn't know if having the baby was even a good idea. I still had a few thoughts about possibly aborting it.

Bina: “I hear you.”

Portia: "Why haven't you reported it?"

Bina: "Because... I just know no one would believe me. I was drugged and raped and I would have to give a statement and be subjected to all those questions. I don't know if I can handle it."

Portia: "I understand. I am willing to walk down this road with you if only you let me. It wouldn't be fair to let you do this alone. Allow me to help you."

Bina: "Okay."

It felt so nice to hear her say that. At times, telling the truth is always best. Keeping a secret eats you up alive, whereas at times if you are just honest – the answer is right in front of you.

Bina: "Thank you, Mmane (aunty). I honestly was so afraid to tell you. I didn't want you to think of me as some loose girl."

Portia: “I would never judge you like that, Bina. We all have our lives to live and we all have demons in our closets. Don't worry about Malome Joel, I'll speak to him. As for your prenatal care – I'll take care of it. You won't need to attend the clinic if you feel ashamed. I have your back. Just please, be honest and open with me from now onwards, okay?”

I nodded and she gave me a warm hug. I was so relieved that she was so nice about the entire thing. I could finally be at ease knowing that she had my back. I truly felt as if Portia was Godsent and that everything was God's plan. I wouldn't call rape God's plan, but surely He wouldn't have made me pregnant if I wasn't meant to be the mother of that child. I decided that I'd pray on it. I hadn't seen much of Malome Joel apart from him dropping us off at school and picking us up. At times we had to use another taxi because he was busy on the road by the time we were done at school. Portia had come to me and told me that she spoke to Malome Joel and that he was okay with them raising my child. He never really touched the subject at all whenever I was around him

but he apparently bought a few small items and gave to Portia to give to me. Apparently he wanted me to feel at ease and to embrace the baby's existence – despite the situation. What kind of surprised me was that he wasn't as angry about the

entire rape issue as he was with my grandmother when he saw those bruises on me. I sort of expected him to go rogue or something and to search high and low for the rapist, but he was calm. I guess he didn't want to stress me out because I was busy with my matric year. At times I'd see him typing a message to me on WhatsApp and then he'd end up not sending me anything, so I never really spoke to him afterwards.

Portia had organised me a gynaecologist in Town and she made sure that she attended every appointment with me. Malome Joel would take us there and wait for us in the car, and as soon as we got out he would ask me how it went and he would ask to see the scans. He always asked to keep one as a memory. I didn't mind, I mean they were practically my parents. Portia explained the situation to the school and they were understanding, yet they couldn't accommodate me much because I mean, life just had to go on. They just ensured that no one gossiped about me or started any trouble for me. I tried my best, but still, my academics were deteriorating dismally. I couldn't focus – every time I tried to sleep at night, I'd get flashbacks of that day and I could hardly concentrate at school. Portia even suggested that I stop going to school and that I'd go back the following year, but it was already the third term and I couldn't afford to just leave school like that. Months

passed and it was December holidays again. By then I was about 8 months pregnant. I knew that my marks were most probably going to be horrible because I just didn't excel as well as I had hoped.

I was tired, and thank goodness I wasn't even showing at all until December month. My tummy wasn't even that big at all, and by then rumours had spread around the entire village, but Malome Joel ensured that he would sort out anyone who tried to start trouble for me. I had already bonded with the child, I felt the kicks and the idea of having the baby grew on me. The last appointment we had with the gynae, I was told that I was having a boy. Malome Joel was way too excited – even more than Portia was. My siblings knew that I was expecting and they were told about what happened to me. They were sad for me but they understood. Boys, will always be boys. Matome and Lesiba were practically forced twins and were very excited that they'd be going to Matric the following year.

December holidays were never fun for me because my mother's first death anniversary was fast approaching. I didn't want to leave my room at all. I knew that babies felt whatever the mother was feeling, but I just couldn't help the way I felt. I heard a stern knock on the door and before I could answer,

someone walked in. I lifted my head and I saw Malome Joel. He hadn't even been into my bedroom for quite some time.

Malome Joel: "Bina, please get dressed. We're going out."

Bina: "Where are we going?"

Malome Joel: "You'll see."

I decided to get up and just did what he said. Portia wasn't around and my siblings were out as well. Malome Joel grabbed his car keys and I just followed him. He opened the door for me and I got in. He started the car without saying a word and drove off. I kept myself busy on my phone and I was a bit taken aback by what I saw on my WhatsApp statuses. Malome Joel had the baby scans all over his statuses; from the third month all the way to the ninth. He even captioned the pictures "Can't wait to meet you, little one. Joel junior." I felt a bit uneasy by that, but I just thought that he was excited as he and Portia agreed to raise the baby as their own. That weird cringing feeling resurfaced in the pit of my stomach. The last

time I had that feeling was the day I got raped. I felt so uneasy all of a sudden and I opened the window. Hot flushes were dealing with me and I felt so numb; I felt so anxious as if I was going to pass out just like that day when I found out that I was raped. I tried to control my breathing and ignored my sweaty forehead.

Malome Joel: "Are you okay?"

Bina: (nodding) "Yes, I'll be fine."

He got into the mall parking lot and I wasted no time. I got out of the car the moment he parked and I felt a bit relieved as soon as I could breathe some fresh air.

Malome Joel: "Are you sure you're okay?"

Bina: "Yes. Are we going to be long here? I feel a bit tired."

Malome Joel: "I was hoping you and I could go out for lunch."

I frowned because we never did such a thing. Why would he take me out for lunch without his wife present?

Malome Joel: "Is there a problem?"

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Bina: "No."

I walked right behind him and he took me to Spur. My nausea and vomiting had gotten so much better after I was about 6 months pregnant. A few people who knew me saw me but I just didn't care. They did nothing for me, all I had to do was focus on myself, that's all. Malome Joel ordered a beer and I ordered a virgin Mojito. We ordered food and waited. I just had my drink in silence until he started speaking to me.

Malome Joel: "Are you excited about going to Varsity next year?"

Bina: "I don't think I'll ever get accepted anywhere. I didn't perform so well this year."

Malome Joel: "Well, you can always try again and rewrite or something."

Bina: (nodding) "Sure."

Malome Joel: "I'm sure you're wondering why I asked you out for lunch today – alone."

I just looked at him and nodded.

Malome Joel: "Well, the truth is I have something I have been dying to tell you for months, Bina."

He held my hands in a very awkward way.

Malome Joel: "You know, that day... at the party... I... I had no intentions of you finding out this way, but I can't keep it any

longer. I just want us to raise our baby without any stress and any conflict.”

My heart started beating way too fast. I was confused.

Bina: (frowning) “I'm sorry, I don't understand. You and Portia agreed to raise the baby as your own.”

Malome Joel: “No, Bina, you don't understand me. This is my baby – our baby. I'm the father.”

I felt as if a sharp knife had stabbed me in the gut.

Bina: “What do you mean?”

Malome Joel: “It was me. I drugged you and had sex with you. I wanted it to be more special than that, but when you showed no interest in me – I just did what I had to do. Now, look at God, he blessed us with a baby boy.”

I was shaking profusely – so much that I spilled my drink.

Bina: (aghast) “Wa reng (what did you just say), Joel? Are you saying that... you are the one who raped me?”

Malome Joel: “No, Bina Bina, I didn't rape you – you and I made love.”

Suddenly all those flashbacks came back to me. “Bina, Bina, I have been waiting for this moment for so long.” I looked at him from head to toe and he was wearing the exact same clothes he was wearing that particular day. I suddenly could smell his filthy whiskey tainted breath on my neck. I kept looking at him and picturing him pleasing himself with me. I felt so angered – so disgusted.

Bina: (teary) “What the fuck?”

Malome Joel: “I couldn't help it, Bina. I just had to show you how serious I was about you. I mean, I felt so bad the first time, that - “

First time? How many times were there?

Bina: (interrupting) “First time? How many fucking times were there?”

Malome Joel: “Right after we dropped Selaelo off, I made love to you again in my taxi. Bina, you didn't protest, you were so quiet. You felt the love. Please, tell me you feel the same way I do too. Tell me you love me too.”

He held my hands and I quickly removed mine from his. I felt as if my entire world was crashing right down. I felt so dizzy – words couldn't even explain how I felt that time. I was staring my rapist right in the eye; my rapist had been right under my nose the entire time. I mean, who knew how many others he had done that to? He raped me – he took advantage of a poor, vulnerable girl and he fucking raped me. He even had the audacity to profess his love to me – 8 months later! I should have killed that baby when I had the chance. All I had ever felt for that baby suddenly came to a halt. I hated that child with every fibre of my being; I couldn't believe that Malome Joel actually took advantage of me.

Malome Joel: "Please, say something Bina."

I took my hand bag and walked right out of Spur. I didn't even look back. I knew he had to settle the bill before he could chase after me. I couldn't run, but I made sure to walk as fast as I could. How the fuck did I not see that coming?! Was I that naïve? Was I meant to suffer? I was starting to question God all over again. A million thoughts were racing through my head and yet no conclusion came to a halt. I was outside the mall and I heard him shouting and calling my name.

Malome Joel: "Bina! Bina, please!"

Bina: (screaming) "Stay the fuck away from me! Or else – I'll call the police!"

Malome Joel: "Please, let me just explain."

Bina: "Don't you even think of following me."

I just walked out and left him standing right there. I had no idea what to do. I just walked until I felt my feet give in. I was in the middle of the road, with random people walking past me. I just yelled and cried so much. I felt the same undesirable feeling I felt that very same day I found out that I was raped. I struggled to breathe yet I tried to gasp for air, until I fell down and all I saw was darkness soon afterwards.

Deutoronomy 22:25 says; ““But if in the open country a man meets a young woman who is betrothed, and the man seizes her and lies with her, then only the man who lay with her shall die.”

13

“Don’t settle for what life gives you; make life better and build something.” — Ashton Kutcher

Bina

I woke up with an extremely dry throat. I looked around and found myself on a hospital bed, with beeping machines all around. I was hooked onto a drip and I could hear faint voices.

Doctor: “She needs to take it easy.”

Portia: “Thanks, doctor.”

Portia approached me with a smile on her face even though I could tell she was very worried.

Portia: (smiling) “Are you okay? How are you feeling?”

I put my hands on my stomach and I felt it was still big. Fuck, I was still pregnant. A part of me was hoping and praying for a miscarriage.

Bina: "What happened to me?"

Portia: "You had an anxiety attack and fell. Thank goodness Joel was there to help you otherwise who knew what might have happened?"

I cringed the moment I heard his name. I took it that she had no idea she was married to a rapist.

Bina: "Where is he?"

Portia: "Oh, he is right outside. Let me go call him."

Bina: "No! I don't want to see him."

Portia: "Okay, I guess you are just tired and frustrated, but you will be fine. Let me allow you to rest."

Bina: "No, please. Don't stress yourself about me like that. I mean, this hospital must cost a fortune. I had an anxiety attack; I'm not bleeding and the baby is still fine. Please, ask the doctor to discharge me. I'd like to go home."

Portia: "Okay. I'll be right back."

I wasted no time and got up. I pulled that bloody drip out of me. I was filled with so much hatred and rage. I was hoping for Joel to die a slow, painful death. I even had thoughts of killing him myself. The doctor was surprised I wanted to leave and tried convincing me, but I wanted to hear none of it. Portia was supportive as always, but the more I looked at her, the more I felt angered that she just didn't see past that motherfucker of a man. I was discharged and we met Malome Joel outside. The fucker was acting so normal. He was even smiling at me.

Malome Joel: "How are you feeling?"

I ignored him and got in just behind the driver's seat. I ensured to look at him via the rearview mirror. I needed him to see that I despised him and thought of him as nothing but a pile of useless shit. What kind of man rapes an innocent, helpless girl who looks at him as her father? Trash didn't even begin to describe him. As soon as we got home, I walked out first. Portia was rushing right behind me and instead of me going to my bedroom, I sat down right in the lounge.

Portia: "Do you need some food?"

Bina: "Please sit. I have something to tell you."

Malome Joel: "Moratuwa (my love), let us let her rest, please. She must still be tired and you heard what the doctor said."

Portia: "I am sure she will rest when she wants to. What is it?"

Malome Joel: "Let me go and prepare her bed for her - "

Bina: (interrupting) “Your husband is the one that raped me. He is the father of my child.”

Portia was shocked – she looked at me aghastly.

Portia: “What?”

Bina: “It's true. Ask him why I fainted today. Ask him why he took me out to Spur. That motherfucker you call your husband wanted to confess to me. He even said that he drugged me because he wanted to prove his love for me! He raped me and planted this thing inside of me!”

Portia was so shocked that tears were running down her face.

Portia: “Joel, is this true?!”

Malome Joel: “No, she's lying.”

Wow, he just had to go there.

Malome Joel: "She doesn't know who the father of the child is, so she wants to pin it on me. Can't you see? She is frustrated that her life isn't going so well, so she wants to be my wife or something. I think she fell pretty hard, my wife."

Bina: (angrily) "Are you fucking kidding me?!"

Portia: "Joel - "

Malome Joel: "I told you that you should have let her stay longer at that hospital."

Bina: (shouting) "I can't believe this! I can't be around a man who doesn't know how to keep his pants zipped. Portia, I am so sorry, I am sorry that you have to live with such a man. I am sorry for everything. Thank you so much for taking such good care of my siblings and I, but I think we should leave."

Portia: "Wait, Bina. Let's talk about this."

Bina: “There is nothing to talk about. I am so sorry, but I don't think it would be fair to burden you like this any longer.”

I went to my bedroom, while Malome Joel was telling Portia just how much of a liar I was. I packed my clothes – every bit of them and took whatever I could – including the money I had. I walked out with my bag and found Lesiba and Matome outside.

Bina: “Lesiba, Matome, pack your bags – we're leaving.”

Lesiba: “Re ya kae (where are we going)?”

Bina: “We're no longer staying here.”

Portia: “Bina, please.”

Lesiba: (shaking head) “No, we're not going anywhere.”

I was so heartbroken.

Bina: “Lesiba, please. You have no idea what Joel did to me.”

Matome: “We don't care. This is the only stable home we have ever had, Bina. If you want to leave – you do it on your own, but the rest of us are staying.”

I looked at Pebetsi, Masalesa and Hunadi and they were also siding with them. I felt so betrayed; I broke my back for them and struggled for them! They didn't even want to hear me out; they simply decided that they didn't need me any more. I took a good look at them, hoping that they would change their minds, but they didn't. I looked at Portia who was pleading with me not to leave. I forced the tears back and refused to cry. I suddenly remembered my mother's words; “Bina, ngwanaka (my child), if you ever get the opportunity to put yourself first grab it with both hands. Do your best in taking care of my children, but you also deserve a life. Put yourself first as much as you can.” I wasted no time and stormed out of the yard with Portia calling after me. I wanted to look back and see if my siblings would cry for me, but nothing. I won't lie, it hurt like hell. My heart was ripped to shreds; I thought we were a team and that we would always tick together, but I guess everything is meant to come to an end, eventually. As soon as I was far

enough from them, I let the tears flow. I cried my heart out. That was the main reason why I didn't want to report the rape; no one would believe me. Malome Joel lied right in his wife's face that day and made me look like a perpetual liar. I couldn't even think straight. I had no idea where I would go, but I just knew that my time in Mogalakwena had come to an end. I had just under R10 000 in my purse, and a few clothes in my bag. I had no family to go to, no friends left other than Selaelo. I took one good look behind me and made a life-changing choice. I took a taxi to the mall and from there onwards, I decided to take a taxi to Gauteng. I had no idea where I'd go, but I chose a place that was far away from home. So far away that none of them would ever find me. I was done being the Bina that cared about everyone else and put herself last. I was done with Limpopo and I vowed to never go back there ever again. In the taxi to Gauteng, I heard a few women say they were going to Atteridgeville and that they were from there. I had no idea where that even was, so I took the opportunity to introduce myself.

Bina: "Dumela, Mma (hello, ma). Ke nna Bina (My name is Bina). I am going to study at Tshwane University of Technology and all I know is that I am supposed to live in Atteridgeville. Do you mind telling me where I can find a room close to town?"

Woman: (smiling) “Well, Bina, my name is Rose. I'd be more than happy to help you. You see, I have a house in Atteridgeville and I happen to have accommodation for you. I have a few shacks and rooms, but the rooms are occupied right now. There is a shack readily available for occupation.”

Bina: “It's fine, I'll take it.”

She told me that the shack would cost me about R500 a month. And as far as I was concerned, I had no idea what to do with the baby inside of me. Rose was so nice and she didn't seem judgemental at all. She didn't even ask me how I felt pregnant at such a young age. She looked about 40 if not older and we gelled quite well. As soon as we landed, she took me by hand and told me that she would take good care of me. My mother never taught me to be that naïve when coming to people, but she showed no signs of being a human trafficker or anything like that. Atteridgeville seemed way too busy unlike Limpopo. Every two seconds I'd hear a taxi ringing its bell and people were literally everywhere. Every second house was a tavern, but other than that it looked okay. Luckily, the shack had a

single bed in it, a small table and a two plate stove. She gave me some bedding and a few pillows.

Rose: (smiling) “I live alone; I don't have any children, so you are more than welcome to live inside the house with me.”

I didn't want a repeat of Portia and Joel, so I opted to stay alone.

Bina: “Thank you, but I think I'll be fine right here.”

Rose: “Okay, my baby. Sleep well, we shall talk tomorrow.”

I nodded as she walked away. It was already night time and she even made me some food before we went to bed. I checked my phone and had dozens of missed calls and messages from Portia and Selaelo. She must have been told that I just took off. Joel had the nerve to text me on WhatsApp begging me to come back with his son. How cruel was he? I didn't want my brain to explode so, I switched off my phone and took a nap.

One week later...

I had settled in quite well in Atteridgeville, Extension 25, right close to Atlyn Shopping Centre. I had gotten used to the business and it was less warmer than back home. I even changed my number the following day. I just didn't want to be associated with any of them any more. I felt so bad for deserting Selaelo like that, but I didn't want to be a burden to anyone. Rose was a darling; I had gotten to know everyone in the yard and apparently it wasn't odd to find teenagers pregnant around there. Mam'Rose knew of my situation – since I decided to tell her everything that happened. She cried as if I was her child. She didn't understand just how cruel men could be, but she kept me whole. She tried her best to allow me to think positively, but I just couldn't. With each day that passed, I became more consumed with harmful and negative thoughts. I just wanted to die and be at peace; just like my mother. Life had never favoured me; my siblings deserted me when I needed them most, so I just didn't see a reason to live. If I felt like that then how on earth would I be able to care for a child? I was a child myself. It was Christmas day, the worst day of my life. It was the day my mother had passed on and I just couldn't even get out of bed. I just had one thought in mind and decided to do the unthinkable; I put on my slippers and didn't even take

a bath; and I headed to the nearest tuck shop. I bought rat poison and walked back home and locked myself into my shack. Mam'Rose was not home; she had gone to church. She was a serious church person, just like I was at one point in my life. I thought of how everyone had deserted me – including God Himself. Nothing just seemed right and all my dreams were ashes at that point. I took one good look at that rat poison and wasted no time. I mixed it all with a cup of water and I drank it all. I lay on my bed and waited for it to do the magic. I could only hope that God would forgive me for taking my own life and that of my child.

Ecclesiastes 7:17 says; “Be not overly wicked, neither be a fool. Why should you die before your time?”

John 12:25 says; “Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.”

14

“Everything negative – pressure, challenges – is all an opportunity for me to rise.” — Kobe Bryant

Bina

I saw myself walk right through a very bright light. I couldn't recognize the place at all. All I saw was the light – nothing else; no buildings, no people.

Dimakatso: (firmly) “Bina! O batla eng mo (what are you doing here)?”

Bina: (frowning) “Mama? Is that you?”

Dimakatso: (angrily) “Ke rile o batla eng mo (I asked you what you are doing here)!”

Bina: “I don't even know where I am. The light is blinding me.”

Dimakatso: “Go back right now! It is not your time.”

Bina: “What do you mean?”

Dimakatso: “You didn't die as you had planned – neither did my grandson.”

Bina: “What? But I am so exhausted Mama! I am tired of this life! Just take me with you!”

Dimakatso: “Badimo ba gana ka wena (the ancestors say it is not your time yet). Go back and love that child. His name is Malachi. He too, will be your messenger, he will show you and teach you love, obedience and patience. I didn't raise you to be weak, Bina. You can achieve your blessings if only you follow my lead. I have never left you and I shall never leave you. Remember my words and heed my warnings. You are my child, Bina, and God knew you before He even formed you. Therefore, God knew Malachi even before he formed him. Don't dwell on the past; focus on being the best version of yourself. Now, leave this place before I become angry!”

Rose: "Bina? Can you hear me?"

I slowly opened my eyes and was rather disappointed that I was still alive. Which means what I had just experienced about my mother was nothing but a dream. I put my hands on stomach and it felt a lot smaller, but I was in so much pain in that area.

Bina: "What am I doing here?"

Rose: "You tried to commit suicide, but because you serve a living God – your time has not come yet."

Bina: "And the baby?"

Rose: "He is healthy and well. Everyone was shocked to see you survive the poison along with the baby. They are calling you and Baby Malachi a miracle."

Bina: (astonished) "What did you just call him?"

Rose: “Malachi, that is his name – given to him by his grandmother, your mother.”

Bina: (shocked) “How do you know all that?”

Rose: (smiling) “Because, I am a seer, my child. A medium to be exact.”

I never saw that coming.

Rose: “When you approached me in the taxi, I immediately knew that you were the girl I was told about. Your mother visited me in my dreams. I must say; she is one persistent spirit. She told me that I had to help her child. Very few ancestors do that without me actually knowing the person physically, but I knew that I had to do it.”

Bina: “That still doesn't explain why I am here. I just want to die. This life is not offering me anything.”

Rose: "That is not true, Bina. If it were true, then why did you meet me? Do you actually think your mother would ensure that she protects you the way she has been all along just for fun? Your time on this earth is not done yet. You are still yet to change your ways and become a mother to two more children. Malachi is only the beginning of your blessings. Why do you think he was born on the very same day that your mother died on? Heed your mother's words; I am specifically talking about the words she uttered to you on her death bed. Your job is not done yet, my baby, you still have a long way to go."

Bina: (teary) "But I have nothing to live for, Mam'Rose."

Rose: "You have so much to live for, starting with that baby boy. Now

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I am going to ask the Nurse to bring him in here so that we can bless him. You need to see him and embrace him; it is crucial that every baby is welcomed and blessed as soon as they enter this world. He needs to feel a mother's love."

I just nodded as she went out. A few minutes later she walked in right behind a Nurse who was pushing the baby on those little wheels they were put in. my heart skipped a few beats as soon as I saw him. He looked so perfect, so beautiful, but he looked exactly like Joel, just a little lighter.

Rose: “Don't be discouraged. Take your time and try to love him.”

I didn't want to look at him; I felt disgusted just looking at him. My heart was torn, I knew I wasn't being fair to an innocent baby, but what choice did I have? Mam'Rose picked him up and started praising.

Rose: (chanting) “You, Malachi, are one of the chosen. Your grandmother is one strong ancestor, and she will always guide you. May you be the messenger you are meant to be in this world. You have been sent to heal your mother's heart and mend it; you were meant to show her unimaginable things and give her so much love. My boy, the holy spirit favours you more than you will ever know. Malachi 3:1 says; “Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple,

even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts.” You are here for a reason, my dear boy, you are going to experience a lot of hurt and trouble in this cruel world, but not once will you judge your mother. You will be the least expected to succeed in life, but you will prove everyone wrong. You will be nothing like your father, and you will be full of forgiveness. You will show the world the teachings of the Lord and bring so much peace unto your family. You will heal your mother's wounded heart in unimaginable ways. Welcome to the world, my darling Malachi.”

Malachi 3:6 - ““For I the Lord do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed.”

15

“Life imposes things on you that you can’t control, but you still have the choice of how you’re going to live through this.” —
Celine Dion

Bina

I was feeling even more depressed than I was before I gave birth to Malachi. Yes, I only gave him one name because well, I saw no other reason for him to have another name. I hated New Year's because while people were making resolutions, I was stuck in a life that just had no meaning. I really tried my best to love my son. I had no one to share anything with and I had no one other than Mam'Rose to confide in. She was so nice to me; she even got all the other people in the yard to host a little Baby arrival party for me. Everyone was so in love with Malachi, I don't know. I guess he just brought out the best in people. Mam'Rose built new rooms on top of the others, and she practically forced me to move into one of them. She said that with a new baby, I couldn't possibly live in a shack. She only charged me R1000 although it actually cost about R2500 for each room since they were bachelor pads and had Kitchen wall units and bathrooms each. The reality had hit me real

hard; I contemplated calling Selaelo or even Portia, but I just couldn't. I needed to accept that I was a mother and that my life had changed. A week later, the matric results were finally released. I had no idea why I even got up early to buy a Newspaper, but I did. I searched for my student number and as expected; I received the worst possible symbol of note; 1220074158 H. I received an H; that is basically a school leaving certificate; just proof that I was in matric. I mean, wow. Just wow. My life was over. I had no direction and I couldn't be a medical doctor. I had to take care of a child I never even asked for, so I had to think like a mother. The money I had was slowly running out, and I couldn't live on handouts.

I just needed to try and be the best version of myself. I couldn't remember the last time I even prayed by myself; although Mam'Rose would always pray with me. She ensured that I joined her church and Malachi was baptised. I wasn't fazed by the church life any more; I just saw no use in praying. I mean what was the whole point of praying if my life was just a standstill? Mam'Rose had managed to get me a job without an interview even at Pick n Pay, just nearby. It was a start for me and I needed all the money I could get. She offered to look after Malachi during the day, while I went to work. From there onwards, I made a few friends; one of them was Phinah, she

was 22 but a darling. That was when I knew that circumstances could form a bond between friends. She had no money to go study right after school, and so she got a job as a start; three years later, she was still working there as one of the cashiers. She was very lively, though and quite chatty. She reminded me a lot of Selaelo. Man, how I missed her. I had to grow up – I just had to. Along the way, I formed really good bonds with the people I worked with. I earned about R5000, it wasn't much, but it was enough to take care of my son and I. There were days when I just couldn't stand his crying nor stand looking at him, but I just had to. I wasn't quite sure what kind of a mother I was, but I had hoped that in time I would change and become a better person.

Five years later...

Life moved on, slowly but surely. It had been quite a ride and my son Malachi was five years old. At least I didn't need to buy any nappies any more, because wow, those things were quite expensive. I hadn't heard from nor seen anyone from Limpopo in years – although I had a tendency of stalking them on Facebook. I deactivated my account years ago when I moved to Atteridgeville, and created a new one with a completely different name. I didn't want the chances of them finding me to

be a lot wider than they were. There were times when I would think about my siblings; a part of me was guilty but then I thought

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fuck it. They made their own choices; no one was in my corner. I had my days; but after all the heartache and trauma I just never dealt with; the insomnia and all the occasional stress – I was a functioning alcoholic. Since I would get staff discounts, I ensured to always have a bottle of wine or two in my fridge. Mam'Rose was a wine lover, so I made sure I gave her some every now and again. My life still felt like it was at a standstill; I mean I could have been two years away from being a Medical doctor. Funny enough, I downloaded all those papers I wrote in my matric year and decided to do them on my own. I checked the memorandums afterwards, and I achieved above 90%. I could never understand why my marks were so poor, and what baffled me more was the fact that I had just given up on becoming a success story. I could have gone back to school or rewritten my matric, but I just gave up. I became yet another statistic in South Africa. I was off on this particular day and Phinah came unannounced. I was sitting on the stoep watching Micah play with other children near the gate.

Phinah: “Hey, moghel (girl). Di reng mo (how are you)?”

Bina: “Ke tla reng, mara (What can I say)?”

Phinah: “Keng o kare o nale stress so (why does it seem as if you have some stress)?”

Bina: “Don't we all? Ke no nagana ka life nje (I am just thinking about life in general).”

I had adapted to the pitori life and I even spoke like them.

Phinah: “Okay, well I have some good news. I am invited to a party and I am allowed to bring a plus one.”

I didn't like the thought of parties at all. They just brought back such bad memories about that particular night.

Bina: (shaking head) “No parties for me, Phinah. You know I just don't like them.”

Phinah: "Why?"

I was even a smoker; bad habits had me hard.

Bina: "Because... they just bring back bad memories."

Phinah: "Ah, okay. If you ever change your mind, call me and I'll get my man to come and pick you up, akere (alright)?"

Bina: (nodding) "Sure."

I had been so out of touch with my spiritual life; that I felt so disconnected every time I prayed. I couldn't feel that same spiritual sense I felt every time I would kneel down. I didn't even dream of my mother any more. I was just a bit of a mess and borderline depressed. Certain things like men and parties brought me anxiety, so I numbed my pain with alcohol and smoking. I was 23 by then, but still it felt as if my life just wouldn't get any better. I must have been deep in thought when Mam'Rose came out of the house.

Rose: "Bina! O kae (where is) Malachi?"

Bina: "Shule wa tshameka ko strateng (There he is playing outside)."

Rose: "Okay, I thought he'd be hungry."

Bina: (shaking head) "You're spoiling that boy, you know."

Rose: "You're too hard on him. Give him a break. He is only a child."

Bina: "Ka zama (I'm trying)."

Rose: "Hmm. Phinah ne a reng (what did Phinah want)?"

Bina: "She was inviting me to a party."

Rose: "And you don't want to go because?"

Bina: "You know very well why."

Rose: (shaking head) "Bina, when are you going to allow yourself to start living again?"

I shrug my shoulders as I kept smoking.

Rose: "Your past and fears are chaining you. Allow yourself to live and be happy again. You are young and beautiful and there is so much hope for you."

Bina: "Okay."

Rose: "I see you're not even listening to me. If you ever change your mind, you know I am always available to baby sit. Go out and have some fun. I'll be in the house if you change your mind. I'm taking this wine bottle with me."

Bina: (laughing) "Alright."

She had a point, you know. A very good one. I just didn't know where to start, but I had to do something that wouldn't enforce me to think of my problems all the damn time. I had no social life, really. And Phinah was my only friend. She had two children, but she was out and about almost every Friday. She was living and always had a story to tell. She was always on point from make up to clothing and she never missed an opportunity to take pictures. Meanwhile, I, Bina Makwetla, I wore jeans Monday to Monday, with either pumps or sandals. I didn't wear make up and all I ever did to my hair was just comb it back. It was time for some serious change. I looked at my phone and it was about 3pm, so I texted Phinah.

Bina: "Does the offer still stand?"

Phina: "You're even asking? I'll be right there. I just went to buy some alcohol."

Bina: "Cool, but I don't know what to wear."

Phinah: "I got you covered, plane Jane. See you soon."

16

“Live for each second without hesitation.” — Elton John

Bina

I patiently waited for Phinah to come and Mam'Rose had already agreed to babysit Malachi. I had no idea what to expect, but I was so consumed with the need to explore and just go out for a change. An hour later, she finally arrived excitedly.

Phinah: (smiling) “Oh, my friend! I can't wait to show you off tonight.”

Bina: “Hayi (no), man, Phinah.”

Phinah: “Ka joker fela (I'm just playing).”

She took out her make up set and luckily I had just taken a bath. I remained in my robe just because I had nothing

interesting to wear, but knowing Phinah that huge bag she had with her had everything just for me.

Phinah: “I'm going to have so much fun playing with your beautiful, virgin face. When was the last time you even wore make up?”

The last time I literally wore make up was on that day that Malachi was conceived. I never even gave myself the chance to attend my Matric dance. I know, that hurt Selaelo so badly. She had been searching for me for years all over social media but I thought she most probably gave up and had new friends or something in varsity. I mean, why would a whole MCHB student be friends with a low life, drop out like me?

Phinah: “Okay, make up done. Now, I am going to style your hair. Girl, are you sure you're even black? This hair is magic.”

I got that a lot from people. My hair was so soft and I was quite light, so light that I'd become red whenever I'd stand in the sun for way too long. Even being in front of the heater for a while turned me red. I just accepted it because my mother was that

light as well. Malachi had taken his father's dark colour and as far as I noticed he was left-handed, but that was it. He looked like a complete version of his father, but he was the total opposite. He was clever, calm and very sweet. He would never even hold grudges against the other children – even me. At times I'd feel so horrible as if I was a horrible mother, but he would just hug or kiss me randomly. Phinah styled my hair with her straightener and for the first time in years, I wore my hair down. My hair was quite long – neck length and I totally loved the look. She was really good at make-up.

Bina: “I totally love this look, Phinah.”

Phinah: “Wait till you see the dress I got for you. I bought it for you a while ago, but since you never actually want to celebrate your birthday, I waited for the perfect time.”

Bina: (sigh) “It's a long story.”

Phinah: “I totally get it. Are you ready to try the dress on? Just promise me you won't say no.”

I had nothing to lose.

Bina: “Okay.”

Phinah took out one of the most amazing dresses I had ever seen in my entire life. It was wine-red, cocktail dress with a long slit just below the bums and a big bow right below the back shoulder. It looked quite expensive. I checked the price tag and I was so shocked.

Bina: (shocked) “Phinah, o kereya kae roko ya ko Versace wena (how can you afford a Versace dress)?”

Phinah: “Come on, Bina. I never lied to you – ever. You know very well what my man does, it is no secret. So, he spoils me every now and then.”

I was in no position to judge her at all. Apparently her boyfriend and father of her two children was a real, hardcore gangster and he could afford just about anything. He was so well-known around Atteridgeville, that no one bothered to

mess with Phinah. He knew all her whereabouts and she wasn't even allowed to mix with men at all. To me, it wasn't the life I wanted, but they seemed really happy; he treated her like a queen and he took really good care of her children. That was admirable; I mean not all gangsters had scary tattoo's and walked around carrying rifles with them. If one saw him they'd never think he was a gangster at all. So, I tried the dress, I mean I hadn't worn a dress that short ever since that particular day. I really looked amazing – even if I had to say so myself. I had lost the baby weight rather quickly and my breasts were almost gone, but from the waist down I couldn't lose weight no matter what I tried. I was actually a size 36, but because of my tiny waist line, no one even thought I wore a size that large. The backside and thighs were a real problem.

Phinah: (excitedly) “Ja (yes), man. I am so good at what I do. Now, for the final piece of the puzzle.”

She handed me black heels.

Bina: “Wa gafa (are you crazy)? I have never worn such high heels in my entire life!”

Phinah: "You'll learn tonight."

Bina: "I hope you're not planning on selling me tonight."

Phinah: "I'd never. You are my best friend, come on. Now, we're running late. Let's go."

We got into Phinah's boyfriend's Toyota Legend 50. Yep, he was a master of art at what he did, so it was no surprise that he would be driving such an expensive car. He was very nice to everyone who was Phinah's friend. He greeted me and I greeted back. While driving, Phinah handed me a bottle of Savanna.

Phinah: "Enwa nyana o tshware plaka (have a drink and loosen up)."

Bina: "Reya kae (Where are we going)?"

Phinah's boyfriend whose name was Thomas, decided to include himself in the conversation.

Thomas: "Bina, have you ever been to Pretoria East?"

Bina: (shaking head) "No."

Thomas: "Well, prepare yourself for the Estate life. I'm taking you guys to a party at The Blyde Crystal Lagoon."

I had heard a bit about it from the slay queens at work. I didn't want to sound clueless or look like a "plaas meisie", which is an Afrikaans term for a farm girl, so I googled it while he was talking about it. Damn, the place looked as great as they had described it, with a fake beach and the units were awesome. It was night time, though, so I doubt that we'd be expected to swim.

Thomas: "It's a very nice place and one of these days, I am going to buy a unit right there and make Phinah my wife. We'll stay there with our children and be one big, happy family."

He occasionally kissed the back of Phinah's hand. That was a beautiful thing to see since a lot of black men I had seen around the area weren't very affectionate towards their girlfriends or wives. I mean, everyone yearns for love – the good kind of love. I also wanted that, but where would I even begin? I was still a reader and I would read a lot of books that entailed how men thought and how intimacy and affection worked. I mean, in my mind I was pretty educated about the opposite sex, but in actual fact – no one can ever be too prepared for men. Those beings are dangerous. We finally arrived at The Blyde and apparently, Thomas's friend was hosting a Birthday party there. As soon as he parked the car, Phinah never left my side. Yes, I was the third wheel, but Thomas never made me feel out of place.

Thomas: “Hey, Bina. If anyone makes you feel uncomfortable, please, by all means – let me know. They tend to forget to keep their hands to themselves and any friend of my queen is a friend of mine, okay?”

I nodded in relief. I mean, Thomas was not the ideal man for me, but he loved my friend and they were happy. He respected her and I appreciated that about him. The scene was so beautiful; I had never experienced a fake beach let alone a real

one at that. The lights and palm trees were just amazing. We finally made it to one side, which was right across the entrance. So, Thomas's friend hosted an outdoor beach party and I absolutely loved it. Yes, it was a bit busy for my liking, but I loved the entire scene. I had never been at an outdoor party like that before. That was legit my second party in my entire life. We had a barman attending to our needs and he ensured we were hydrated at all times. I stuck with my Savanna, and quite honestly I had no idea why Phinah had bought so many drinks only to leave them in the car. The music was great and the vibe was flowing. Phinah never left my side as promised and I was introduced to a few of Thomas's friends. He stated clearly to them that if they tried to make me uncomfortable in any way, he would ensure that they paid the price for that. I was just minding my own business while one of his friends tried to make conversation with me. I didn't feel him much, because I felt as if he was forcing things, you know. He wasn't really on my level – intellectually. All he talked about was sports and the thug life and told me about how much money he had in his bank account and all the different cars he drove

but that was just not my thing. I asked him to be excused and told Phina that I was going to the rest room. Upon exiting, I bumped into the most gorgeous man I had ever seen.

Phil: (smiling) “Oh, I'm so sorry. I thought that this was the gents' room.”

I was dumbstruck and actually charmed. I mean, I never found white men interesting at all, but that one was so gorgeous. His beautiful, blue eyes were just magic, accompanied by his gorgeous features and his well-built body. He looked a bit older than I was, but my goodness, he really swept me off my feet.

Bina: (nervously) “Oh, uh... no problem.”

I tried moving but my body betrayed me. It was seriously embarrassing. I mean, why was I acting like I had never seen a man before? Fuck.

Phil: (smiling) “Hi, I'm Phillip, but you can call me Phil.”

Bina: “Oh, Hi, Phil. I'm Bina, but you can call me Bee.”

That was rather stupid of me. I felt my entire face feeling quite warm and I felt even warmer as he smiled and graced me with his remarkable dimples. I was hooked.

Phil: "Nice to meet you, Bina. That means dance, right?"

Duh, blame my parents for naming me that.

Bina: "Yes."

Phil: "Okay, do you mind waiting for me? I just want to go to the loo really quickly and then I'll be right back."

I just nodded and smiled. I had no idea what to do or say, but I tried breathing to calm myself down. I was flushed, but I didn't want to leave the guy's side. How predictable. He finally came back and we walked back together to the party. Phinah looked really worried and sighed in relief as soon as she saw me.

Phinah: "Oh, great. You're back. I was starting to think you were kidnapped."

Phil: (chuckling) "Come on, Phinah, you trust me, don't you?"

Phinah: "All I know is that you're white and my friend hasn't had a man in legit five years."

Wow, she just had to put it all out there. I felt so embarrassed. Apparently he was one of Thomas's friends.

Thomas: "Bina, I see you have met Phillip. He is one of my friends."

Call me typical, but I didn't think that Thomas had it in him to have such sophisticated, white friends. I mean Phil looked like a completely decent guy as if he was born with a silver spoon in his mouth. He reeked of money and he looked like he had a really good education. I got the feeling he was into the kasi vibe and he was one of those rebellious guys that loved the kasi life but his family was still a bit backward. We spend the entire night talking and dancing, and surprisingly he was so good at dancing to black music. It turned out that he used to spend almost every weekend in Atteridgeville or wherever Thomas

took him. He seemed like the perfect package; he was gorgeous, smart, funny, educated and loaded.

Phinah: (whispering) "Friend, we're going to spend the night here, but Thomas asked me to ask you if you're okay with it?"

Bina: "Sure."

Phinah: "Alright then."

I didn't plan on staying the night there, but I decided why not? I had nothing to lose and Phil and I were hitting it off like a house on fire. We headed to one of the units. By then we were very few; it was just about 8 of us, Phinah and her boyfriend with Phil and I included. I just enjoyed Phil's company so much. Soon, the rest of them went their ways and headed to the bedrooms, and Phil and I remained alone. I was actually nervous, but he never even gave me any indication that he wanted to sleep with me or try anything funny. So, we spent almost the entire night just talking. I must have dozed off in his arms because we were woken up by Phinah yelling at us the following morning.

Phinah: (screaming) “Hey, Iona (you two)! Tsogang (wake up)!”

As I opened my eyes, I realized I was in Phil's arms and my head was pounding. It must have been all the alcohol from the previous night. I was about to get up, but Phil pulled me back into his arms and kissed my forehead. I felt so happy. It really felt so good to be in a guy's arms and him not feeling the need to want to sleep with me.

Phil: “Good morning, gorgeous.”

Bina: (smiling) “Hi.”

Phil: “Hao (goodness), no hi, Phil, or babe, or my king, or my future husband?”

I blushed.

Bina: "Hayi (No), man, Phil."

Phil: "You're so cute when you blush, you look like a tomato."

Bina: (embarrassed) "Voetsek (piss off)."

He laughed.

Phinah: "Phil weh (please), allow my friend to come and make breakfast with me."

Phil: "Fine, but afterwards she is all mine."

He gave me a light kiss on my lips and let me go. I was head over heels with a man I barely knew. Was I going crazy?

Phinah: "So? How was the night? I see you are still fully clothed so which means you didn't do the hanky panky. But I bet he sucked you off, didn't he? Phela (Because) white boys are quite kinky."

Bina: "Sies, man, Phinah. We didn't do anything of that sort. We didn't even kiss."

Phinah: (laughing) "I'm just playing, man. Phil is one of the good ones. I mean, he comes from a filthy rich family yet he prefers spending his weekends in the ghetto."

Bina: "How rich is he?"

Phinah: "Rupert and Oppenheimer rich. I mean, his father is expecting him to take over the company, but he has been stalling."

Wow, I mean he just told me that his family life was pretty complicated, but I never expected it to be that bad. That meant his family would never accept me.

Bina: (sadly) "I see."

Phinah: “Why do you sound so disappointed?”

Bina: “It's nothing. I mean, that would mean his family will never accept me.”

Phinah: “Don't be so sure. You two literally just met. Give it time to evolve to whatever it needs to become. Whatever the outcome is, take each experience as a lesson. Life is too short and at times not everything is meant to last forever, but we're meant to experience it nonetheless.”

She was right. Every time she gave me a life lesson I just knew that she was the right friend for me. She would always say the right things. We had breakfast together and Phil was all over me. He wanted me on his lap and didn't want me leaving his sight. It was finally time to leave and I wasn't too happy about it, but I followed Phinah's advice.

Phinah: “See you soon, Phil.”

Phil: "Sure thing, Phinah. Hey, gorgeous. Call me as soon as you get home."

Bina: (frowning) "You never took my number."

Phil: (smiling) "Check your phone. You'll see my number. See you soon, my Queen."

He gave me one, long, passionate kiss and I actually forgot I was around the people. I had never kissed anyone in my life before, but I just followed his direction. That was literally the best day of my life. I was suddenly filled with great hope. I knew that something good would come out of me meeting Phil.

Zechariah 9:12 - "Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope; today I declare that I will restore to you double."

17

“Life is like riding a bicycle. To keep your balance, you must keep moving.” — Albert Einstein

Bina

I couldn't stop thinking about Phil. He seemed like a true God sent even though I hadn't really been wishing to stumble across any romantic interest. The impressive night I had with him seemed like something out of a movie or a romantic novel. I felt like I had missed out on so much in my life, I mean I was a virgin when that mother fucker Joel raped me. I'd had men show interest in me before here and there, but they just didn't have that thing. Phil had that thing; he was gorgeous and the conversation flowed like magic. I was quiet throughout the entire ride home, while unconsciously smiling all alone with thoughts of Phil devouring my mind. We hadn't even spoken about going on a date or even labelling whatever it was we were doing – yet I was already having thoughts about us having a great future. The treacherous power of the mind. The mind is so powerful – hence it can make you believe just about anything you want to.

Phinah: (smiling) “Baby, someone is in love already. Bona fela o jele di smarties bjang (Just look how she can't stop smiling).”

They laughed together leaving me blushing all alone.

Bina: (blushing) “Hayi (no), man. I am just thinking fela (only).”

Phinah: “Well, what I can say is that Phil is not even half bad. He is a bit of an Oreo, but I think he genuinely likes you.”

Bina: “Oreo?”

Phinah: “Yes, man. You know, white on the inside, black on the outside. In this case it's vice versa. He loves the kasi (township) vibe. He reminds me a lot of DJ Kasi Duchaz.”

I guess she was right, but only time would tell. I didn't want to count my chickens before they hatched, yet I just couldn't stop thinking about him. They dropped me off first and I waved goodbye. It was Sunday, and Mam'Rose's house was locked. I knew she had taken Malachi with her to church, so that gave

me enough time to rest before gathering the strength for work the following day. I got into the shower and soon after I was done, I saw a few missed calls. Phil had saved himself on my phone as “Future Bae”. It was funny but cute, really. I decided to call him back.

Phil: (excitedly) “My future Bae.”

Bina: (chuckling) “Hello.”

Phil: (laughing) “We need to work on that. Everyone deserves a pet name. Did you get home safely?”

Bina: “Yes, thank you. You?”

Phil: “Yes. I was hoping you'd say yes to a date.”

Bina: “I would if you ask me.”

Phil: (laughing) “Well, Bina Makwetla, my future Bae, will you please, please go on a date with me today?”

Bina: (blushing) “Of course. What time?”

Phil: “I am actually on my way to Atteridgeville, so I can pick you up in about half an hour?”

I started panicking; I mean I had no idea how to even do my own make up and Phinah was already gone.

Bina: “Well, that doesn't give me enough time to do my make-up.”

Phil: “I don't care about make-up. I bet you look even better naturally.”

I was a bit nervous even though I just agreed. We said our goodbyes and hung up. I had no idea what to even wear, I mean that dress was the only nicest outfit I had in my closet. I was starting to over analyze everything. “What if he doesn't

like me today? What if I'm too plain or too poor for him? What if he doesn't like the fact that I already have a son?" I went through my closet and indeed, all I had were jeans, my uniform, Tshirts, a few blouses but that was it. Well, if he actually liked me, then he wouldn't mind what I rocked up in. So, I wore one of my skinny jeans, a crop top I once got from Phinah, but I never wore. It still had a price tag on and it fit me nicely. I put on a pair of All stars and just combed my hair. If he didn't like the plain Bina, then perhaps it wasn't meant to be. I waited and indeed an hour and a half later, he was at the gate. I thought he would hoot for me to come out or something, but no, he got out of the car and walked right into the gate. Oddly, he knew right where my room was. Eish, that guy. Everyone who was in the yard had gone out and acted as if they were on their way to the tap. They wanted to see who the rich white guy came to see. He was even driving a black Bugatti Veyron. That car valued at \$3.3 million! Phinah was not lying when she said he was indeed filthy rich. By then I was peeping through the window a little. I heard a stern knock on the door and I took a deep breath before opening.

Bina: (smiling) "Hi."

Phil: (smiling) "Hi, gorgeous. May I hug you?"

He was so polite – even asking for permission to hug me. I had never seen such before.

Bina: “Sure.”

He hugged me and I smelled his hypnotic cologne which left some of its smell on my clothes. The other ladies who were also living there deliberately walked past and they were pointing and whispering. Well, I wasn't bothered.

Phil: “Shall we go?”

Bina: “Yes, let me lock up.”

He waited for me to lock up and held my hand as we walked out together. He waited for me to walk out of the gate first and even opened the car door for me before he got into the driver's side. I was so flushed, my heart was jumping for joy. I hadn't even told Mam'Rose that I'd be gone but she wasn't back from church yet. So, we drove around while we were listening to

some Amapiano. I mean, basically Phil was just like the average black, kasi (township) guy except he was white on the outside. He did everything that an average black guy did, although he had so much respect for women. He occasionally kissed my hand while driving. I liked that. I assumed that we'd just be going to a normal restaurant somewhere in Pretoria or something, but well, Phil was Phil. He drove near the Blyde, where we were the previous evening until we went to some remote location that looked like a lodge, but at the far end. I had no idea what we were going to do there, but I kept an open mind. He kept driving until it felt as if we were driving towards nowhere. I secretly hoped that he wasn't planning on killing me, you know. After driving for about 15 minutes right inside of that yard, we approached a helicopter. I felt like a movie star – the black version of Marilyn Monroe, I tell you.

Bina: (smiling) “And this?”

Phil: “Do you trust me?”

I mean I had only known him for a few hours, but I had nothing to lose. I just nodded.

Phila: “No, gorgeous. I want to hear you say it.”

Bina: “Yes, I trust you.”

Phil: “Good, because I want to show you how I treat those I hold dear to my heart.”

He opened his door and rushed towards my side and opened mine for me. He took my hand in his and we walked alongside each other towards the helicopter. There was no one there, so I probably guessed he was the one that was going to fly. I had never been in a helicopter before, so one could imagine my fear levels. They were on steroids.

Phila: “Get in.”

He helped me in and got in as well. I was utterly nervous, I won't lie, but the excitement was way more than that. He assisted me to buckle up and put on my headphones. I could at least hear him through them and he could hear me speak through the microphone.

Phil: “No matter what happens, I need you to relax, okay? You're in good hands. I have a pilot license. You're safe with me.”

He winked at me while I tried to relax. That was my very first date and already I was up in the sky, watching the entire Pretoria. People were living, I tell you. We didn't really fly for that long – most probably about half an hour. I actually enjoyed the view from the helicopter, to be honest. Who would have thought that I, Bina, a village girl from Limpopo would be riding in a helicopter with a rich, white guy? We finally stopped at another remote location, but it didn't look like Pretoria at all.

Bina: “Where are we?”

Phil: “Welcome to Cape Town, babe. Come.”

He took my hand in his once again, and we walked towards this really beautiful beach house right across the Beach.

Bina: “Phil, I have never been on a beach before, let alone Cape Town.”

Phil: (smiling) “There's a first time for everything, Bina. I want to show you the world – if you let me.”

I smiled approvingly. We didn't walk that far from the Helicopter, and we finally made it to this delightful beach house. It was so gorgeous, with the most alluring furniture I had ever seen. I could most definitely picture myself taking a break right in there. There were a few pictures around the house of Phil, and fewer of him and a few people who looked like him. The house screamed serenity and peace. Things I most definitely yearned for in my life.

Bina: “This house is so beautiful. Whose is it?”

Phil: “It's mine. Come.”

He pulled me towards the kitchen area.

Phil: "Make yourself comfortable, while I cook for you."

Hmm, smart

Advertisement

funny, attractive and he could cook. He was ticking all the boxes. He made me a Mojito and grabbed a beer for himself, as he started whipping a five course meal. That guy was such a natural in the kitchen. I mean, ever since I left home, I never really took my time to cook. I lived alone, so I hardly had the time to make a 7 colours meal. We had the most illustrious conversation I had ever had with a person in my entire life. He most probably had been cooking for about 3 hours, but in those three hours I got to know so much about him and about myself, really. So, his name was Phillip Andrew Ferreira, the son of prominent business man Andries Ferreira, who owned a few hotels in South Africa and had a few affiliations with Taxi Associations. I wasn't surprised, I mean he most probably owned a few taxis under a black man's name. He also owned a few restaurants, a few franchises and a few restaurants. He was the only son and had two sisters. His parents were still married, and he didn't really have such a good relationship with

his father, so he said. He was groomed from birth to take over the family business one day and well, he was a bit late.

At 35, he had to have taken over after he graduated, actually. He had a degree in Engineering Sciences, which basically encompasses a vast range of subjects, from microelectronics to offshore oil platforms, and involves the application of creative reasoning, science, mathematics (and, of course, experience and common sense) to real problems. Yes, it seems all too complicated, I know, but basically he was too intellectual to even put in words. No wonder we got along so well. I enjoyed Physics so much at school as well as Mathematics. I was so envious that he got the opportunity to live such a good life and he even obtained the degree from Harvard. That is almost everyone's dream, you know. It just baffled me that despite all the money he had and all the access to all the opportunities in the world, he still wasn't content with his life. He was yearning for something way more. We finally started eating with a bottle of Vergelegen Reserve Carbenet Sauvignon 2014. I mean that bottle cost about R1 500, roughly. I wasn't even fascinated by the money aspect, really. I was just so surprised that I finally met a man that I had so much in common with, a man who liked me as much as I liked him.

Phil: “So, basically, my father kept shoving the family empire down my throat, so I decided to study abroad – far away from him and I even chose a degree in Engineering Sciences just to spite him. I thought if I did that, he would see that I had a different passion and vision in life from his, but as soon as I graduated, he bought a mine and said that I'd manage and run it until I was finally ready to run the family business.”

Wow, I had a feeling that most rich kids were quite unhappy, but that was just something else.

Bina: “So, you think that running the business would ruin your life?”

Phil: “It's about way more than that, Bina. I want a different life, I am into different people. My father is very traditional in all aspects. He doesn't understand me – he never has.”

He seemed so heartbroken as he spoke about his father. I could see that it hit a nerve every time he had to explain it.

Phil: "Enough about my sad life, come. Let's take a walk on the beach."

I didn't say no to that. We took a walk on the beach and it was so peaceful. I really enjoyed myself. After about an hour, we headed back to the house and relaxed on the couch. As usual, he had be wrapped in his arms as I lay my head on his.

Phil: "Bina, I really like you, I mean really, really like you. I know, our worlds are different, but that is just how I like my life. I want to show you how serious I am about you. Just give me a chance to show you how much more you deserve."

I nodded without hesitation and he kissed me, so passionately yet again. I still was so nervous because I had no idea how to even kiss someone.

Phil: "Relax, go with the flow and follow my lead."

I nodded. I mean he was curious as to how I was so inexperienced yet I had Malachi, so, I told him everything about

my family. As far as I was concerned, we were totally transparent towards one another. I didn't see the need to hide whom I was and where I had come from. It felt as if he was also being genuine with me. We carried on kissing; it was magical. Never, have I ever had my tongue being massaged by someone else's like that before. His tongue was gyrating mine and I absolutely loved it. For the first time ever, my body felt so intense, so weakened, so parched as if I was pastry being seared in an oven; while the master awaits to devour it patiently. His lips travelled to my neck as he planted soft, wet kisses on it. Just as I was enjoying his tantalizing kisses and his fervent touch, he stopped. I must have openly frowned at him.

Phil: "I want our first time to be special, Bina. Not like this."

I nodded with a smile. I had great hopes for us and I felt that he was truly a man I could see a future with. After a great day, it was time to go back home. I felt rather bored having to go back to my boring life, but I had to be patient and take everything one step at a time. I got home at about 6pm thinking that Mam'Rose would be angry at me, but she was the total opposite.

Bina: "Mme (Ma), I am sorry I took so long."

Rose: "No worries. O ntletse eng (what did you bring me)?"

I frowned in wonder.

Rose: "Ska ntebella bjao (don't look at me like that). The other tenants told me that there was a very handsome, rich white man in the yard who took you with."

I should have known.

Rose: "So?"

Bina: (blushing) "Eish (Oh), thing is... I met him last night, wa bona (you see)."

Rose: "I don't want the details. I just want to know how you feel about him."

Bina: (smiling) "I really, really like him, Mam'Rose."

Rose: "See? Being open minded is truly not a bad thing."

Bina: "Do you think it will last?"

Rose: "Whether it lasts or not, the important thing is you opened your heart and got to experience real love. We shall wait and see."

I had a feeling she wasn't truly honest with me about Phil, since she was a seer, but then, I chose not to bother her with my life like that. She was always there for me and she took good care of Malachi for me. She was basically his mother, unlike me. He thought of her as his grandmother and they were inseperable.

Bina: "Thank you so much for everything. I'll take Malachi to bed."

Rose: "No need. He is already asleep. You have an early morning tomorrow. Go sleep, I'll take care of him."

I thanked her and proceeded to my room. I just wondered what I would have done without Mam'Rose to be honest. She was my guardian angel and she kept me sane. Phil sent me a text telling me how much of a good day he had and how he couldn't wait to see me again. I was in love, just a day after knowing that man. I wasn't even sure where it would end up, but I had a good feeling. Positivity is good, although we never know what tomorrow holds.

Jeremiah 29:11 - "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope."

18

“Sing like no one’s listening, love like you’ve never been hurt, dance like nobody’s watching, and live like it’s heaven on earth.” – (Attributed to various sources)

One month later....

Bina

I was still reeling from the euphoria that Phil had brought right into my life exactly a month later. It felt like we had known each other for more than that. We had been seeing one another every single day; if I wasn't at his place then he would come visit me at mine. I came clean with him about what happened to me back home and why I left. I even told him about Malachi. I had to do it because Phinah kept pressuring me into telling him before it blew up in my face. I was a bit sceptical at first, but he accepted the news with open arms. Whenever Malachi was around me he was always quiet and apprehensive. I didn't blame the poor child, I mean I hardly gave him the proper attention, but when Phil was around; he would smile and actually laugh. I didn't want to introduce Phil to him yet, but somehow it just gradually happened. It was

April month, so it was Easter time and that meant Mam'Rose would be gone for a while with her church conferences and all. It was also family time for most Christians, so most of the other tenants had gone home. They were used to Phil's regular visits by then and I couldn't believe he was humble enough to park a Bugatti in Atteridgeville. Partly, I think he was comfortable because everyone knew him. We had gone on so many dates – yet we still hadn't done the deed yet. I wasn't in a hurry although I was rather surprised. I mean, I was under the impression that men fell out of love if you didn't give it up soon enough. Well, I had no idea who was going to take care of Malachi that Easter weekend, as I was on duty until Easter Monday. I was about to knock off that Thursday, when Phil unexpectedly walked into the store. Everyone knew we were together, so it wasn't much of a surprise whenever he came – even though not everyone was entirely happy about our relationship.

Phil: (smiling) “Hey, beautiful.”

Bina: (blushing) “Hey, love.”

Phil: “Aren't you supposed to have been knocking off already?”

Bina: "I was busy with stock taking, but we're almost done."

Phil: "Okay, then. I'll wait for you outside."

He gave me a kiss and left.

Phinah: (smiling) "Hehe, someone is head over heels."

Bina: "Eish (Oh), chomi (friend), I can't help it. I really think Phil is the one."

Phinah: "I hope so too. He needs to wife you already a swabisa difebe tse (so that he can spite these bitches)."

Bina: (laughing) "Wena, mara (but you, though)."

Phinah: “Anyway, what are you going to get up to this weekend after work? I mean, obviously you won't go home, but a girl can only hope.”

Bina: (sigh) “Ah, I am most probably going to spend my time konna (at my place). I'll ask one of the tenants who'll be home to look after Malachi while we're still here.”

Phinah: “Alright then, you'll shout if you need me to come keep you company.”

Phinah had always invited me over to her house to spend the holidays with her family. I didn't mind, I mean her family was really nice to me. They had grown on me and it just didn't feel foreign with them at all. We were done with our work and I found Phil waiting for me outside. He smiled widely as soon as he saw me and he spun me around before kissing me again. I received a kiss almost every five minutes from Phil.

Phil: (smiling) “Come, let's go fetch Malachi.”

Bina: (frowning) "Where are we going?"

Phil: "To my place, silly. Did you honestly think I'd let you worry the entire weekend about who was going to look after him when you have me?"

Bina: "Phil... You honestly don't have to do that."

Phil: "Baby, you're my girl and Malachi is your son. I take him as my own. Come on, now. Besides, I have a wonderful weekend planned."

Bina: "Yes, although I have to work this entire weekend."

Phil: "You will be knocking off early, and besides, I'll make sure I get you to work on time. I promise."

I nodded in agreement. I mean, it wasn't as if I had anything better to do and besides, Malachi had grown so fond of Phil already. Every moment with him was just fun. There was no

time for dull moments. We went by my place to get Malachi and just as I was about to pack a few clothes, he stopped me.

Phil: "Don't worry about packing anything. Let's just get Malachi and leave."

Bina: (frowning) "What am I going to wear?"

Phil: "Don't worry about that. Let's go."

So, we locked up and took off. He lived in Silverlakes, which was not very far from The Blydes. He had his very own Townhouse and thankfully he lived alone. As soon as we entered, the house looked completely different. He had changed the décor, with a few items that we were looking at a week prior.

Bina: (frowning) "What is all this, Phil?"

Phil: (excitedly) “This is our home, Bina. I replaced some of my furniture with a few items you chose from the catalogue I showed you.”

Bina: (surprised) “You didn't have to do that.”

Phil: “You're wrong. I had to. You're my woman and I want to show you how serious I am about you. The best is yet to come this weekend. You just wait and see.”

He picked Malachi up and held me with his hand as he pulled me towards one of the bedrooms. I was so shocked, that I was in tears. He had changed one of the bedrooms into Malachi's bedroom, which also had a play area for him as well. It was toys galore. The closet was also filled with so many of his clothes – all brand new and name brands. Was I dreaming?

Bina: (teary) “Phil...”

Phil: "You deserve it, Bina. All I want is to show you how much I love you. Both of you. Malachi, this is your new bedroom. You can sleep in here in play in here whenever you come visit."

Malachi: (excitedly) "Thank you, Uncle Phil. Can I call you daddy now?"

That really pulled a few strings from my heart. I was torn. I had no idea if it was right or not.

Phil: (smiling) "Of course you can."

They hugged so intensely, and it really hurt me. I never gave myself the time nor energy to love my son like that. I would always look at him and see a spitting image of Joel. Just then, my heart would be filled with hatred all over again. I was so impatient with him, and I barely had time for him, but my poor son, he didn't even mind. He was never angry at me. He was just happy to get the few minutes of attention he would always get from me. I excused myself and went to Phil's bedroom. I slept there a few times although he had never seen me naked. I found myself crying on the edge of the bed. It even

took me a while to notice just how different the bedroom looked. He had completely changed the entire house's décor just to accommodate me.

Phil: (worried) “Did I do something wrong? I am sorry if I overstepped my mark.”

Bina: (shaking head) “No, it's not that at all. It's just that, you have given me so much joy over the past month, and I have never seen my son that happy. You have really changed my world, Phil. I mean, you fell for a girl like me who doesn't even have a qualification. Why is that? I mean, there are plenty of fish in the sea.”

Phil: “Yes, there are plenty of fish, but they can never be you. I chose you because I love you, Bina.”

That was the very first time he had told me that.

Bina: (shocked) “You love me?”

Phil: “Yes, anyone who does such for you and your son loves you. I have loved you from the moment I saw you. I didn't want to tell you because you would have probably thought of me as some psychotic white guy. Well, I couldn't wait any more so I just had to say it. I love you, B. You complete me in so many ways, you just don't know it yet. You refuse to see just how much potential you have. Yes, I have money

but not once did you let any of that get to your head. I am actually so happy that you chose to love me – and not what I have. I don't want you to ever have any negative thoughts whenever you're around me. I have a lot of baggage – which might seem unbelievable to you, but I do. One day, I will make you my wife and you will see just how worthy you are of being loved. I don't judge you at all for any of the choices you have ever made. We all have endured trauma and not all of us have overcome it, but in due time, you and I will heal together.”

I was crying the entire time as I listened to his sweet words.

Bina: “I love you too, Phil.”

We cuddled for a while until I calmed down. Afterwards, he showed me all the clothes he had bought for me. I didn't even

think he knew what size I wore, but he got it all right – including shoes. I loved how he had bought different kinds of clothing; from dresses to blouses to leggings. I was just happy to have someone who cared about me like that. I opted for a shower, while he went out with Malachi to buy us some takeaways. After my shower, I got dressed and probably dozed off for a shortwhile, because not long afterwards, Phil woke me up.

Phil: “Hey, come and eat.”

I felt really weird.

Phil: “Are you okay?”

Bina: “Yes, I'm fine. I just had a weird dream about my mother.”

Phil: “What kind of dream?”

Bina: “She was just staring at me without saying a word; she didn't even smile – she just looked at me.”

Phil: “It's probably just one of those dreams. Come. Let's eat.”

Phil, Malachi and I had a good dinner while he was just happy to see his new toys and fit into his new pyjamas. He went to sleep rather late, at about 11pm, and Phil didn't even mind. He was such a natural around Malachi. He put him to bed, while I went to Phil's bedroom and waited for him. He smiled as he closed the door behind him and wasted no time further. He kissed me slowly and passionately. My body responded and heated up immediately. He stopped and looked me right in the eyes.

Phil: “I'd like to make love to you, Bee.”

My body was tensing up. I didn't know what to expect nor was I even sure if I was ready.

Bina: “Okay.”

he slowly got on top on me and started kissing me again. His hands were caressing my entire body as if I were a Harp while my back was the strings. Slowly but surely, his hands were making magical music with my body as the percussion instrument. With each touch, I melted and our souls collided and assimilated. Never in my wildest dreams did I ever imagine that a man's fingers could perform such sumptuous incantation. He removed my pyjamas in such a subtle way, while I returned the favour. It was the very first time a whole man had seen me naked and the very first time I had seen such a goddess of a man naked – any man for that matter. His sultry, warm breath appeased my body; I felt my toes curl with every breath that came about. His eyes were searching for tranquillity in mine and it seemed as if he had found what he had been longing for.

His conciliate hands gently touched my breasts as if he was moulding them into something new. The tip of his fingers were flicking my nipples so well, that it sent tantalizing signals to my crotch. The intimate, wet kisses he planted on my body were an invitation to consummate our relationship at last. It was quite painful at first, I won't lie. Phil made sweet love to me that night and at least we used a condom. I never knew that

my vagina could spill so much liquid. As embarrassed as I was, Phil just couldn't stop holding me. We repeated the beautiful process countless times throughout the night. Phinah would always tell me that Thomas had a very high sexual appetite and that they would have about 4 to 6 rounds at times. I couldn't fathom until I experienced it myself. When my alarm rang, it felt as if I just didn't get much sleep. Even though I was going to knock off at 1pm that day, I still dreaded the day even before it began.

Phil: "Good morning, babe. Wake up and go take a shower before you run late."

Bina: "Eish (oh), Phil. I am so tired. I don't even feel like going to work."

Phil: "Don't go then. Let's pick up where we left off last night."

Bina: "You mean this morning, I mean you kept me busy til 3am. Besides, I can't stay away from work."

Phil: "You can if your boss is my father."

Bina: (shocked) "What do you mean?"

Phil: "My father owns the store you work at."

That just didn't sit well with me at all. I mean it was no wonder most women at work looked at me with such hatred.

Bina: "Why didn't you tell me before?"

Phil: "I didn't think it was a big deal."

I got up as much as I didn't want to. The fact that Phil's father owned the store was a bit alarming. He hardly spoke about his father and almost everyone I worked with had never met him. Those who had worked there for a longer while said that he would pitch up once or twice a year. Phil made me some breakfast and packed me some lunch and dropped me off at work. I don't know, but I had a hard time concentrating that day, all because of what Phil had told me.

Phinah: (frowning) "Earth to Bina. Keng kgante (what is it)?"

Bina: (sigh) "It's nothing."

Phinah: "Out with it. You'll end up giving someone the wrong change."

Bina: "Okay. Well, Phil told em that his father owns this store."

She didn't seem surprised at all.

Phinah: "I thought you knew. So why is it stressing you out?"

Bina: "I don't know, I mean it seems as if his father wouldn't like the idea of us dating. I am just a bit unsettled by that."

Phinah: "Don't over think things. Your relationship is still new at that, so just go with it. You'll cross that bridge when you get

there. I mean, remember how I told you about Thomas's mom not liking me at all? She ended up accepting it even though I can tell she still doesn't like me. Thomas always pulls up for me. He stands up for me – even against his mother. The only reason why we haven't gotten married yet is because of the fact that my mother doesn't like the fact that he is a gangster. They will have no choice but to accept it – eventually. That is how it should be.”

She had a good point, I mean I guess I should have just gone with the flow.

Seven months later...

Phil and I had been dating for about eight months by then. Phil indeed had a great weekend planned for me after we slept together. Just when I thought that him buying my son and I an entire full wardrobe of clothes, he surprised me with a house. An entire house that he bought for me right down the street from Mam'Rose's place. Not only that, but it was fully furnished and in my name. It was a basic house – yet the design was so modern and beautiful. It had three bedrooms, a kitchen, lounge, bathroom and a tiny store room outside. I

didn't expect that at all, but I was delighted. Never did I ever think that I'd be a home owner at the age of 24. It was December month yet again, and I wasn't really psyched about it. Work had been going so well, and Phil had been spoiling me rotten. We were having sex every chance we got. I even got a few tips from Phinah and by December, I was practically a porn star.

It was still very weird that Phil never had family dinners with his family and that I still hadn't met his family after dating for almost a year. I mean, I had no family – they were all dead to me, but Phil, he had a family and they all lived right there in Pretoria. Mam'Rose had gone home on the 13th of December already to go visit her family in Limpopo, and most of the other tenants had gone home too, which meant there was no one to chill with really. Phinah had gone to visit her relatives in Rustenburg as well, while I was home alone. Phil invited Malachi and I over to spend the December holidays with him. I felt a little bad because it was starting to feel like he was pitying me instead of spending time with his family.

Bina: “Phil, how come you never speak of having dinner with your family or something?”

Phil: (edgy) "It's complicated, Bee. I told you."

Bina: "Well, perhaps you should go visit them for the holidays, you know. I mean, Malachi and I are used to being alone. You don't have to sacrifice your happiness like that."

Phil: "Trust me, I'd rather be here with you than with any of them. This is where I want to be."

I nodded even though I felt he was hiding something from me. No one decided to stop spending time with their family out of the blue. He had never seen them once ever since we started dating – as far as I knew.

Phil: "I was thinking, we should go Christmas Shopping at Menlyn or maybe Rosebank. It should be out outing, you know."

Bina: "Okay."

Phil: "I'll go call Malachi from his room."

He went to take Malachi from his room and off we went. I just had this odd feeling in the pit of my stomach; the very same feeling I had when I got raped; the very same feeling I got when I found out I was pregnant. What was even weirder, was the fact that my mother had been a frequent visitor in my dreams. All she did was just stare at me without smiling. She just looked at me – without saying a word. The further we drove, the more the feeling grew. It unsettled me so much. I remained quiet throughout the drive and just told Phil I was most probably tired. We made it to Rosebank mall, finally and headed out. Phil suggested that we go eat first before we went shopping, and he took us to the Grillhouse. That feeling just grew more as I sat down, and I could feel my entire body shaking. We ordered our drinks, and after a few sips I went to the rest room and tried to calm myself down. Upon exiting the cubicle, I was met with the biggest shock of my life.

Selaelo: (gobsmacked) "Oh, my goodness! Bina!"

Luke 8:17 - "For nothing is hidden that will not be made manifest, nor is anything secret that will not be known and come to light."

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“The way I see it, if you want the rainbow, you gotta put up with the rain.” — Dolly Parton

Bina

I couldn't believe my eyes. It was as if I was seeing a ghost. Once again, my body betrayed me; I could barely move. My throat was so dry it felt as if that hardened knot in my throat refused to go down without a fight.

Bina: (astounded) “Selaelo...”

She was so excited to see me as if we had last seen each other a few days prior. She attacked me with a hug.

Selaelo: “Oh, my word! How long has it been? Six years?! Wow, man. I have looked for you everywhere.”

My goodness she looked so good, she had even gained massive complexion and a bit of weight. Her nails were done and her make-up was on fleek. I didn't expect her to look plain, I mean she was the fashionista between the two of us.

Bina: (softly) "Yes, it has been a while, hey."

Selaelo: "Where have you been hiding? I mean what are the odds of finding you in Jo'burg?"

Bina: "Ag, around. I live in Atteridgeville. I came here with my boyfriend..."

Selaelo: (excitedly) "Boyfriend?! I have to meet this guy, I mean I need to see who has been treating my best friend so well."

Bina: "Maybe another time, I mean who are you here with?"

Selaelo: "Oh, I'm here with my fellow varsity mates. My goodness, Bina. I have missed you dearly, friend. We really need to catch up."

Bina: "Yes, we should. I have to go."

Selaelo: "Wait, let me walk out with you."

I was trying to avoid Selaelo as much as I possibly could, but she just wouldn't budge. We walked out and Phil was almost getting up most probably to look for me.

Phil: (smiling) "Oh, good. I was starting to worry about you."

Bina: "Sorry, I bumped into my high school best friend and we started catching up."

Phil: (smiling) "Oh, hi. I'm Phil, Bina's boyfriend."

I don't even know why I felt a bit embarrassed because I loved Phil and he loved me, but I didn't want Selaelo to think that I was selling myself to white blessers instead of studying to become a doctor as we wanted to.

Selaelo: "Pleased to meet you, Phil. (gasping) Oh, my goodness! Is that him?"

I just nodded.

Selaelo: "My goodness, he is so beautiful. Hey, little man. What is your name?"

Malachi: "My name is Malachi."

Selaelo: "I love it."

Phil: "Why don't you join us?"

Selaelo: "Oh, I'd love to, but I was actually on my way out. I have to be in Limpopo this weekend for a funeral."

Bina: "Whose funeral?"

She suddenly tensed up.

Selaelo: "You don't know?"

Bina: "Know what?"

Selaelo: "Pebetse has passed away."

I felt as if I was being stabbed with a large, sharp knife right in my gut. Everything went black from that moment onwards. I couldn't even think straight.

Phil: "Bee, are you okay?"

For some reason, I felt stabbing stomach cramps, while my forehead became sweaty. I felt as if I just couldn't breathe.

Selaelo: (shouting) “Can we get some water, please?! Bina, breathe!”

I dropped on the floor and the last thing I saw was Phil walking up towards me.

Bina: “Mama? Mama? Why aren't you saying anything?”

Dimakatso: “What do you want me to say, ngwanaka (my baby)? You have made your own choices.”

Bina: “Isn't that what you wanted me to do?”

Dimakatso: (shaking head) “The life you're living now, is that how I raised you? Is that what I asked of you when I told you to name my grandson Malachi?”

Bina: (teary) “But Mama...”

Dimakatso: “You wanted to be a doctor, Bina. Where did that dream go? I taught you how to pray. Proverbs 3:5 – 6; “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.”

She looked me right in the eye and her eyes were full of wrath.

Dimakatso: (angrily) Psalm 119:105; “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” Phillipians 4:13; “I can do all things through him who strengthens me.!”

Bina: (teary) “I don't know anymore, Mama. You know what happened to me - “

Dimakatso: (interrupting) “You know what happened to me, but did I blame the world? Did I carry grudges?! Bina, the world owes you nothing; you are not the very first person to get raped and conceive a child; you are not the very first person to not perform well in Matric. You're lucky – you have matric. Did I have any?! You have made me angry, ngwanaka (my child), and an angry ancestor is a dangerous one. You haven't heeded any

of my warnings. I visit you despite it all – yet you fail to listen. You have turned into a disappointment and your actions will indeed have consequences.”

Bina: (crying) “Mama! Mama, please!”

Dimakatso: (firmly) “I'll leave you with this; 1 Corinthians 10:13; “No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful

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and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it. Do with it as you wish.”

I felt my eyes burning as soon as I opened them. I then realized it had been the light of the hospital room. Everything seemed too bright and I felt a migraine creeping up on me. Once again, I was in hospital and I had a dream of my mother. It just didn't make any sense. I mean she was so angry at me. Aren't ancestors supposed to guide and be there for you? I mean I was only human, you know. Humans make mistakes just as much as

she did in her time on this earth. I looked around and saw Phil right in the corner.

Phil: "Oh, thank goodness. You're awake."

Bina: "What happened to me?"

Phil: "You fainted."

I then remembered; Selaelo told me that Pebetsi had passed away. I started crying silently. I was reeling with conflicting emotions within me. I felt so guilty; I had a lot of what ifs such as what if I hadn't left? Would he have lived if I had stayed? At the same time my heart had become a heart of stone where my family was concerned. They never wanted to listen to my reasons for leaving. They were so comfortable living with a rapist, that they didn't even want to stick up for me.

Phil: "Hey, it's okay. We'll get through this together."

Bina: (crying) "I shouldn't have left them..."

Phil: (frowning) “What are you talking about? I mean you're a great mother, so I know you'll do great with our child.”

My heart nearly stopped.

Bina: (shocked) “What did you just say?”

Phil: “You're pregnant.”

Fuck, no. How could that have happened? I tried retracing the previous few months to get an idea when I could have conceived. I wasn't even ready to have Malachi; what the fuck was I going to do with another baby?

Bina: “Tell me you're joking. Please tell me that this is all just a horrible dream.”

Phil: “I wish. The doctor says you're 12 weeks pregnant. I can't wait to finally meet our angel.”

That for me, was yet another horrid day. I felt as if someone could pinch me and tell me that it was all just a bad joke.

Phil: "I thought you'd be happy."

Bina: "I don't know how to feel. I just found out that my brother died and now I am pregnant."

Phil: "It's okay. We can go there today if you want. I can go with you."

Bina: "What about your parents?"

Phil: (edgy) "What about them?"

There it was again. His family seemed like a sore subject – yet he could never tell me why.

Bina: "Phil, we have been together for nearly a year now. I am pregnant, which is something we never planned to do. What will your parents say about this? Are they going to be happy? Will they accept the fact that you impregnated a black girl?"

Phil suddenly started scratching his head and he could barely look me in the eye. I knew that something was up. I just knew it.

Phil: "Bina, it is complicated. You wouldn't understand."

Bina: (angrily) "I wouldn't understand?! Why?! Because I'm black?!"

Phil: "Don't shout like that, you'll wake Malachi."

I was so upset and frustrated. Phil was legit dodging my question. I really knew he was hiding something from me about his family, yet he could not even trust me enough to tell me.

Bina: "I'd like to go home. Please, just take me home."

Phil: "Okay. I'll get the doctor."

All the emotions I had felt that day had turned to irritability. The doctor told me the usual shit about taking my vitamins, refraining from drinking alcohol and taking it easy, but I just didn't want to hear any of it. I just zoned out, while Phil was too excited. He was talking about us being a family the entire way. I was quiet the entire drive, until I saw him turning at his robot.

Bina: "I asked you to take me home."

Phil: "This is your home, Bee."

Bina: "I meant my house."

Phil: "Bee, I just want to be with you. Why can't you just pretend to at least be happy about this?"

I just ignored him and let him drive. Something just didn't feel right; I mean sure, everyone around me knew that I was Phil's girlfriend, but what puzzled me was the fact that I had never met any of his friends or family – not even distant relatives or something. We always took pictures and videos – tons of them, but he never wanted me to post them anywhere on social media – except WhatsApp. He would post Malachi and I on his WhatsApp, but we all know how one can block people from viewing their status updates, right? I was so confused, but I just kept hoping that I was wrong. We walked in and I went straight to the bedroom. He followed me.

Phil: “Bee, come on. Please don't tell me you regret falling pregnant with my first child.”

Bina: “Are you ashamed of me, Phil?”

Phil: (frowning) “What do you mean?”

Bina: “Phil, you never post me anywhere except WhatsApp; you don't even want me to post you on my social media – except WhatsApp! Coming to think of it, we never go out in public

around Pretoria unless it is at the Blyde. Why are you hiding me, Phil? Is it because your family is racist?”

Phil: (calmly) “Yes.”

Okay, I actually didn't expect that.

Phil: “My family has never liked the idea of me dating outside my race, Bina. I just want to introduce them to you, gradually. Please, I don't want you to think that I am ashamed of you. My father is a very powerful man – more powerful than people think. With power, comes danger. I just want you to meet them when the time is right, okay?”

He sounded convincing enough. Perhaps I was just hormonal.

Bina: “Okay.”

Phil: “Now, please. Take it easy. You, Malachi and I can go to Limpopo tomorrow since well the funeral is on Saturday.”

Bina: "I don't think I should go."

Phil: "You left your siblings years ago and they must be worried sick. Can you imagine how they feel right now? About to bury your brother without knowing where you are, not knowing if you're alive or dead. The least you can do is pitch up and bury him."

He had a point, but I had no idea how they would receive me. Shit, I felt like such a loser. I was 24, with a six year old and pregnant again; no qualification and most definitely no achievement. Meanwhile, Selaelo was living her dream – my dream. I didn't know what the future had in store for me, but I decided to hold on.

Romans 3:23 - "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

“Life is really simple, but men insist on making it complicated.”

—Confucius

Bina

I was so uneasy with everything that had been going on. I wasn't even sure if I wanted another baby – let alone a baby that came with so much drama from Phil's family. I mean, I already had enough on my plate. Phil couldn't keep his hands off me and he was so excited to be a first time father.

Meanwhile, Malachi was so attached to him. Phil had given Selaelo my number right after I fainted. I don't even know why he did that. I mean, I felt as if we had nothing to talk about, really. She was going to tell me about her fabulous life and all she had achieved, while my only achievement was what?

Having Malachi? I wasn't too sure about that. Having Phil? I mean I couldn't actually be too happy about that since men would embarrass a woman without thinking twice. He practically forced me to drive with him to Limpopo and I was having mixed emotions all round.

Phil: "Remind me to book you for a learner's license when you come back. It is high time you learnt how to drive."

Bina: "Yeah..."

Phil: "I can't believe I am going to be a father. I hope it's a girl. I'm going to spoil her rotten. Aren't you excited to be getting a baby sister, Malachi?"

Malachi: (excitedly) "I can't wait to hold her and play with her, daddy."

Phil: "That's my boy. Hey, Bee. I wanted to surprise you, but I well, since all this is happening, I might as well tell you now."

Bina: "What is it?"

Phil: "Open the glove compartment."

I wasn't too excited, but I did it anyway. I came across a big, brown envelope.

Phil: "Open it."

I opened it and started reading the letter. "Dear Mr. Ferreira, we are pleased to let you know that your son, Malachi Makwetla has been accepted for Grade 1 at Maragon Primary School in Doxa Deo Faerie Glen." I was gobsmacked.

Bina: (shocked) "Phil, when did you apply for this school?"

Phil: "A while ago. I wanted to surprise you."

Bina: "That school is expensive. It costs just over R50 000 annually."

Phil: "I can afford it. Besides, Malachi deserves the best life can offer."

Bina: "No, I can't let you do that."

Phil: "Why not?"

Bina: "It's just not right."

Phil: "We'll talk about this some other time."

I could tell he wasn't pleased about my thoughts regarding that. Suddenly his phone rang. He looked at it once and ignored it. His entire body language changed. His phone rang again and he ignored it – again.

Bina: "Aren't you going to answer that?"

Phil: "No, it's my father. I don't want to talk to him now."

I decided not to pester him about it any longer. We finally entered the village of Mogalakwena and the journey ahead gave me so much anxiety and brought back sour memories. We

passed the mall and I remembered how a helpless teenager had to sell vegetables instead of going to school to help her siblings survive. We drove past Joel's house, and my entire body reacted. I felt so cold, instantly. I tensed up and felt suffocated. I opened the window and forced my tears back.

Phil: "Are you okay?"

Bina: "I'm fine."

At least I'd be making an appearance with my rich, white boyfriend in his Mercedes-Maybach GLS 600. I was no longer the poor Bina that was cursed and hated by her family, at least they'd have something to talk about after the funeral. As we approached my grandmother's house, I saw a huge tent there. I couldn't even escape Phil's demand to take me home, so I had to punch in the address straight into the GPS. He stopped right before the gate. There were a few people walking around in the yard. The infamous silver tables were set outside and a lot of dishes most probably waiting to be washed were on them. I felt uneasy, but I couldn't run away. I hesitated walking out.

Phil: "Are you ready to go out?"

Bina: "Can't we just come back tomorrow for the funeral?"

Phil: (shaking head) "No, I don't want you to regret not doing this. I'll be right with you. Come."

Bina: (shaky) "They don't know about Malachi."

Phil: "You came here for your brother's funeral. You owe no one an explanation."

As he opened the door, I could see a few people walking closer to the gate. They were most probably fascinated by the fact that a R3 million car was right at the gate. I saw my grandmother look at the car in awe. My goodness, the witch was still alive.

Koko: (shocked) "Yoh, yoh, yoh! Lona, tla le boneng (Guys, come and see)!"

Phil opened my door and gave me his hand. I wanted to make a statement. I couldn't come back and give them something to satisfy themselves with. So, since I was dressed in Saint Laurent also known as YSL, from head to toe. I put on my Sunglasses and put my hand in Phil's as I walked out. He opened the door for Malachi was dressed in Versace. At least even if I hadn't achieved my dream, I was sure to make them eat their words. As I approached, my grandmother couldn't even recognize me. She was so excited to see me, just because I looked like a rich bitch walking out of an expensive car. That reptile.

Koko: (smiling) “Oh, hello... Eh, my boy. Bjale ke mang yo (who is this now)?”

Phil could hear African languages, he just couldn't speak them. He only said a word or two here and there. My grandmother looked a lot older than she was 6 years prior and yet, she still reeked of alcohol. It wasn't even midday yet.

Phil: (smiling) “Dumela, Koko (hello, granny). You must be Bina's grandmother. My name is Phil. I have come with Bina to attend her brother's funeral.”

She was so stunned, she nearly toppled backwards.

Koko: (shocked) “Heh (huh)?! Wa re ke Bina o (Are you telling me this is Bina)?! Aowa, ga go kgonagale (No ways, it isn't possible)!”

By then, I could spot my aunt Celia just behind her and a few people who looked a lot like my siblings. I took off my sunglasses, and they were all flabbergasted. I actually liked that. As soon as they saw Malachi, they were even more shocked.

Celia: (shocked) “Bina! Ke wena o (is this really you)?! Ke ngwana mang o (Whose child is that)?”

Bina: “Ke wa ka (he is mine).”

Koko: “O tshwana le (he looks just like) - “

Bina: (interrupting) "I didn't come here for that. Are you going to welcome me in or not?"

Koko: "Tsena, tsena, ngwanaka (come in, come in, my child). Lebitso la gae ke mang (what is his name)?"

Phil: (smiling) "His name is Malachi."

I ignored her while she was trying to make small talk with Phil along with Celia. What stunned me the most was my siblings. They had grown so much, I was in disbelief. First from the left was Lesiba, I could tell because he was always tall, dark and very good-looking. He looked as if he had been working out a lot. He was always the cleaner one between him and Matome. My goodness, he was dressed in a suit in broad daylight?

Lesiba: (firmly) "Sesi (sister)."

Bina: "Lesiba, ke wena o (is this you)?"

Lesiba: (smiling) "In the flesh."

Next to him was Matome, of course he was a bit thinner, but very good looking as well. He had a beard, though and he was a lot hairier than Lesiba. He had a nice, faded haircut, while Lesiba had a chiskop.

Bina: (smiling) "Matome..."

Matome: (chuckling) "Sesi (Sister) Bina."

Right in the middle was Hunadi. My goodness

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she was really the spitting image of our mother, just a lot fairer in skin colour. She had good hair, though, just like me and she had a lot more weight, though, but had the most gorgeous skin.

Bina: "Hunadi."

Hunadi: "I'm surprised you can still remember what I look like after all these years."

Okay, she had some attitude. I expected that, since she was 15 years old by then. She looked a lot older, though. And finally, Masalesa. My goodness, he was a whole ball of energy and was just a year younger than Hunadi.

Bina: (smiling) "Masalesa!"

He was the only one who was excited to see me amongst all of them. He rushed towards me as soon as I recognized him and he hugged me.

Bina: "It's so good to see you all again."

Hunadi: "Really? If so, why did you just dump us here? Were we that much of a burden to you? I mean if you had stayed you wouldn't have come back with a rich man, right?"

Lesiba: (reprimanding) "Hunadi. That's enough. Now is not the time."

Hunadi: "Sorry, abuti (brother)."

Wow, he was so authoritative, I was a bit jealous. I mean I was practically being treated the very same way my mother was by her own siblings.

Bina: "I know, you must be angry at me just as I still am at you."

Lesiba: "We'll talk about this inside. Come, you didn't come here for that."

I nodded as we walked in. Of course, Hunadi was the first one to walk away while clicking her tongue. She had Salome's tendencies that one. Speaking of Salome, I asked about her and Malome Frans, since I had last seen them since her first born's lobola day, when she attacked me with a belt.

Bina: "O kae mmane Salome (Where is aunt Salome)?"

Matome: "She's in one of the guest rooms. She's not well."

Bina: (Frowning) "Bothata (what's the problem)?"

Matome: "We're not sure yet. Some say cancer, some say she has schizophrenia since she hears and sees things that none of us do. It seems like a misdiagnosis, really, but Koko says ke dilo tsa sesotho (black magic)."

Bina: "Oh."

I didn't even want to go and see her. She wasn't one of my favourite people.

Bina: "Malome (Uncle) Frans ena (what about Uncle Frans)?"

Lesiba: (sigh) "He didn't take Connie's death very well, but he is getting there."

Bina: "I see. Well, you guys turned out really well, hey. Where is Portia?"

Lesiba: “We can talk about that a bit later. Don't you want to know what happened to Pebetsi?”

Bina: “Of course I do. What happened? I mean he was only 19.”

Lesiba: “He wasn't doing so well at school unlike the rest of us. You see, he had always felt alone as if he just didn't have anyone to relate to. I had Matome, while Hunad had Masalesa. He was basically all alone, so he was never the same again once you left. He was constantly asking about you and when his grades dropped, he couldn't take it any more.”

Bina: “What are you saying?”

Matome: “He committed suicide. He even left a note which you can read alone.”

I wasn't ready to hear that. My heart was so broken. I honestly thought he was ill or something, but suicide? I mean no, not Pebetsi. He was so quiet and hardly showed any signs of

depression. Something wasn't right; surely Portia and Joel must have done something to him.

Bina: (angrily) “No. I refuse to believe it. Surely Portia or Joel must have done something to him.”

Hunadi: “Portia was a mother to us – she still is. She has done things for us more than you ever could. It is not our fault you decided to sleep with Malome Joel.”

That stung like a bitch. Proverbs 18:21 says; “Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruits.”

Lesiba: (firmly) “Hunadi, I said enough! Why don't you take a walk or something. Clearly this conversation is too grown up for you.”

She got up irritated, while my heart bled. I felt as if I was bleeding from the inside and my tears were burning my cheeks.

Matome: “Forgive her, she is not usually like this.”

I could tell he just wanted to make me feel better, to be honest. She was always like that – I could tell. She had turned into one, ungrateful mother fucking bitch. How dare she?

Lesiba: “Look, sesi (sis), we have been looking for you all these years. I mean, what happened never sat well with us. We didn't even know that Malome Joel had done that to you, until Selaelo told us. By then, Matome and I had moved to varsity. Soon after you left, Portia kicked Malome Joel out of the house and raised Pebetsi, Masalesa and Hunadi all on her own. It's actually a pity because she found out she was pregnant soon after kicking him out. What happened to you has been eating her up for years. It has taken a huge toll on her, and all I can say is give her a chance to explain. As far as I go, I am terribly sorry for not choosing you that day. I don't know what the future would have turned out like, but if the tables were turned, I know you would have chosen us in a heartbeat.”

Matome: “Yes, I am also truly sorry, Bina. I mean, you took good care of us from the moment we were born. Not once did you ask anything from us; you gave yourself and you never

complained. We should have believed you – we should have chosen you. And now, you have had to raise a child you never intended on having. Please, find it in your heart to forgive me – forgive us.”

I had longed to hear those words for so long. I wasn't even sure if they were being legit or not, but I was just grateful that they were at least sorry. I mean, sure, I was also guilty of just abandoning them, but I had to choose myself at some point. They had turned out so well, and I bet if they had chosen me, they wouldn't have been such wonderful people. While we were having our moment, I heard a familiar voice.

Portia: “Hello, Bina.”

I guess the universe had decided that it was finally time for my own dose of therapy that day.

Proverbs 10:19 - “When words are many, transgression is not lacking, but whoever restrains his lips is prudent.”

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“You never really learn much from hearing yourself speak.” —
George Clooney

Bina

My heart literally froze for a few seconds. I was so conflicted and immediately, that unfortunate yet unforgettable day replayed slowly in my halfway corrupt mind.

Portia: (smiling) “Oh, Bina. I am so happy to see you at last.”

She gave me a hug, and I had no reaction. I wasn't even sure if I even wanted to return the hug, but she was just too happy to see me.

Portia: “Where have you been all this time?”

Bina: “In Pretoria.”

Portia: “You look so good. I've been praying for this moment. Can we perhaps talk?”

I've yearned to hear her speak to me like she used to; like a concerned and loving mother she was to me. My heart had felt a beaming light of hope, and just as I was about to open my mouth, in stormed a boy who looked exactly like Malachi.

Boy: “Mama! Mama! Ke kgopela R1 ke batla go rekela mogwera wa ka di sweets (May I please have R1, I'd like to buy my friend some sweets).”

Just then, that beaming light started to disappear slowly. I was so overwhelmed with negative emotions. I felt as if Portia knew all along about what Joel did to me even though she never confirmed it with her own lips.

Portia: “In a moment, my boy. I'm still talking to Aunt Bina.”

Boy: “Okay.”

He ran back out again in high energy. I wasn't even quite sure why I was angry, though, but all I know is that I was angry.

Portia: "Maybe we can take a walk and - "

Bina: (interruting) "I'm sorry, but I have to go."

Of course, my siblings were disappointed to hear me say that.

Lesiba: "We were hoping you'd spend the night."

Bina: "Perhaps another time."

I was heading out when Portia stopped me.

Portia: "I didn't know, you know. If I had known, do you honestly think I'd let him live?"

I turned around in shock at that awful statement of hers.

Bina: "He's still alive, isn't he?"

Portia: "Bina, that's not fair. Just give me a chance to explain what happened."

Bina: "No need. You and Joel can be one, happy family along with your son. As for me – you can forget about me. I mean, you weren't obliged to take care of me – of us after all."

Portia: "Bina, I just hope that one day when you look back at this day you will remember my words. Life is so short and it is really an overused statement, but the truth in it is so palpable. You are not going to be young forever, that boy is going to grow up and he will start asking questions. I hope you don't look back in regret. By then everyone will have moved on with their lives and you will be angry at the world, for not looking out for you when you have done nothing but shut them out."

Bina: (bewildered) "Wow, how big of you. It's so nice talking from an entitled perspective. Anyway, I hope you bury my

brother with the dignity he deserves. I mean, you all have the money, so I doubt that would be a problem.”

Lesiba: “Bina, please - “

I ignored them all and stormed out. I headed towards the car, and found Koko and a few of my other relatives including Celia hovering over Phil's car. My man's car. The fucking nerve.

Bina: (angrily) “Le go re le nthabele gore ke sa phela, le nnetse go phophola koloi e le ka se tswile le e rekileng (Instead of being so happy that I am still alive, you're busy touching a car that you'll never be able to afford)!”

Koko: (shocked) “Aowa (No), Bina. Bjale wa telela (you're being disrespectful right now).”

Bina: (shouting) “Disrespectful?! Are you even hearing yourself right now?! Your own daughter nearly beat me to death and I went to live with Portia and Joel! Joel raped me, Koko! He raped me and I was a virgin. He raped and impregnated me

and left me with so many scars. All you know how to do is talk shit about everyone who has been nothing but nice to you! Your daughter, my mother died and you never had the decency to take care of us! I hope you're happy now. Now, get away from my car and fuck off!"

Celia: "Yoh (Wow)! I have always heard that Gauteng changes people, but now I truly believe it."

I got into the car and slammed the door right in front of them. They were cursing and shouting outside, but I couldn't be bothered. My tears were burning my entire face, while my head felt as if it was going to explode. All the pain and hurt I had buried beneath my soul had come back to haunt me, slowly. Phil rushed to the car and sat in his seat.

Phil: "Are you okay?"

Bina: (crying) "Let's just go, please. I don't want to be here any more."

Phil: (nodding) "Let me go get Malachi."

I didn't even want to look outside my window. I saw a glimpse of a few people staring at me and I knew that they were hoping I'd stay. Why stay where you're not appreciated? Yes, I decided on my own that I'd leave and start my own life. I changed my number and did everything I could have done to ensure they never found me, but the least they could have done was pretend that they were happy to see me. Phil put Malachi in the car and strapped him in his seat. He was crying, which annoyed me even more.

Bina: (shouting) "Can you just shut up, Malachi?! Just shut the fuck up!"

Phil: (firmly) "Don't talk to him like that. He is a child and he is sad to leave his family. You should be more understanding than anyone right now, as his mother."

What a low blow.

Bina: "What are you trying to say, Phil? Are you trying to say that I'm a bad mother?"

Phil: (sigh) "Let's get out of here."

He started the car and drove off. He didn't even answer my question, so I also left him just like that.

Bina: "Don't even drive to the hotel, let's just go back home."

Phil: "Your brother is being buried tomorrow."

Bina: "I know and I'm not going there."

I thought he would beg me as always, but instead he just kept quiet and drove off. He never said anything right after that – except for conversing with Malachi the entire trip back home. They annoyed me so much and as much as I was hungry, I just didn't want to speak to him. I died with my pride the entire way home. He took us to his house and straight to

the bathroom. I headed straight to the kitchen and fixed myself a sandwich.

Phil: "I'm going to get us some food. I'll be right back."

He was so cold, yet so loving towards Malachi. It really broke me. I mean, he was my man – not Malachi's. Yes, he accepted me with my son, but why would he give all the attention to him and not me? He took Malachi with him as expected and left. While nibbling on my sandwich, I browsed through my phone. I had switched it off right after leaving Koko's house because it was ringing off the hook. I saw countless WhatsApp and text messages from Selaelo and one from an unfamiliar number which caught my eye. "Sesi (sister), it's Lesiba. Selaelo gave me your number. I hope you're okay where you are. Text me or call me as soon as you get this message." I decided not to respond. As far as they were concerned, they were dead to me. I mean, I had Phil and that was all I needed. I could create my own family instead of going back to them. They were too toxic and destructive for their own good. Hunadi was a bitch towards me and I assumed the rest of them were pretending to be happy to see me. An hour later, Phil arrived along with Malachi and had bought him tons of toys as usual. He came

back with Ocean Basket, much to my dismay. I hated seafood ever since that dreadful

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unplanned pregnancy. The stench was an enemy to my senses as expected. I couldn't handle the smell, so I distanced myself from Phil. I went to the bedroom and sat on the bed. Within a few minutes he walked in and followed me.

Phil: (firmly) "Can we talk?"

Bina: "Sure."

Phil: (firmly) "I really don't like what you did today, Bina. I took my time and effort to ensure that you at least go and bury your brother, but instead you lost control over your emotions and refused to give them a chance to speak to you and explain everything. Yes, they have wronged you in the worst possible ways, but you weren't also very innocent in all of that. As a result, you're back here and now you won't be able to bury your brother."

Bina: (frowning) "What are you trying to say, Phil?"

Phil: "I'm saying that one day, you are going to regret all of this. You have robbed Malachi of knowing his family – his real family and you also robbed yourself an opportunity to forgive and for inner peace. You already do not give Malachi the love he deserves as a mother – despite me being there for you every step of the way."

That really hurt, it actually stung. I felt myself flare up with rage; rage that I had stored beneath my soul ever since we left Limpopo. How dare he?

Bina: (angered) "Excuse me?"

Phil: "You heard me well, Bee. I can't be teaching you this when we have been together for nearly a year. I mean, you practically told your family off and said to them that you don't need them, because you have me. What if I won't be here forever? Have you ever thought about that?"

Bina: (anxious) “What are you saying, Phil?”

Phil: “You told them that you have a car, you are basically acting like a slay queen instead of getting your life on track. What happened to the Bina I met months ago? The Bina I fell in love with? The ambitious Bina, the one who wanted to be a doctor?”

I felt so attacked.

Bina: (teary) “Phil, that's not fair.”

Phil: (sigh) “Don't wait up for me. Food is in the kitchen. Just make sure you get Malachi in bed.”

He stormed out while I was calling out to him in frustration. So, my own boyfriend basically told me that I was a lazy, slay queen who disrespected and wrote off her family. He called me a bad mother while at it. The fucking nerve. I was so frustrated; yet I had nothing to take it out on. I scrolled through my phone and decided to call him, but after three phone calls – his phone went to Voicemail. For the very first time in our relationship, I felt neglected and I had fear. I feared Phil was having doubts about me – about us. Perhaps me falling pregnant was not the best thing to ever happen to us. While I was still trying to call Phil like some stalker, I received a WhatsApp message from

Lesiba. I hadn't saved his number, although I remembered that he had sent me a message earlier on that day. I opened the message and I instantly wished I hadn't. He had sent me a picture of Pebetsi's letter.

“To my dear siblings, firstly, I would just like to say that I love you. I have always loved you. Yes, we have had a very tough life, but amazingly – we conquered. I felt that our life as siblings was finally coming together; when we went to live with Malome Joel and Mmane (Aunt) Portia, I finally felt as if we had been given a second chance, a chance at life and a chance at success. All I wanted was for us to prove to people; our enemies; our mother's enemies that we would be greater than they expected us to be. All my life, I was always the black sheep; the forgotten one. Bina was always alone and had to struggle all alone, while the rest of us had it easier. She took care of us – nonetheless, she was selfless and only wanted the best for us. That night Salome beat her up, she could have decided to go alone and leave us behind, but she chose not to – she chose us. The biggest mistake we ever made was to let Bina leave us with Joel and Portia and not believe her or give her a chance to hear her story. We failed our sister – our eldest sister.

Lesedi and Matome, you guys were always together; almost like inseparable twins. I was alone; I could never relate to any of

you, while Masalesa and Hunadi were practically together almost always. I slipped into a deep depression when Bina left us. How were we going to protect one another if we failed to protect someone who has been there for us ever since we were born? I managed to pass my matric well, only because I wanted to prove people wrong about us, but when my grades started dropping in Varsity, I couldn't take it. Nothing made sense; I had no friends and no one to talk to. Our family has always been against us. Even though Malome Frans decided to put us through Varsity, it just never felt okay without Bina. She didn't get the chance to go to school again and be someone she has always wanted to be. All I want now, is to join Mama in peace. I am lonely; I have always been. Please, do not feel guilty about my death. It is entirely my choice. If you ever find Bina, please show her this letter. Tell her that I love her and that one day we will meet again. Once again, I love you all and wish you all the best in life. Love, Pebetsi.”

I felt so much pain within me; I wanted to die right on that bed. I felt so guilty, so upset, so enraged. How could Malome Frans all of a sudden be able to pay for their tuition, but failed to do so for me when I was living there? Was I the only one who had to undergo all that trauma, all that heartache? I suffered dearly and no one was in my corner. So, they most probably felt guilty and looked at me with pity; “Bina, our poor first born sister who could never go to University”. My brother

killed himself and I felt as if it was partially my fault. Had I been there, perhaps the outcome would have been different. A part of me felt as if I could never go back home and be a family unit with them ever again. They failed to listen to me when I told them that Joel raped and impregnated me. They didn't even want to leave with me. I was glad they did well, but I could never go back. Things could just never be the same again. Yes, perhaps I wasn't thinking straight and perhaps I was being bitter and unforgiving, but I had made my choice. Selaelo had been calling me all damn day and even left countless messages for me on my Voicemail. All I wanted to do was cry in Phil's arms, yet he wasn't home and he didn't even seem interested. I just wanted to ensure that he was coming back and that he was fine. I checked his WhatsApp and he was online – yet his phone was off. I texted him and as soon as he received my message, he logged out. What was the entire purpose of him avoiding me? Was that the end of us?

Phillipians 3:13 – 15 - “Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you.”

“My mama always said, life is like a box of chocolates. You never know what you’re gonna get.” — Forrest Gump

Bina

I couldn't sleep, more so I just had a pounding headache. I had completely forgotten about Malachi, when he came to Phil's bedroom and slept right next to me. I was so unsure how I felt about him at that point. Going back home meant that I had to relive what Joel had done to me. Every time I would look at Malachi, I'd always see Joel no matter what. I was so comfortable with other people taking care of my son that I just never took my time to bond with him. I was a mess and I had no idea how to get out of it. I checked my phone and it was about 4am in the morning. I had no messages nor missed calls from Phil. I was worried, most importantly I was worried about what he was doing and whom he was with. He had never slept out before, although we didn't live together. How could he just leave me in his house like that and not even call or text? I heard movement downstairs and I knew it was him, so I pretended to be asleep hoping he would apologize for what he said to me earlier. I heard him walk in and take Malachi to his room and he

came back. He went to the bathroom and ran the shower. That was a bad sign. Why would he come back at odd hours of the morning just to take a shower? I heard his phone ring and he answered almost immediately. I could hear him speak, although distinctively.

Phil: (softly) “Ek kan nie nou praat nie (I can't talk now). Ek weet (I know). Luister, ek sal jou later bel (Listen, I'll call you later).”

He hung up the phone and went about with his shower. He came back out roughly 15 minutes later. I expected him to cuddle me or at least wake me to talk, but no. Instead, he just faced the other way and went to sleep. My heart was broken. I felt so unloved, I mean we were days away from Christmas; our very first Christmas together and he decided to just change like that. He sounded as if he was cutting the caller off and I just knew that was a bad sign. Perhaps he had another, that would explain why I had never met his family. Drifting off to sleep was nearly impossible, but I managed to do it eventually.

Days passed, and Christmas came and Phil was no longer the Phil I knew. He was so cold, and I hardly saw him. Every time I called him, he would cut me off or give me an excuse. He would

call me and ask to speak to Malachi, or send me some money to buy a few things. He would only drop by for a few minutes, and we would hardly talk. I hadn't even gone for my first doctor's appointment and all he ever did was ask me how I was doing and how the pregnancy was going. I was slowly becoming depressed to the point of no return. I was obsessing about Phil so much, that I was stalking his social media with fake profiles, but he was so discreet; he never posted me or anyone in his life. I hated every moment of being away from him. I thought of spending Christmas with Phinah, but Thomas had taken her to his family in Rustenburg, and I couldn't go home since I never buried my brother and also, I deleted all their numbers and changed mine. So, I did the unthinkable. When you want a man's attention, you can do crazy things. I decided to grab Malachi and take him with me because no one was available to babysit. I called an Uber and went straight to his house. I was nervous, my heart was pounding and I was overcome with anxiety, but I just did it. He promised me to spend Christmas with us, but all of a sudden he had changed his entire behaviour. We arrived within half an hour and I knocked first before entering, even though I had a key. No one answered after I had knocked for a good few minutes, so I unlocked the door and entered. No one was home, but I was sure that he wouldn't mind seeing me there. I mean, I was his girlfriend and the mother of his child after all. The apartment looked clean as

usual, I didn't see anything unusual, until I went to his bedroom. Everything looked fine, although I saw a lipstick that wasn't mine on the dressing table. I was instantly alarmed, so I decided to call him. His phone rang until it went straight to voicemail, from there it was off. He was most definitely avoiding me. So, I let Malachi play around while I made myself some food. I tried to do something nice for the two of us for Christmas, and Malachi was a very happy child. We had been spending about 5 hours at Phil's house, and I must have dozed off on the couch. I heard a key turn in the door, and I figured it was Paul, so I remained on the couch. It was only when I heard an unfamiliar voice that I became immediately alarmed.

Man: (shocked) “Phillip, wat gaan hier aan (what is going on here)?! Wie de fok is die (who the fuck is this)?!”

I got startled and got off the couch almost immediately. I saw a man who looked like the spitting image of Phil, just way older. It must have been his father, although he looked so livid. Phil must have been outside, but stormed in as soon as he heard his father shouting. He looked absolutely shocked to see me. That was not how I thought a boyfriend would look after seeing his girlfriend in his house.

Man: “Ek het jou 'n vraag gevra (I asked you a question).”

He was about to answer, when Malachi ran towards him.

Malachi: (excitedly) “Daddy!”

Phil looked as if he just wanted to dig a pit and just stay in it.

Man: (frowning) “Daddy?! Phil, wie is die (Who is this)?!”

Bina: “Hi, I'm - “

Phil: (interrupting) “Sy's my skoonmaker, pa (She's my cleaner

Advertisement

dad).”

I felt so broken, that I literally felt my soul leave my body. How dare he? I mean I knew that he was afraid of his dad, but how dare he? I wanted to cry, but I tried really hard not to.

Man: “Nou, hoekom is sy hier (Now, why is she here)?”

He was so rude, he looked at me in such disgust. He was even speaking in Afrikaans, thinking I couldn't hear them, but I could hear them very well. What broke me was that Phil was really hoping I'd say nothing. I thought love was all about risking it all for the one you love.

Phil: “Uh, sy (she)...”

I walked a woman who looked like his mother, alongside another young woman, most probably 30 or so. She didn't look like either of them but I assumed she was family.

Woman: “Andries, hoekom raas jy so (why are you making so much noise)?”

Young woman: “Babe, what's up? Who is this?”

Babe? I looked at Phil who didn't seem to be denying my thoughts. I was crushed. I just stood there quietly while he was carrying on with the entire charade.

Phil: "Sy is my skoonmaker (she is my cleaner). She was waiting for me to call her a cab. It is standard procedure since there aren't any taxis around on a holiday."

Yep, I was being treated like his maid right in front of his parents and someone who just called him Babe.

Man: "Oh, well, you'd better get her out of here. I mean, her son is even calling you daddy. It might send out the wrong message. Jy ken hoe is hierdie mense (you know how these people are)."

Woman: "Andries, be nice. We don't speak to our workers like that, you know that."

Man: "Ek sê maar net (I'm just saying)."

Phil: "Bina, please get your things so I can get you a cab."

I just nodded with glistening tears as I headed to his bedroom to get the rest of my things. Not once did he follow me or anything, but he just stood there until I went back.

Phil: "I'll be right back."

Young Woman: (smiling) "Come back soon. I miss you already."

She kissed him while he kissed her back. I felt as if I was stabbed right in the gut. I trusted Phil, I thought I found the love of my life, I mean I was pregnant and he did that to me?! What the fuck was I? The black mistress? As soon as we walked out and he closed the door, I just let the tears flow. The further steps I took, the more I just cried and started hyperventilating. Nothing and no one else mattered at that point, apart from what Phil had done to me.

Phil: (nervously) "Bee, I can explain."

I cried even more while heading down the stairs. The moment we walked out, I felt as if I was finally breathing.

Phil: "Bina, please. Get into the car and I'll explain everything."

Bina: "No."

Phil: "Please."

Bina: "I said no! How dare you, Phil? Am I just some fucking fetish to you?!"

Phil: "Get in the car!"

I refused and kept walking, until he pulled me roughly and shoved me right in his car. Malachi was put in the back and I just cried.

Phil: "Bee, please. It is not what you think."

Bina: "Really? So, I didn't just hear you tell your parents and your girlfriend or wife or whatever the fuck she is that I'm your maid?!"

Phil: "It's not easy to explain, okay?"

Bina: "I understand it all now, I perfectly understand. I mean, you find out I am pregnant with your baby and you decide to change. You can't stomach the thought of your parents being grandparents to a black baby, isn't it? You'd rather let them see me as your maid than your girlfriend!"

Phil: "Please, Bee. It's not that easy, okay? I love you."

Bina: "Really? Then why have you been so distant? Why didn't you tell them the truth? And who is that girl?"

Phil: "I have been dealing with my father and his demands, Bina. He wants me to take over the company, but I have been

stalling. I am trying to think of something so that you and I can finally have a life together; away from my father's control.”

Bina: “Who is she?”

Phil: “She... She's a woman my father wants me to marry, but I love you, Bee. You are the one I want to be with.”

Bina: “If that's the truth, then end it with her. Let's go back up there and tell them the truth, right now. Tell them that I am your girlfriend and that I am pregnant.”

I could tell he wasn't even considering the idea.

Phil: “I can't.”

Bina: “Why not?”

Phil: “It's complicated.”

Bina: "Uncomplicate it."

Phil: "I can't."

You know there is always that gut feeling you feel in the pit of your stomach, no matter how much you try to deny it, it just always creeps up on you. I had that feeling. I tried avoiding it, but I knew deep down that I had made a horrible mistake about Phil. I went into the relationship blindy and ignored all the signs. That day, he confirmed to me whom he was loyal to, but my heart just didn't believe it.

Phil: "Just please, give me some time to sort it all out and I will be yours – only yours. Please."

I didn't want Malachi to end up being angry and depressed all over again. Phil was a good man, and he loved him like his own. He had already done so much for me and I decided to stay. I stayed and compromised even though I knew that life had already changed the moment he didn't tell his father that I wasn't his maid. My life would slowly spiral into a killer hurricane and it was all my fault. Choices can imprison you for a very long time.

2 Corinthians 9:6 - The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully."

“Watch your thoughts; they become words. Watch your words; they become actions. Watch your actions; they become habits. Watch your habits; they become character. Watch your character; it becomes your destiny.” — Lao-Tze

One month later...

Bina

The new Year had finally arrived and as usual, I just couldn't be happy about it. I didn't have any resolutions like anyone else and my life was pretty much messier than it was a few weeks prior. Phil had been distant as expected ever since that fateful Christmas day. I was so embarrassed about the entire situation, that I didn't tell anyone about it. People were asking me about his whereabouts, including Phinah and Mam'Rose, but I just came up with an excuse that he had gone out of the country. Oddly he sent me a text message a week after New Years, telling me that He had already paid Malachi's entire year's school fees. He even sent me some money to buy him uniform and essentials. I was slowly slipping into depression and I just wasn't coping. I could barely take care of myself, let

alone Malachi. I was still pregnant, and that was depressing me even more. I had no life, my boyfriend was almost non-existent and I had no future goals. My life felt so stagnant, that I didn't know what else to do – but to drink and numb the pain away. Malachi was staying with Mam'Rose for a while, since I asked her to take care of him while I try and sort myself out. I was at work, trying to ignore thinking about Phil, when Phinah approached me.

Phinah: “Babes, ke lunch time (it's lunch time). Let's go eat.”

Bina: “I'm not hungry.”

Phinah: “Either way, you need a break. Come.”

She basically dragged me out of there as we headed out of the store.

Phinah: “I'm buying us some lunch and you'd better eat.”

I just nodded. She bought us some takeaways at McDonalds and we decided to eat in.

Phinah: "Now, spit it out."

Bina: "Eng (what)?"

Phinah: "You have been distracted for the past few weeks, Bee. Come on. I know this has something to do with Phil. Thomas even told me."

I suddenly saw a flare of hope as soon as she said that. It meant that perhaps Phil was talking to Thomas about me.

Bina: (anxiously) "What did he say? Is he okay? I mean, of course he is okay, but I mean, does he talk about me?"

Phinah: (sigh) "Not really. They do talk here and there. He is currently out of the country on some business."

Bina: "Oh."

Phinah: "Look, I don't know what happened between the two of you, but surely you should focus on your life and forget about him for a while. I mean, Phil is not the end of the world, Bina. Let him be and take care of yourself and your son."

Phinah didn't understand. I hadn't even told her that I was pregnant. I was about four months pregnant by then and I really couldn't just give up on Phil like that. Giving up on us would have meant that I'd be a single mother of two – yet another statistic. I'd have proven my aunts right along with my grandmother. Although they didn't know where I was or where I lived, but surely they would have found out sooner rather than later.

Bina: "It's not that easy, Phinah. I mean, you have Thomas and your children. You have known each other for so long yet here I am. I am miserable, I can't even take care of Malachi and I'm pregnant."

Phinah: (shocked) "You're pregnant?"

Bina: (nodding) "Yes."

Phinah: "How? When? Yoh (oh), this is bad."

It felt as if she knew way more than she let on.

Bina: (frowning) "I know, but why do I get the feeling you are hiding something from me, Phinah?"

Phinah: "Eish (Oh), it's not my place to tell, friend. Besides, I'm only suspecting."

My heart started racing abnormally. I was terrified.

Bina: (worried) "Phinah, spit it out already."

Phinah: (sigh) "It's best I show you."

She whipped out her phone while I started feeling sweaty. She scrolled through for a few seconds and handed me the phone. My heart stopped for that moment. My entire mind was going through a whirlwind of scenarios, and plenty of insults I felt like throwing right at Phil. How the fuck dare he?!

Bina: (teary) “What the fuck is this?”

Phinah: “She posted it and tagged him on Insta. Since you were rather distant for the past few weeks, and I haven't seen much of Phil, I gathered there was something not right. Now with this, and you being pregnant, I honestly don't know what to say.”

Bina: (teary) “So, Phil decided to propose to the bitch, instead of keeping his promise to me?”

Phinah: (shocked) “You knew about her?”

Bina: “I went to his house unannounced on Christmas along with Malachi. He rocked up with his parents and this girl. I had

no idea who they were since I hadn't met them before. He blatantly told his father that I was his maid, Phinah. Imagine that? His maid! We found out a few days before Christmas that I was pregnant. I mean who the fuck does that?! I haven't even gone for a check up and I am four months pregnant. What will I tell this child now?"

Phinah: (tearfully) "Oh, Bee. I had no idea you were going through this. I am really sorry."

Bina: (crying) "What do I do now?"

Phinah: "I think it would be best to just focus on the baby. Phil's family is complicated, I mean, I don't doubt his love for you, but at this point I think he loves his life and his family more than he loves you."

That really stung like hell. I wanted to not believe her, but I knew deep down she was telling the truth. Sadly, I wasn't ready to hear the truth. My heart just wouldn't let me.

Bina: "You don't understand. Maybe we should talk about this in a few days."

Phinah: "I'm afraid that might not be possible."

I frowned as I stared at her in confusion.

Phinah: "I've been accepted at Wits to study Business Sciences. Thomas is going to pay lobola for me this weekend and then we're moving to Jo'burg next weekend with the kids."

That was such a bummer for me. I mean, I thought that Phinah would never try applying for Varsity ever again. I was supposed to be happy for her as her friend, right? But I was envious, I was incredibly jealous and I just wished that she had stayed there working at the shop like me until I got my big break. If she left, then I had no one else to relate to. Life was just fine when we were two simple girls working at Pick 'n Pay and just sharing their lives together. I just didn't want her to leave me. I was slowly becoming a miserable, selfish person and I had no idea how to feel about it.

Bina: (faint smile) "That's amazing. I am so happy for you."

Phinah: "I wanted to tell you, but you seemed to have a lot on your plate. I really didn't want to seem like everything was about me."

Bina: "It's honestly cool."

Phinah: "Please don't be sad or angry at me, Bee. I am not abandoning you in any way if that is what you're afraid of. I mean, we'll still get together and call one another, right?"

Bina: "Of course. It's not like that at all. I am genuinely happy for you, babe. Let's go back to work before they think we are doing as we please."

She smiled at me and I tried so hard to mask my evil feelings towards Phinah at that point, but I was not happy. I could feel that Satan was slowly using me. 1 Corinthians 10:13 says; "No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your

ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.” I was slowly being consumed by evil and doing the complete opposite of what I was taught to do from the moment I was born. I tried by all means to fight against the evil thoughts, but the more good news came towards people's way, the darker my heart became.

I started over thinking about everything and anything; asking myself if God truly loved me, then why did He let opportunities pass me by and yet He blessed others instead. I mean, my first child was conceived out of rape, I was pregnant with my second one and the father basically dropped me like a hot potato. My best friend was moving up while I was stuck in that miserable, pathetic life. That wasn't right nor fair at all. Phinah and I went about our day and I still couldn't stop thinking about Phil. I was basically obsessing about my boyfriend, who was engaged to his so called girlfriend. He never posted me yet he posted a picture of him and that girl being engaged. I felt so used, so unloved. I wondered if I was still in a relationship or not. The moment I knocked off, I bought myself a few bottles of wine at Woolworths. I forgot about being pregnant for a few moments, and I just wanted to drink. As soon as I got to my house, I

logged onto Instagram and I saw the picture. I started pouring myself a glass of wine and just kept it coming.

That was the only picture that Phil had posted of her, yet as soon as I went onto her Instagram, she had millions of pictures of her and Phil. I couldn't believe it. So, he dropped me – his pregnant girlfriend just to go be with her? What the fuck was even happening? I couldn't stop obsessing over Phil, and I was obsessing about her even more. Her name was Melissa van der Merwe, the daughter of Koos van der Merwe who was also Phil's father's business partner. I mean sure, it didn't take a genius to figure out why they were engaged – it was most probably for business, but he just looked so happy.

I was so angry; I couldn't understand what was so special about her. Did Phil really just not care about his child? His first born child? I couldn't just leave it like that and forget about it, so I did the unthinkable. I created an album on Instagram and Facebook and uploaded every picture Phil and I took; together and along with Malachi. Call me malicious, but I wanted to see what the outcome would be. I wanted to see if he would really come back, fight for me or simply deny me like he did that day. Sure, I was supposed to get the message then

but he bought me my own house, he took such good care of my son and even took him to a private school. Surely that counts for love, doesn't it?

I tagged Phil in every single picture I uploaded, and of course, since I was using my original accounts, everyone who knew me back home commented. One of them being Gladys, and some of their comments just weren't nice. Some said I was a delusional side chick and posted a picture of Phil putting that mega sized diamond ring on Melissa's finger. I couldn't help it. Phil betrayed me and I wanted to make him pay. It didn't take long before he started bombarding my phone with calls and messages – as expected. “Pick up your phone”, “Do you have any idea what the fuck you just did, Bina?”, “Please pick up so we can talk.” I ignored all his attempts to contact me. Suddenly, he was available and knew just where to find me. The nerve. I switched off my phone since he was irritating me and decided to drink the rest of my wine. I caught up on some soapies and two bottles later, I heard a stern knock on my door. I tried ignoring it, but before I knew it, I heard someone open the kitchen door. I was frantic, I thought someone was breaking in, until I heard Phil's voice.

Phil: (shouting angrily) “Bina! Bina where are you?! Where the fuck are you?!”

He stormed right into the lounge, staring at me bewildered. I had never seen Phil so angry before that.

Phil: (angrily) “What the fuck were you thinking doing what you did?!”

Bina: “Excuse me? What the fuck were you thinking doing what you did to me?!”

Phil: “Bina, you know I love you. I told you, it is complicated. Why couldn't you just wait?”

Bina: “Wait for what? For you to make an even bigger laughing stock of me?”

Phil: “Did you honestly think that I'd buy you a house, take care of Malachi and take him to an expensive private school if I didn't love you?”

Bina: (crying) “Phil, you told your father that I was your maid. You practically denied me in front of your family – including your fiancée. Now, that I have most probably ruined things for you, you came here trying to convince me to retract those posts, right? You didn't come here because you love me.”

He was about to answer until I nearly stumbled and tried balancing myself with the couch.

Phil: (frowning) “Have you been drinking?”

Bina: (looking down) “No.”

Phil: (angrily) “Have you been drinking, Bina?! You are carrying my child! My fucking child!”

He came closer towards me, with his eyes filled with rage. Phil looked like he was about to go on a rampage, which petrified me.

Phil: (livid) “I asked you a question, Bee! Why have you been feeding my child alcohol?!”

Bina: (frightened) “It was only one glass, I - “

Phil: (interrupting) “I love you, Bina, but do you now see why I had to choose my family over you? You have lost your ability to think like a normal person. You can never put others above you – not even your own children. Why the fuck would you drink knowing very well you aren't supposed to consume alcohol when you're pregnant.”

Bina: (crying) “You don't care about me, Phil. You don't care about this baby. You just want to keep daddy's legacy and money going. So, do us both a favour and fuck off. Don't ever come back here again.”

Phil: “You don't understand what you just did with those posts, Bina. You have created something you won't be able to finish. Thanks to you, I might never be able to be a father to that baby. Thanks to you, you are going to lose everything I

fought so hard to give you. This house; Malachi's education; your job. You don't know what you have just done.”

He turned around and I thought he was about to leave when he turned around and had this pitiful look on his face.

Phil: “If only you had given me some time to marry her and gain my inheritance, I was going to come back to you, Bina. Call me selfish, but I was going to come back.”

With that said, he left. I dropped onto the floor, sobbing as if I had lost my entire world. I knew Phil had come from a very powerful family, but what he just said made me dread another day. I honestly thought he was going to fight for me, but I was wrong. He most probably wouldn't have come back after having children with his chosen, white wife. It was all over for me. I just knew it. I tried getting up, but I must have dozed off right on the floor. The following day, I woke up with a very heavy head. I felt like I was hit by a truck. I shouldn't have had so much wine to drink. Oddly, I remembered the dream I had about my mother. This time, Pebetsi was right next to her. It still baffled me as to why I never dreamt of my father, yet my mother always appeared in my dreams. She was still silent; she

just looked at me without saying a word. Yet, Pebetsi had a smile on his face. I was actually glad I dreamt of my brother considering that I never buried him. I tried getting up to take a shower and get ready for work, but my body failed me. I just couldn't; instead I vomited profusely. My body was rejecting all the alcohol I had ingested the night before. I sent a message to my manager stating I wasn't going to make it to work and that I was ill. I spent the entire morning in bed as I couldn't get up to do anything. All I could manage to do was sleep. I heard a stern, continuous and rather annoying knock on my door. I checked the time and it was 12pm midday. I felt so irritated, because I thought it was Phil again. Surely, he had a key so he could have just stormed in like he had done the previous night. The person kept knocking again, and I irritably opened the door without caution. I was stunned to see who was standing right before me.

Andries: (angrily) "Finally, you decided to open the door, maid."

Wow, so condescending and rude.

Bina: (annoyed) "May I help you?"

Andries: "He wasn't kidding when he said you were eloquently spoken. I have come to see the whore that has attempted to ruin my son's life."

I was so displeased. That man was trying to antagonize me in my own house.

Bina: "Look, this is my house and if you haven't come here in good spirit, I suggest you leave."

Andries: (chuckling) "You township whores have no limits."

He pushed me aside and stormed into my house, holding a big, brown envelope. I could tell that Andries was racist, I mean I didn't need to get a word out of him. Just by his Afrikaner look and his devious eyes, I could tell he just hated black people with a passion. He was dressed in an expensive suit, and he drove a McLaren, so of course he saw no need for his son to be in a relationship with a black girl from the township. Perhaps if I was a Billionaire's daughter, then he might have accepted me.

Bina: "I will have to call the police if you don't leave."

Andries: "You are just a village girl who saw an opportunity to milk my son dry. Well, you have gotten the wrong man this time."

Bina: "Mr. Ferreira, I have no idea what your intention is, but I love Phil. Besides, he and I are over, so your visit is deemed to be in vain."

Andries: "Your little social media stunt has caused me a major PR scandal. It will take weeks to fix this shit."

Bina: "This is not the apartheid years any more, Mr. Ferreira. Many interracial couples have existed since Jan van Riebeeck's days. You don't scare me."

He was a large man; with a large body structure. Just seeing him stand before someone was scary. He leaned across me and slapped me so hard across my face and I fell down.

Andries: (angrily) “You should be scared of me, whore. You should be. I own everything you own. Phil bought this house with my money, he paid your son's school fees with my money. I'll be damned if I let you ruin everything I have worked so hard to achieve. You are no longer working for me with immediate effect. I don't want to be sued for unfair dismissal, so I'll pay you your pension within the next 24 hours, with a little extra to keep your measly life going. You are no longer in charge of this house. It belongs to me. I cannot have you running your mouth to people saying that Phil bought you this house. Your son will go to the school for the rest of the year and after that, you will take him to another school at your own expense. In this envelope is a contract you will have to sign. You will have to agree to a non-disclosure clause. You are not going to tell anyone about this child. You can abort it or raise the bastard – I don't care, but Phil will not be a part of its' life at all.”

That man was so cruel to me. I had never experienced such cruelty in my life before – not even what Joel and my aunt did to me was equal to that.

Bina: (crying) “No, I won't do it.”

Andries: (sigh) “You do realize that I can make your entire life a living hell, right? I can ensure that you never work a day in your life again.”

I kept quiet.

Andries: “Fine, I'll let you keep the house and I'll increase your pension to R1 million. That's about it. Sign it and live the life you deserve. You don't belong in our world, Bina. Deep down you know it too.”

Romans 2:6 – 8 - “He will render to each one according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury.”

24

“In three words I can sum up everything I’ve learned about life: It goes on.” — Robert Frost

Four months later...

Bina

It had been a horrible four months and I was 8 months pregnant. Ever since Andries, Phil's father terrorized me in my own house, I was never the same again. Phinah had left to go stay in Jo'burg with Thomas and the kids. I was too distraught to attend her Lobola negotiation ceremony, but we kept in touch every now and again. I couldn't bring myself to abort my unborn baby. I lived in so much fear, depression and anxiety ever since he came to my house. I never managed to sleep an entire night ever since then. I couldn't even bring myself to stay in that house – despite that asshole giving it to me as a sign of pity. I had never seen anyone look at me in such disgust before. I never heard from Phil ever since that night he came to my house. It was painful to endure all the stares and comments from people.

All I heard whenever I took a walk around the neighbourhood was; “Bina o wele (has lost her touch)”, “Ne a nagana gore o tlo fella kae (where did she think she was going to end up)?”, “Bona nou o imile ngwana wa lekgoa (Look now, she is carrying a white man's baby)”. If I had been the Bina I was before coming to Atteridgeville, I would never have let people speak to me or about me like that. I was a smart girl, but I chose to ruin my life in a heartbeat. I could have chosen to go back to school and be a good mother to my son. I failed at that; I failed at school and at life. Andries gave me R1 million indeed, and I decided to sell the house in fear that he would always know where I was. It wasn't really the smartest idea, since I still lived in Atteridgeville, just a different section. I bought another house around the area, just a bit farther from Mam'Rose. I could at least keep my furniture, and renovate my new house. The heartache didn't go away and it got even worse when Phil married Melissa.

I knew then that my life was over; my relationship with Phil was over and I had to move on, but moving on deemed impossible. I secretly drank my pain away – despite being pregnant. I had lost so much touch with reality, that I didn't know who I was anymore or where I was even going in life. I was avoiding

Mam'Rose, but I bet she knew what I was up to. I couldn't face myself; I couldn't face people. It was a horrible way to live. I was in so much pain, that I decided to try and end it – yet again. I recalled the day I tried to end my life while carrying Malachi and how it just didn't work. It had to work that time. Yes, Malachi was 7 years old and Mam'Rose was taking really good care of him, but I just couldn't be a mother to him. I just couldn't. So, I walked out and went to the nearest Tuckshop. I bought a bottle of Stametia, and went back to my house. I drank an entire bottle of red wine first, before consuming the entire bottle, along with a few pain killers and waited. I hoped it killed me that time along with the child I was carrying inside of me because I could not handle raising another child I simply hated. I could feel my eyes getting really heavy and I could see nothing else.

Dimakatso: (fuming) “Bina, when will you ever learn, ngwanaka (my baby)?”

Bina: “Mama? Is that you?”

Dimakatso: “You know very well it is me. Why haven't you learnt anything that I taught you? I've been visiting you – giving

you warnings, yet you just don't listen. When will you accept God back into your life and when are you going to learn how to pray again?"

Bina: "Mama, I am so tired. I can't take this pain anymore."

Dimakatso: "You haven't seen anything yet. Until you learn to live for your children, you will continue to make costly mistakes. Life is not for the faint-hearted, Bina. I told you this the last time."

Bina: (frowning) "The last time?"

Dimakatso: "Yes, the last time you were here, you tried to kill my grandson. Did you honestly think I'd let you kill my grand daughter?"

Bina: (weeping) "Mama, please. Take me or take the child. I can't live anymore. Ke lapile (I am tired)."

Dimakatso: (shouting) “It is not your time yet! You have clearly learnt nothing from the words I spoke of when I was on my death bed. Salome never changed and she met her fate, don't be like her. Love your children the way I loved you. Turn your life around and you will see miracles. All the blessings that were supposed to come your way are blocked by you. Open yourself up to love – love your children and yourself.”

Bina: “I can't - “

Dimakatso: “I'm done talking. I told you, an angry ancestor is a dangerous one. I will take every single thing away from you until you learn to do what I have said. No one owes you anything; if you don't pray and acknowledge us, your ancestors, how do you think you will receive blessings?”

Bina: “But Mama - “

Dimakatso: “Her name is Hazel, which is Hebrew for “God sees”. She will show you that God is always watching you – no matter what you do. Malachi and Hazel will become your hidden gems, unlike your third child.”

Bina: “Yoh (oh), Mama, another child?!”

Dimakatso: “You are going to have one more. Akere ga o kwe (You just don't learn, do you)? Name my grand daughter Hazel Hannah Makwatleng. She will endure many hardships because of you, but her faith will remain unwavering and she will prove you wrong. Hopefully, you will change your ways, Bina. If you give her the wrong name, I will personally punish you.”

I slowly opened my eyes and heard a familiar beeping sound of machines and I became blinded by the bright light in the room. I heard familiar voices, and I just knew that I was alive. Fuck. I wasn't happy about that at all. I was 25 years old, I had just given birth to my second child right after my second suicide attempt. Everyone at that hospital must have thought I was insane. I looked around and saw no one, but there was a baby sleeping peacefully in her little hospital crib right next to me. She looked awfully light. I sat up so that I could take a good look at her and my goodness, she was the spitting image of Phil. She had golden brown

curly hair which made me so sad. I shed a few tears because yet again, I had a child who was the spitting image of her father, her ruthless, motherfucker of a father.

Mam'Rose: (smiling) "She is beautiful."

I wiped my tears off quickly, as I did expect yet another lecture from Mam'Rose.

Mam'Rose: "I know what you're thinking, but did you listen to your mother's words this time?"

I nodded in shame.

Mam'Rose: (sigh) "Bina, it is okay to make mistakes, but one has to learn from them. What have you learnt from your experience with Phil?"

Bina: (shrugging) "I don't know. I have learnt that men are trash, I am worthless, senseless and that I just don't want to live any more."

Mam'Rose: (shaking head) "Your future could be so much brighter, Bina, if only you allowed yourself to think. You have children now and you need to step up. I won't be around forever, you know. What will happen to these poor children once I die? I am basically Malachi's mother, and judging by your current state of mind, you won't even be able to take care of Hazel."

Bina: (frowning) "I don't expect you to sacrifice your life for my children, Mam'Rose. I get the message. Just tell me when you're tired."

Mam'Rose: (firmly) "Don't disrespect me like that, Bina. I am a straight talker, and not once did I judge you, but I am going to be forward with you this time. O nale masepa (you are full of shit). I don't want to welcome that child into this world when I am this irritated by you, so I will refrain from that. We shall have this conversation again soon, but one thing I can tell you is that you are going to regret your life choices in the most undesirable ways. You think you are not the same as your grandmother? Well, you are exactly like her. What you are doing to Malachi is the exact same thing she did to your mother. You are repeating a horrid cycle and you don't seem to see anything wrong with that. Your siblings will flourish more

than you ever expected while your life keeps spiralling out of control because that is what you chose. Wa e rata tshokolo, ngwanaka (you enjoy the life of poverty, my child). Phil was an opportunity for you to get your life on track. He wanted you to get your license, but what did you do? You simply chose to enjoy being a slay queen. Now what are you going to do with all those designer clothes and bags? Are you going to be a shebeen queen who wears old, designer clothing? You are going to be a laughing stock, Bina, and it will be by choice. You are angry at the world, when you have had plenty of chances to change. You could have re-done your matric, but akere wena o dese (but you're the best, aren't you)? O tlo shwela dibe tsa gago (you are going to suffer for your sins) in the worst way possible. You are going to be so envious towards your children, that you will try and block all their blessings by all means, with your stone cold heart. The child you will love the most, will turn out to be the biggest disappointment ever. I won't be on this earth forever, but I vow to give Malachi and Hazel the love you refuse to give them. For as long as you are on this earth, Bina, your destiny has not been fulfilled yet. You have dug a horrible hole for yourself and only you will be able to get yourself out of it. I can do nothing, but pray for you at this point.”

I was crying so much, that I felt my head heat up.

Mam'Rose: "Wipe away those crocodile tears because I simply can see through your evil heart."

She walked towards Hazel and took her right into her hands.

Mam'Rose: (smiling) "Hazel, you are so beautiful, just like your father. You will grow up thinking that your father has failed you, but he will have only failed you minimally. You will grow into a beautiful, magnificent flower and you will be a constant reminder to your mother and to the rest of the world that God does indeed see. He sees us all; and He already saw your heart before He formed you. You are going to change the world in many ways. Hannah, my beaut, you will have so much faith even when life will be throwing you curve balls. I cry for you, because your own mother will envy your success, but you will rise above it all and become who you were meant to be. Ba ga Makwetla (The Makwelta's), I have heard you. Go lokile (It is well), ngwana o amogetswe (the child has been accepted). Your name carries so much power, just like your brother's name. May God protect your beautiful soul at all times."

Ecclesiastes 7:1 - "A good name is better than precious ointment, and the day of death than the day of birth."

25

“Life is ten percent what happens to you and ninety percent how you respond to it.” — Charles Swindoll

Seventeen years later...

Hazel

My name is Hazel, and I am 17 years old. I am currently in Grade 11. I live in Attredigeville, Extension 22 along with my mother Bina, my elder brother Malachi and my younger sister Isabella. I have no idea why we have English names and none of us have Sepedi names. I'm not bothered by it all, but I think it is rather special. Unlike my siblings, I look completely different from them. One can always tell that they are black – except me. I am rather dissimilar from them; I have extremely curly hair with a very odd golden brown colour; with Emerald coloured eyes and a very light skin colour. I'd say that I'm a yellow bone gone wrong, seeing that my mother is very light, but it's not the case at all. I look light, but not the light one would always see in the township. I look white, even though my mother has never told me what happened to my father. Unlike Bella, my brother Malachi and I don't really have a father-figure. My mother isn't

entirely bad, she has her moments although she has more bad moments than good ones.

Our grandmother Mam'Rose loves us so much and I honestly couldn't imagine my life without her. She practically raised us, while my mother was too busy with her own life. My brother was quite on the receiving end of her abuse if I put it like that, but so was I and still am. I only have peace whenever my brother is around. I am always abused by my mother whenever he isn't home. Bella is treated like gold, platinum actually, while I am treated like the slave around the house. Mama owns a tavern in the yard, so it makes everything a lot harder. We hardly have any peace, but my brother knows how to make her be quiet. He is very firm with her, and has never laid his hand on her. I think she has done so much damage to her than she actually thinks. She is always so cold towards Malachi and I, but not to Bella. My mother isn't married, but she is still in a relationship with Bella's father, Moses. He treats Malachi and I fairly. Whatever he busy Bella, he tries and buys for us as well – much to my mother's dismay. A lot of people have told us that my mother despises the two of us, but well, as a child you really don't want to think the worst of your mother, until you actually start to see that. Moses is a mechanic, and he doesn't earn much, but he is a good man. He has never abused us in any

way. My mother makes a decent amount of money with her tavern, but she breaks her back to pay for Bella's school fees. Malachi passed his matric really well, with 7 distinctions and even got a bursary to study the course of his choice. He wanted to study Chemical Engineering at The University of Cape Town. He had even gotten a bursary, but when he was supposed to leave, he got into a car accident and it took him an entire year of recovery at the hospital. Ever since then, he never applied. He always says that it was to protect me from my mother, and he wanted to wait for me to finish school so that he could apply again. I feel so bad that he would sacrifice his future for me, but throughout that entire year he was in hospital, I was beaten, bruised and starved by my mother. I am so thankful for him and I always ensure that God spares his life for me. We are like two peas in a pod, despite him being 7 years older than me. I think our bond was the fact that my mother never loved us and we endured much hardship from her. My sister on the other hand, is the spoilt brat in the house. Malachi and I have always been lucky despite my mother's abusive behaviour. With each year, we'd get an anonymous donor who has been paying our school fees. I always say that it is our guardian angel and one day we'd meet him. After a reflective morning thinking of my life, I had to get to school. Malachi took me to school every morning without fail, along with my two friends Otlile and Kgaugelo. We've been friends ever since the first grade and we've been

inseparable ever since. Bella has her own transport which my mother pays for, so she never travels with us.

Malachi: (ringing bell) “Hazel, zwakala (come on). O tlo latelwa (you're going to be late).”

Hazel: “Ke etla (I'm coming).”

I was about to head out, when my mother stopped me.

Bina: “Hazel weh! Ntelele metsi (bring me some water).”

She didn't even say please. Typical, but I didn't really take everything to heart. She is my mother after all.

Hazel: “Can't Bella do it? Malachi o tlo nshiya (will leave me).”

Bina: “A ka seke (he won't). Besides, I asked you, didn't I? Or wa gana (or are you refusing)?”

Hazel: "No, mama. I'm bringing the cup."

She was giving orders right from her bedroom, while Bella was sitting comfortably in the lounge, watching tv before her transport arrived. I don't understand what narrative my mom is pushing by treating us differently, but I am just not capable of hatred. I went to the bedroom and handed her the cup.

Bina: "You can go now."

She didn't even say thank you. Such small gestures always broke my heart, like that one day I was out playing in the street along with Bella who was with her own friends. Instead of calling us both in, she called me back home alone instead. I wanted to play still, I mean it was about 4pm. I was a child, so I sneaked out and went to play some more. I didn't understand why I was called back home, while Bella was still allowed to play. Instead of reprimanding me, she beat me up so badly with a belt, that I still have a scar on my back to prove it. Her exact unforgettable words were; "Re tla bona gore bo pila bo ba gao bo tlo fella kae (we shall see where this so called beauty of yours will take you)." I never asked God to make me the way I

am, but she would always throw it in my face whenever it suited her. I left Bella sitting right there and rushed out. Malachi was even about to come fetch me.

Malachi: “Kgante what took you so long?”

Hazel: “Sorry, Mama wanted me to get her a glass of water.”

Malachi: (annoyed) “She could have just asked Bella to do it. Anyway, I'll have a word with her when I come back.”

Hazel: “Leave it. O tlo mo kwatisa (you'll anger her).”

Malachi: “Wena (you) just hang in there. This won't be forever. Re tlo tswa ka mo (we're going to leave this place).”

Hazel: “Soon, brother, very soon. I'll be the world's best Psychologist, while you'll be the best Chemical Engineer the world will ever know.”

Malachi: (chuckling) "It's never a bad thing to dream. Come."

I got in the front, since the back seat was always for Otlile and Kg. We stopped by Otlile's house first, as always.

Otlile: (smiling) "Dumelang bagaetso (Good morning, my people). Gape ka jeno le latetswe (Today you are rather late)."

Hazel: "Hi, chomi (friend)."

Malachi: "Hello, Otlile. Same old with you, isn't it?"

Otlile: (smiling) "If you thought I'd be talking less today, you were wrong, Malachi."

She winked at him while he just smiled. I mean, she is the most talkative one amongst the three of us. I am the reserved one, while Kg is the careful one. She always thinks things through and she gives us the best advice. We fetched her too and off we went to school.

Malachi: "Haze, do you have practice today?"

Yes, I'm a sporty girl, along with Otlile, but Kg is very timid and wears glasses. She hates sports, so she always reads a book while watching us play Hockey.

Hazel: "Yes, I do. Ke fetsa ka 4 (I finish at 4pm)."

Malachi: "Sharp, I'll be here when you're done."

Hazel: "Sharp."

We said our goodbyes and off we went. Minutes later, Bella arrived with her own transport.

Kg: "Tell me something, do you see your mother changing any time soon?"

Hazel: "I doubt it."

Otlile: "Such things happen, you know. I mean, my mom and her mom never got along until recently. Something about the scars of the past or something. The truth is, black parents always have this habit of blaming their children for their own mistakes. I don't doubt she loves you, I just think she is a bit toxic. It is never too late to change, akere (right)?"

Kg: "After all, the Bible says; ""Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you – Exodus 20:12."

Otlile: "Hayi (No), nna ka mo rata Modimo laitse le lona (I love God, you both know that too), but some things just don't make sense. I mean why doesn't He give some of us to normal and fully functioning parents? I mean, He knew us before He formed us, right? So, He knew that your mother would be the way she is today."

Hazel: "Don't question God like that, man. He has His reasons, besides, He does such to show us just how great He is. He can pull us out of any situation."

Otlile: "Amen, Mma Moruti (Pastor)."

They both chuckled while I shook my head. Bella stopped by as always.

Bella: "Hmm, if it isn't the three masketeers."

Otlile: (rolling eyes) "Bella, weh (Hey, Bella). The grade tens are that side."

Bella: (clicking tongue) "Mxm, you three think you rock, hey. I mean

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you're not all that just because of Hazel. She's just white, there's nothing special about her."

Kg: “Ag, we have heard that before. Come up with better insults, man. I mean, you have a flat ass just like most white girls, but you don't see any of us telling you kak (shit), do you?”

She clicked her tongue and walked away.

Kg: “Inferiority complex is such a problem, though.”

We went about to our Register period, and we were going to be there for a while, since Mrs. Louw was also our English Teacher.

Mrs. Louw: “Good morning, 11C.”

We greeted her back.

Mrs. Louw: “I see no one is absent, which is a good sign. Since well I have you for the first two periods of the day, I'd like to give you your topics on your upcoming task for the Term – your Speech.”

I hated public speaking, but I did it anyway because I just had to.

Mrs. Louw: “You can choose from three topics: 1. What is toxicity?, 2. How does family and society contribute to depression? 3. Do you think there is life after death?”

I wasn't expecting such topics, but to be honest, number 1 and number 2 most definitely spoke to me. I could think of a million definitions for toxicity, but well, I had enough time to start planning it.

Mrs. Louw: “You have one day to prepare for your speech. You have to present it on Wednesday.”

My mind involuntarily wandered off as I thought of all the troubles I had endured all because of my mother. At one point her shebeen caught fire while I was sleeping behind the counter. Thankfully, Malachi saved me just in time. Til date, she had never apologized for that. We went about with our day and before we knew it, it was break time. We went to our usual spot to eat, while Bella had her own friends.

Kg: "So, my mom has decided to have a birthday party for me this weekend."

Otlile: "Ah, that is nice. I haven't been to a party in ages. What's your theme?"

Kg: "Disco meets Jazz. You can wear any outfit that fits."

Otlile: "I can't wait to show off what my mama gave me."

We all laughed.

Otlile: "Please tell me you have invited some really hot boys."

Kg: "Mara (But), Otlile. I don't know if they're hot. I'm not into dating, you know that."

Otlile: "Come on, we're all virgins here, but a girl can drool, you know. You guys can't tell me you're not already planning your matric dance."

Hazel: "Bathong (Goodness), Otlile. That's like a year and 5 months away."

Otlile: "I like being prepared, you know that."

Kg: "Ai (oh), I'll cross that bridge when I get there."

Otlile: "Even so, I know you'll want Shaun to be your date. I mean, he is the most likely to win the Head boy position. He is fine, so mighty fine. Who knows what else he is hiding underneath those pants?"

We all laughed.

Hazel: "Otlile, man! You can't say such."

Otlile: “Some day, we will be talking about this when we know what real men taste like. Like I said, I am preparing myself.”

Kg: “I think I want to save myself for marriage.”

Otlile: (shocked) “And have sex with one man your entire life? No ways. Miss me.”

Hazel: “Well, that isn't a bad thing, though, Otlile. I mean, do you honestly want to go through a series of men before you find the love of your life?”

Otlile: “If that is what it takes – then yes. I mean, my sister married the first guy she had sex with and she is miserable as fuck. I could never do that to myself. Life has no manual, you know. Women are too oppressed, man. Men get to sleep around while we have to “Preserve” ourselves. You see why I have so many questions about the Bible?”

We carried on with our conversation and the bell rang. Our day went on as always and it was finally after school. Otlile and I

had to get ready for practise, while Kg watched our bags on the field. While we were changing, Otlile had always been comfortable getting undressed in front of others, while I on the other hand had a different story.

Otlile: "Hazel, o rata go fihla man (you like hiding)."

Hazel: "You know I'm not as confident as you, Otlile. I mean, you have the body of a goddess."

Otlile: "Who told you that you don't? I mean, I'm pretty much plus size, baby, but you, you are an hour glass with a very nice bum."

Hazel: "Yeah, and I'm also the school freak that everyone mocks when they run out of someone to mock."

Otlile: "You're not a freak, you're God's product. And you know just what I do to anyone who calls you a freak. Besides, they are just upset that they don't have green eyes."

She had a point here and there, but I still felt uneasy taking my clothes off in front of other people. She was my friend, and she never judged me, so I did that because I had to. We went to the field to practise and everything went along just fine, until Mathilda decided to start an unnecessary fight with me. I was about to score, when she deliberately ran towards me from the side and knocked my knee with her bat. I screamed out in pain and fell onto the ground. I knew she did that deliberately, but the coach didn't see anything. She was one of the richest girls in the school; black but with white tendencies.

Hazel: (screaming) "Aah!"

Otlile: (angered) "What the fuck, Mathilda?! You just hurt my friend!"

Mathilda: (frowning) "I didn't do anything. It was an honest mistake."

Coach: "What happened here?"

Otlile: “That roach deliberately hit my friend in the knee! She injured her!”

Mathilda: “Coach, are you going to stand around and let her speak to me like that?”

Coach: “You're not my boss, Mathilda. Did you deliberately injure her?”

Mathilda: “I'd never do that! Besides, why don't you ask the rest of the team if they didn't see that it was an honest mistake? Am I right, girls?”

They all kept quiet and looked down. They were legit afraid of her and I was one of the nicest girls in school.

Otlile: (annoyed) “Are you all serious right now?!”

Mathilda: “Otlile, you really need to stop pushing this agenda you have towards me.”

Coach: "Otlile, help me carry her to the first aid room. I shall launch an investigation into this matter. Mathilda, you'd better hope and pray you didn't do this deliberately, otherwise, you'll be in big trouble."

Mathilda: "My father is one of the biggest donors at this school. He basically pays your measly salary!"

Coach: "Your father doesn't own this school, Mathilda. Training is adjourned. Hazel, be careful and lean on me."

Otlile and Coach both helped me walk. I couldn't even walk with my left leg. I was in serious pain. I knew she did it deliberately; she wanted to see me get hurt so that I wouldn't be able to play in the upcoming competition. She was a cruel girl, but God loves all His children. Coach took me to the first aid room and assessed me.

Coach: (sigh) "It seems as if you have an injured knee. It is not so bad, but you might have to get a knee cast. Who is coming to fetch you? It may take a while to do it."

Otlile: "Her brother is coming to fetch us. I'll call him while you do it."

Coach: (nodding) "Okay."

While Otlile left, I was left alone with Coach. It hurt so badly, but I had to bear the pain.

Coach: "I know she did this deliberately, although I didn't see it happen."

I just nodded in silence.

Coach: "You know, Hazel, you are one special girl. Ever since I have known you, you have always been the enemy to most girls, but you just keep going. You just need to remember that no one gets what they want in this life by remaining quiet. Sometimes, you need to take the bull by its horns and fight back."

Hazel: (sobbing) "I can't exactly beat someone up on the school terrain."

Coach: (chuckling) "That's not what I mean. I mean that you have to be a lot more firmer in your actions, you have to grow the confidence you need in this life. People will always think you are different and call you weird and all sorts of names. Different doesn't mean bad, it simply means that you have something that scares the shit out of them, and that is your advantage. Knowing that you scare someone should give you an indication that they know just what you are capable of. Do you think I wanted to be a coach my entire life? I wanted to be something big. I wanted to be a physician for the big leagues in Sports, but life happened. Life happened, but I still took the bull by the horns and made the most of it. I didn't allow anyone to break me."

Coach was one of those people who knew just what to say and when.

Coach: "All done. You won't wear the cast for long, luckily. A week max. I'll take care of Mathilda, don't you worry."

Otlile: "Is she okay?"

Coach: "She's fine. Remember what I said, Hazel."

Hazel: (nodding) "Thank you, Coach."

We left while Kg was waiting for us with Malachi who looked really angry.

Malachi: (angered) "Mathilda did this to you?"

Otlile: "Yes, can you believe sfebe sela (that bitch)?"

Malachi never wanted us to swear in his presence, but at that moment, he didn't care.

Malachi: "O kae ena (where is she)?"

Hazel: "It's fine. Coach said I just need to wear it for a week."

Malachi: (clicking tongue) "It's not right. Just because you're not from a rich family, doesn't give her the right to abuse my sister. I'll be here first thing tomorrow morning to sort this out. A re vayeng (let's go)."

Mathilda ruined our day entirely and Malachi was very quiet on our way home. We dropped off my friends and he helped me in as he carried my bags. My mother saw me limping and at least asked me what was wrong.

Bina: "Hawu (goodness), Keng (what is it), Hazel? Who hurt you?"

Hazel: "I had an accident during Hockey practise."

Bina: "Ah, this is why I never did any sports while in school. Anyway, go get changed so you can help me with stock taking."

Malachi: (angrily) "Can't you see she is hurt?! Ask Bella or do it yourself. I don't want to hear you bothering Hazel today or else I will get angry."

Bina: "Okay, I'll do it myself. Bella is studying."

I walked to my bedroom with Malachi's help.

Malachi: "Should I get you something to drink?"

Hazel: (shaking head) "No, thank you."

Malachi: "Ka boa (I'll be back). I'll get you something to eat on my way back home. Just rest a little."

1 Corinthians 16:14 - "Let all that you do be done in love."

“You have brains in your head. You have feet in your shoes. You can steer yourself any direction you choose.” — Dr. Seuss

Hazel

My knee was so painful and all I wanted to do was just lay down. I felt a bit peeved that girls like Mathilda still existed. I mean, all she hated me for was the colour of my skin; as if I had asked God to make me the way I am. The moment Malachi left, I decided to take a nap, but of course, that didn't last long. It was always difficult to sleep due to the loud music and the ins and outs people were making in the yard. I mean, it was a tavern after all. While I was trying my best to sleep, I heard a short, stern knock on my door and before I could answer – the person barged in. I should have expected that since I was an foe to both my mother and sister.

Bina: “Hazel, tsoga o tlo thusa (wake up and come assist me). I have so many customers today and I am short of hands.”

Was she even serious?

Hazel: “Mara (but) Mama, ke gobetse (I'm injured). I just wanted to take a short nap before doing homework.”

Bina: (angrily) “Oho (Oh), o utlwa monate, neh (you're enjoying life, hey)? O ja nna, o kgora nna (I feed you) and now you don't want to help me?! Must I do everything in this house?!”

Hazel: “Aowa (No), Mama. A ke gane (I'm not saying no), it's just that ke gobetse (I'm injured). Please, can't you ask Bella to help you?”

Bina: (annoyed) “Waitse Modimo O tla go dira gore o nye bana ba go nyele (You know, God will make you shit kids and they'll end up shitting on you)! Sala o le fela bjao (Stay just like that)! O tla bona gore o ja eng ka jeno (You'll see what you're going to eat tonight)!”

Just like that, she stormed out and banged my door so loudly, I could feel the earth shake a little. I had no idea why my mother despised me to be honest, but I had a feeling it had to do with my father, the man I hadn't even met. I forced myself to get up

and browse around the house to see where Bella was, only to find her lying on her bed, talking on her phone.

Bella: (frowning) “Chomi ema ga nyane (Friend, wait just a minute). And then? Keng ka wena (What's with you)? Can't you see I'm on the phone?”

I just closed the door without any further ado. I quickly changed from my sportswear into regular clothes and I went out to the tavern area. I knew my mother would never let me have peace if I didn't go out to assist her. As much as I was in pain, I tried to walk slowly but surely until I found her. When she saw me limping, she didn't even any form of pain.

Bina: (frowning) “And then?”

Hazel: “I came to help you as you asked.”

Bina: “Hmm, o tsere nako ya gao man (you surely took your time).”

I was used to the hurtful comments and remarks, but it didn't mean that it got any better nor that it was the correct behaviour. So, I went straight to work. I grabbed a cloth and started sanitizing the tables. I removed all the empty beer bottles from the tables, while taking orders in between. By then, my mother was mingling with a few of the customers, laughing and chatting away. Of course it hurt me; the fact that Bella was not even called to come and assist but was just chilling in her bedroom talking to friends and who knew who else on the phone broke me, the fact that I was injured yet still expected to assist really broke me, but that small voice in my head always said to me; "she's still your mother". I don't know if I was stupid or what, but I was only 16 and almost 17, I felt like I still needed her. I didn't have any other option nor any other home as my backup. While working with a severely painful knee, I heard a familiar voice.

Beast: (cheerfully) "Since when is working while injured a thing now?"

I smiled and turned around almost immediately.

Hazel: (smiling) "Ah, you know how it is."

Beast: “Aowa (no), you can't be abused like this. O kae mama gao (where's your mother)?”

Hazel: “O around somewhere (She's around somewhere).”

Beast: “I'll wait for her.”

Hazel: “Alright.”

Beast: “So, how was school today? Did you learn anything spectacular?”

I chuckled. Beast was my brother's best friend. His real name was Bethuel, but they called him Beast. I never even wanted to know why, but he was very famous around Atteridgeville, and stories spread like wildfire around the township – even when they aren't true, people will believe them. He was famously known for being a gangster, although I had never seen him in action. He was a decent guy and a good friend to my brother, he hated men who disrespected women – more especially their

own mothers, sisters, girlfriends, wives, etc. He wore expensive clothes and jewelry, much like a typical kasi (township) gangster, but he was a really nice guy and funny too. I figured that they called him Beast because once he got angry – he would really fuck a person up. He was also a bit big in structure

Hazel: (smiling) “Ah, you know school. I'm actually supposed to be preparing for my speech. I have one day – which means only today and tomorrow to present.”

Beast: (frowning) “You shouldn't be working, mos (right)? I mean, you actually shouldn't be working at all. Sis'Bee! Sis'Bee!”

My mother came hurriedly and her facial expression changed almost immediately when she saw him. She wasn't very fond of him.

Bina: “Oh, ke wena (it's you). O batlang (what do you want)?”

Beast: (chuckling) "You're still the same, I see. I came to buy a few beers. I also want to ask you why Hazel is working when she has a speech to prepare for and some homework."

Bina: (frowning) "You know, I only tolerate you because you're my son's friend. I don't like gangsters."

Beast: "What does the Bible that you love reading so much say? "Do not judge for you shall also be judged before the Lord."

Bina: (clicking tongue) "Mxm, you're still a customer."

She grabbed his money and proceeded to the till.

Beast: "I asked you a question, Sis Bee."

Bina: "Is it? What did you ask me again?"

Beast hated people who patronised him, but he was always calm until he flipped.

Beast: (chuckling) “Ja, neh. I asked you why Hazel is the only one out of your two daughters working here, during the week on top of it all. You are exposing her to all kinds of men who won't be nice to her. Now, why is she working instead of doing homework?”

He asked that in a firmer tone. My mother was somehow afraid of Beast as she was of Malachi. They had never laid a hand on her, but they were not afraid of her either.

Bina: (embarrassed) “Oh, hayi (no) man. I was short staffed, you see. I just asked her to come help me real quickly.”

Beast: “Didn't you notice she is injured?”

Bina: “I did... she got it from school. Anyway, Hazel, you can go now.”

Beast looked at her firmly and then smiled at me. I was hesitant, but she repeated that so I left without even thinking twice.

Beast: "Let me walk you out. Sis Bee, keep the change."

He always had a few beers with my brother, so he would keep buying in sets of four. He held the beers with one hand, while assisting me to walk with the other. By then I had only noticed how painful my knee had gotten. I most probably should have rested, but well.

Beast: "You know, I don't like the way she treats you."

Hazel: "I don't know what you mean."

Beast: "I see you want to play dumb. We'll have this conversation one day when she has done something worse to you. Only then, will I show you what I do to people who mess with those I care about."

I looked at him and he was dead serious. His eyes were bloodshot. Cared about? I mean, sure, I took him as a brother, since he was my brother's friend and he was his age, you know. He was basically 8 years older than I was.

Hazel: "Thank you for that. You really saved me."

Beast: "Malachi won't be happy seeing you like this."

Malachi: "I won't be happy seeing you like what?"

I wondered if I should tell him what happened in his absence, but it wouldn't have been right. Yes, my mother treated me like shit on most days, but I still had a soft spot for her.

Beast: "I found her - "

Hazel: (interrputing) "He found me walking outside. I just wanted to take a walk. Now my knee is complaining."

I looked at Beast who just gave me a stern look. Malachi didn't look too convinced, but he didn't want to push the issue.

Malachi: "Oho, okay. Here's food for you. Go to your room and do your work."

He had gotten me Chicken Lickin.

Hazel: "Thanks, abuti (brother). Bye, Bethuel."

Beast: (chuckling) "Only my mother calls me that. Anyway, sharp."

I headed back to my room, limping. I made sure to lock my room before I went to the bathroom to take a bath, because my sister had a nasty habit of taking my things without my knowledge nor permission. I soaked my knee into the warm salted water before taking a bath. Half an hour later, I was feeling a whole lot better. I went back to my room and it was about 6pm by then. I decided to do my homework while at it before planning my speech. We usually ate supper around

6:30, so I went to the kitchen to check. I found my mother had cooked, but she only dished up for herself and Bella. They were both eating in the lounge. Malachi never really ate food cooked by her, so I would usually just eat quietly with them talking to one another and talking right over me.

Hazel: (frowning) “Mama, ga la ntsholela (didn't you dish up for me)?”

Bina: “For eng (what)?”

I felt a tight knot making its appearance in my throat.

Hazel: “I don't understand.”

Bina: “Akere o mosadi wena (you're a woman now, aren't you)? You took your damn time to come and help me in the tavern, and you got your little thug boyfriend to intimidate me in my own tavern. You're most probably faking that injury of yours. Besides, akere Malachi o go reketse (Malachi bought you) some fast food without considering any of us. Since you're

so special, you can go eat that. Nna le ngwanaka (My child Bella and I) Bella, will eat the food I buy and the food I cooked.”

I wanted to cry right there, but it was of no use. I mean was I being punished because Malachi bought me fast food? I wasn't even sure why I was being punished, but it seemed as if I was always the easy target. Bella was never at fault – no matter what she did. It really hurt me, deeply. I looked at her hoping she would say she was joking, but she wasn't budging. I slowly returned to my room and closed the door behind me. I cried silently. I could hardly remember a time I was ever happy around my mother. I was practically raised by my grandmother, Mam'Rose. My mother hardly even had time to wish me a happy birthday. I lived with Mam'Rose my entire life, until I turned 14. My life was total bliss when I lived with my grandmother. I get it, she wanted time to herself of which I understood when she returned me to my mother, while Bella had lived with my mother her entire life. I had no idea why my mother had her little cruelty episodes, but they were slowly taking their toll on me. I had no time to be sad, I had school work to think about. So, I wiped my tears away and ate my food. I could hardly enjoy it since I was filled with so much guilt, I mean I don't even know why. My brother bought me the food, I didn't steal it – yet every bite was agonizing. I slowly

planned my speech and after my cue cards, I knew I was good to go. I knelt down and did what my grandmother taught me – to pray. She always said that the power of the tongue is very dangerous and that one should always think twice before they say anything to someone. The consequences are dire and can last a lifetime, but the power of prayer defeats all evil.

Hazel: “Father God, I humble myself before you. I thank you so much for this wonderful day, I thank you so much for the gift of life. Dear God, I have no idea why you have placed me in this position, and I don't question you at all. I know you hold all the desires of my heart and you knew me before I was even born. I trust you, Lord. I believe that you will change my situation around and you will help me be the best I want to be. All I ask is that you bless me with a clear heart, help me not to hate my mother, no matter what. I forgive her, Lord and I hope she knows it too. I don't know why I am hated by almost everyone I know, but I trust you will deal with all those who consider themselves my enemies. I ask you to protect and guide me throughout the days of my life, and bless me with good things. I ask this in Jesus' Mighty Name. Amen.”

I felt the load getting a little lighter. I got into my bed and slowly drifted off to sleep. The morning came and I was up and

ready to go as always. I woke myself up with my alarm clock, while Bella was the queen of the house; my mother always woke her up in the morning and never missed a day in her life. It is always the little things that hurt people the most. I took a bath and got dressed. When I went to the kitchen to make myself lunch

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my mother appeared.

Bina: “Whoa, ema gona moo (hold it right there).”

What did I do now? I thought to myself.

Hazel: (nervously) “Is something wrong, Mama?”

Bina: “O ra bjang gore (what do you mean) is something wrong? Akere you were eating nice food last night? You can eat that for lunch or better yet – ask your brother to buy you lunch with his filthy money.”

I was appalled.

Hazel: "But Mama - "

Bina: (interrupting) "Tlogela borotho bowe (Leave that bread). Tsamaya (go), your transport is waiting for you."

By my transport she meant Malachi. I tied the bread again and left with a sore heart. I didn't want to cry so early in the morning, my brother would have gone straight to her. I didn't want to seem like a trouble maker or look like I was causing a drift between mother and son. They didn't get along, but still, we were still family. I just didn't want to. I found him smoking outside of the car. I quickly composed myself before approaching him.

Malachi: "And then? Why do you look sad? What happened?"

Hazel: (shaking head) "Nothing. It's just this knee."

Malachi: "If you don't get better, I'll take you to the doctor."

He was always so thoughtful.

Hazel: (nodding) "Okay. Why are you up so early?"

Malachi: "I told you I'm going to see the Principal. I've already set the meeting. Come, let's go."

He was really serious about that. I got in and tried my best to be okay. We fetched Otlile and Kg yet again, while I was awfully quiet. Once we got to the school, he got out with us in the school's parking lot. I was about to walk away, but he stopped me.

Malachi: "Are you sure you're okay?"

Hazel: "Yes, I am."

Malachi: "You know if you ever need anything at all, you just need to shout, okay?"

I nodded and he gave me a tight hug before leaving. I walked a little faster just to catch up with my friends.

Otlile: "How is your knee?"

Hazel: "Still painful, but I'll live."

Kg: "Your brother is really going to turn this school upside down."

Otlile: "Yes, of which he has every right to do so. I'd also be pissed. Gao nyeweng (let shit hit the fan)."

Hazel: "Come on, guys. There is no need for such."

Otlile: "Hazel, the day you learn to start fighting for yourself, will be the day you learn to gain some more confidence. That girl dribbled you, bra. She injured you on purpose just because she doesn't like the way you look. I mean, come on. How sad is that? When will you ever learn that being a victim is not cute?"

She was rather straight forward about pretty much everything and that was the nice thing about her. She didn't beat around the bush and she was hardly rude about it.

Hazel: "I get your point."

Otlile: "If you say so."

We went to our register classes before Bella could start annoying us before the day even started. I was worried about not having any lunch and I could have avoided all the stress by asking my brother for some lunch money, but I just didn't want to stress him out. While we walked into class, she made an announcement.

Mrs. Louw: "Good morning class. As you know, today you will be presenting your speeches, but before we do that, the following people need to report to the office, please. Hazel, Otlile, Kgaugelo and Mathilda."

I knew what that was about and I became nervous immediately. I don't even know since I did nothing wrong. Confrontational situations just made me anxious.

Otlile: (whispering) "I guess Big brother Malachi has started the drama after all."

Mathilda walked past us first as she gave us one of her usual, annoying smirks. We followed one another to the office in silence, but of course Mathilda just had to say something.

Mathilda: "Just so you know, you can't get me suspended or anything. My father has shares in this school."

She clicked her tongue leaving Otlile amused and she burst out in laughter. I could never understand why a person who came from such a well-off family saw the need to do such things to other people. Mathilda was vile; she literally wanted her own clique and everyone had to like her – and if you didn't, then you were in trouble. You immediately became her enemy if you disliked her. As we approached the Principal's office, we were asked to go to the staff room. As we walked in, I saw my

brother sitting right across the Principal, with a very stern look on his face.

Principal: "Good morning, girls. Do come in."

We walked in and sat next to one another, with Mathilda sitting right across me – deliberately.

Mathilda: "I'd like to know why we're here, headmaster."

Principal: (irritated) "I was about to get to that, had you given me the chance."

Mathilda: "Just so you know, my father will be here any minute - "

Principal: (interrupting) "Anyway, I suppose you know why you were all called here, Hazel."

Hazel: (nodding) "Yes, ma'am, I do."

Principal: “Your brother is here to express his dissatisfaction about what happened yesterday on the field. The coach did tell me his side of the story, however he did not see the incident when it occurred at the exact time. I also have a list of witnesses whose statements do corroborate. I'd like to hear your side of the story, Hazel.”

Mathilda: (shouting) “This is not fair! I already told you what happened! Who are those witnesses and how come I am alone while she has her friends alongside her?!”

Principal: “If you have another one of your childish outbursts, then I am afraid I will have to put you out without giving you a fair chance to tell your side of the story, Mathilda. This is not your school nor your father's school, let me just make one thing clear – you're the learner here and if you ever interrupt me again, I will put you out. Is that clear?”

Mathilda looked like a scorned five year old who was just denied a treat. It was so pathetically annoying.

Mathilda: "Fine."

Principal: "Please, go ahead, Hazel."

Hazel: (Sighing) "I was playing on the field as usual, alongside my friend Otlile and the other team mates, when Mathilda came out of nowhere and deliberately hit my knee with her hockey stick. I am not one to ever get into trouble, ma'am, but Mathilda has had it in for me ever since day one. When she was asked about what happened, she said that I fell."

Principal: (nodding) "Thank you. Otlile and Kgaugelo, you were called here because I wanted to hear what you two saw."

Both my friends spoke honestly about what they saw, while Mathilda looked bewildered. She was even more stressed over the fact that she had to keep quiet. She could never really submit to anyone without having a word or two in. I always thought she was rude and impulsive, but no one is born that way, really.

Principal: “Thank you, you two may leave, while Hazel stays.”

They got up and Otlile gave me the look before she left. While they were on their way out, I saw Mathilda's father, alongside a coloured woman I had never seen before. She looked nothing like Mathilda, I mean she was dark skinned but she was beautiful – too beautiful for that ugly heart of hers.

Mr. Mabaso: “We're so sorry we're late, headmaster. Duty calls, you know how it is.”

Mathilda immediately folded her arms and sighed in annoyance when she saw them. I saw some resemblance from her father, but the woman, I wasn't sure who she was.

Principal: “Please, take a seat Mr. and Mrs. Mabaso. The victim's brother has been here since this morning. I'm so glad you could make it.”

I picked up the sarcasm in her tone. Mr. Mabaso looked like a very wealthy and rather busy man, but he lacked respect for

the smallest things. If you can't respect people's time by just being punctual, then you really aren't a good businessman. He seemed a bit arrogant.

Mrs. Mabaso: (chuckling) "Come on, now, Evelyn. My husband is a very busy man, surely you know that. Now that we're here, can we get right to it?"

Yep, the wife was even more arrogant, as for calling the headmaster with her name. I had no idea that was her name to begin with. All we ever saw was Mrs. E. Steyn. Evelyn was not such a shabby name at all. You know how white people become red whenever they are angry or upset or irritated? The headmaster became like that and I could tell she wasn't a fan of Mr. Mabaso either.

Principal: "Well, I am sorry that you and your husband find a meeting concerning your daughter's attitude so measly and uninteresting."

Mathilda: (interrupting) "Step daughter."

Oh, that was the problem.

Mrs. Mabaso: (embarrassed) "Come on, now Mathilda. There's no need for you to act this way. I am your mother, regardless of blood."

Mathilda became even more agitated.

Principal: "Anyway, Mr. and Mrs. Mabaso, your daughter has assaulted Hazel over here and her brother is really not impressed. I am not either, and I am pretty sure if she was the victim, we'd most probably all be in court right now."

Mr. Mabaso: "Surely we can fix that. I'll pay for the medical bills."

Malachi: (annoyed) "It's not about the money."

Oh, so money fixed everything for them.

Principal: "That's not how we do things here. Mathilda has had tons of transgressions on her list ever since she has been a learner here, and honestly, the fact that it has been swept under the rug just doesn't sit well with me. I am afraid this time, I have to take action."

Mr. Mabaso: "Oh, come on, Evelyn, I mean I am the best donor here - "

Principal: (interrupting) "We take assault very seriously at this school. You should be very glad Mr. Makwetla didn't press any charges or take this to the media. Mathilda is suspended with immediate effect."

Of course, Mathilda didn't take it so well.

Mathilda: (shocked) "Excuse me?! You can't suspend me! What am I supposed to do with all that time at home?!"

Principal: "You have all the money in the world, I am sure you will figure something out."

Mr. Mabaso: “Evelyn, I am sure we can work something out.”

Principal: “That's Mrs. Steyn to you, Mr. Mabaso. Rules are rules and if you don't agree with it, you can take it up with the board.”

Mathilda was battling to keep it together and she just started crying. I had seen fake tears before, but she was crying for real. I had never seen her cry like that before.

Mr. Mabaso: (angrily) “This is what happens when you decide to embarrass me in front of the lower class, Mathilda. You have really disappointed me. Imagine what I am supposed to tell my fellow business partners when they hear about this.”

Mrs. Mabaso: “Honey, you don't have to shout at her like that.”

Mathilda: (crying) “As if you care! I hate you! I hate both of you!”

She stormed out not giving the Principal a chance to even excuse her. I was a bit appalled by Mr. Mabaso's behaviour. Mrs. Mabaso really seemed nice, even though she was one of those Stepford wives. She really seemed hurt by Mathilda's reaction and she walked out to follow her. I learnt then that it was not just poor families who created broken children, but rich people too. Mathilda was always mean to me and to everyone at most, but the fault lay with her parents. Something big was brewing in her house and she had no other way to escape it other than to be a pain in other people's lives.

Mr. Mabaso: "I am really sorry about this, Eve – Mrs. Steyn. Rest assured, she will come back from this suspension a better person. Hazel, please accept my apology. I'll send you the bill, Malachi."

Malachi: "There's no need for that. Mrs. Steyn, I appreciate your efforts. Thank you for your time."

Principal: "You are welcome. That is all from my side. You may leave."

I got up and walked out, when Mr. Mabaso just had to put his foot in it.

Mr. Mabaso: “It is so good to see you again, Malachi. I mean how old are you now? 24?”

Malachi: “25.”

Mr. Mabaso: “Hmm, I thought you'd be an Engineer or something as you promised when you left here. I mean, if you ever need a favour or two, I can squeeze you into my firm.”

Malachi: “I didn't come here looking for handouts, Mr. Mabaso, I came here to sort out an issue your daughter created. I don't want to come back here regarding another incident like this. Hazel, ke tiao bona (I'll see you) later.”

My brother looked really embarrassed. He was one of the top achievers at the school and it wasn't easy for him to be without a qualification and without a decent job after all those years. I concluded right then, that Mr. Mabaso was a real asshole and

no wonder his daughter was one too. On my way back to class, I bumped into the crying Mathilda.

Hazel: “Hey, Mathilda, are you okay?”

Mathilda: “Fuck off, Hazel!”

Yep, I guess I enjoyed being a frequent receiver of pain and insults. I was just trying to be nice to her. I needed to learn to stop that, because clearly it always bit me in the ass – hard.

Ephesians 4:31 - “Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.”

“The way I see it, if you want the rainbow, you gotta put up with the rain.” —Dolly Parton

Hazel

I wasn't in the mood for the day any more, more especially since I started feeling my tummy rumble. I also couldn't get Mathilda's situation out of my mind. I sort of started seeing her in another light. She wasn't innocent and after all she had done to me, she didn't really deserve my kindness, but she was a person as well and I felt that everyone was capable of pain. I couldn't help but think of how it must have been like living with a father like that. I asked myself what ever happened to her mother, her real mother and why she didn't like her stepmother like that. Rich people sure had problems.

Mrs. Louw: “Hazel, you're up next.”

I had drifted off elsewhere, completely ignoring people's speeches. I got up with my flash cards in my hands, but Mathilda's situation kept wavering in my head.

Hazel: (clearing throat) “I have chosen the topic: How does family and society contribute to depression? Yes, I firmly believe so. Statistics have shown a very steep rise in depression and mental illness amongst the youth. I know, this is not a race issue, but I'd like to specifically put emphasis and focus on black people regarding this topic. So many black people aren't even aware of what depression actually is. A lot of us youth like saying “I'm so depressed” even when we're just generally upset, but how many people actually died or took their lives because no one understood them or even tried when they said they were depressed? Society contributes severely towards depression because for one, when you don't have the latest gadget or you're not involved in the latest trend – you're not worthy of being befriended. A lot of people define love, relationships, family dynamics all because of what society and social media tell us. People have felt so entitled to how we should live our lives, that we end up clinically depressed because we can no longer match up to their standards or afford the latest gadgets. Family, is the biggest and worst contributor of them all. A mother, from a broken background can treat her children differently from one another, causing sibling rivalry and hatred towards her and each other. Black tax has become such a common denominator amongst black families, that some breadwinners can't live up to their family members'

expectations. We as the future generation can change all that. We can rule out all generational curses and thrive to have the best families we can ever get.”

The topic felt so personal to me, little did I know it was soon to be a chilling reality. I didn't even realize how passionately I was speaking about it and I hardly even used my flash cards. I might have spent more than 3 minutes on my speech, though. I saw Otlile and Kg stand up and applaud me. Those two just enjoyed making me the center of attention. Surprisingly, the rest of my classmates were clapping their hands as well. It felt so moving, really. Mrs. Louw applauded me as well.

Mrs. Louw: “Thank you, Hazel. That was very moving. It's nice to see you being so free and open in front of others. You may take your seat.”

I really liked that. I mean, I wasn't a public speaker, but I really enjoyed that. It felt really good to voice out my thoughts, even though it was compulsory. Break time finally came and Otlile and Kg couldn't stop raving about my speech. I thought they were overdoing it, but the rest of my classmates were really into it. They also congratulated me as well.

Otlile: “Wa bona (you see), my friend? Your speech was fantabulous.”

Hazel: “You two are overdoing it now, come on.”

Kg: “I agree with Otlile on this one. Perhaps you should think of joining the debate team. You'd be amazing.”

It wasn't a bad idea, but I already had my plate full with hockey. Besides, Mathilda would have a fit.

Hazel: “I'll pass.”

They took out their lunch boxes, and then I remembered that my own mother refused to give me food. I salivated as I saw their food, but I didn't have the heart to tell them about what happened.

Kg: (frowning) “Aren't you eating today?”

Hazel: (shaking head) “No, I'm on a diet.”

What a lame excuse, but I was embarrassed.

Otilie: (clicking tongue) “Mxm, nonsense. Why would you ever need to go on a diet?”

Hazel: “Because...”

Kg: “Hazel, you do know that you can tell us anything, right?”

There they went again.

Hazel: “I know, I know.”

I think they both saw that I had an issue that I didn't want to discuss. We always shared our lunch – always.

Kg: “Enough of your nonsense about diets. We always share food and just because you don't have any today, doesn't mean you don't have to eat with us. Now, eat.”

Hazel: “Seriously, guys. I'm fine.”

Otlile: “Eat before I take my words back about your speech.”

I chuckled lightly, even though my heart was breaking into tiny pieces, slowly. I knew that my mother would have most probably made that issue a more permanent one. Sooner or later they'd get tired of always eating their food with me. I needed to think of something – fast. After school, Malachi came to fetch us. We didn't have hockey practise on certain days of the week, only on Mondays, Wednesdays. The ride home was the usual, but for me I dreaded every moment as we got close to home. I was slowly starting to hate my own home.

Malachi: “Hazel, o shap (are you okay)?”

Hazel: (faint smile) “Yes, ke sharp (I'm fine).”

Malachi: “Okay, I need to go do something real quickly. Ka boa (I'll be back).”

I nodded and got out of the car. The moment I walked through the gate, my mother appeared from the tavern.

Bina: “Wa be wa fihla (You finally made it), my child. Go change, I need an extra pair of hands.”

I was instantly annoyed. She never asked me how my day was or anything like that, but she always managed to ask Bella. One time, Malachi was so happy to have won one of his debate competitions. He came home with five trophies, and all she said was “wena man (wow)”. Certain things may seem small, but the after effects are so damaging. That speech topic had touched me in more ways than one; it was my daily reality. I was peeved when I saw Bella eating lunch in front of the tv, still in her uniform.

Bella: (laughing) “Tsamaya o bereka, sesi (go work, sis), while us God's favourites get to watch some tv.”

She kept laughing, which made me even more angry. I decided to just ignore her. I changed my clothes and went straight to the tavern. I hated every moment of it; to make matters worse, my mother ensured that she told me where to get off every second she got.

Bina: “Ja, I heard Malachi was at your school today. I see you want to lose your little bursary, Hazel. If you don't stop creating drama, you will be forced to matriculate mo kasi kao botsa (in the township, I'm telling you.”

I just ignored her.

Bina: “As for taba e ya gao (this thing of yours) of getting Malachi to intimidate me, no child of mine will tell me what to do under my roof. Where is he now, huh? For as long as you live under my roof, you will follow my rules.”

I ignored her even though I wanted to cry. I just wanted to break down right there. I really missed my grandmother, Mam'Rose. I needed to make a plan to go visit her real soon.

She was always busy helping people at church and at home. After two hours of cleaning up after drunkards and serving alcohol in the shebeen, she finally let me go. I was worn out, angry, tired and mostly depressed. I kept hoping for Malachi to come back, but yet I couldn't expect him to fight all my battles. I went straight to the kitchen and found Bella still watching tv. I was starving. I was about to open the bread tin, when she stopped me right in my tracks.

Bella: "Oh, no you don't. Mama strictly instructed me to check on you. You're not allowed to touch any of the food in this house – except for water. That's the only thing that is free – for you."

I was so livid. I had reached breaking point. I stormed to my room and banged the door right behind me in frustration. I could hear how happy Bella was to see me suffer like that. My own mother, she made me work my ass off in that tavern that day and didn't even let me eat anything in the house. I sometimes asked myself if she was even my real mother. I mean, I looked nothing like her, though. Perhaps I was adopted or something. I had heard rumours my entire life about her being involved with a white man, who left her when she was pregnant with me. People talk and it doesn't take long for

stories to get out in the township. I cried silently and went through people on my contact list. I didn't want to bombard my friends with my problems and most certainly not Malachi. He really had his plate full and I was an additional problem to all of that. I was starving and crying at the same time, which caused me to have a huge migraine. I could barely do my homework. I didn't even have any energy to take a bath. I just got into my bed and dozed off. I woke up feeling really light headed and thirsty. The hunger was ten times worse than it was that afternoon. I walked out, and found the little happy family sitting in the lounge, eating pizza. Oh, my stomach growled so loudly and I just couldn't help it.

Moses: "Oh, hello, Hazel. You're awake. Re ja (we're eating) pizza. Go grab a plate and have some."

I was about to go grab a plate without thinking twice, when my mother stopped me.

Bina: "Wa reng, wena (what did you just say), Moses? She's not eating any of this. She can ask her brother to buy some for her."

My heart bled. At that moment, I just didn't care about anything any more. I was willing to beg just to get enough food in my stomach to get through the night.

Hazel: (teary) "Bathong (goodness), Mama."

Bina: "Bathong (goodness), Mama ya eng (for what)?! Go drink some water. You're not going to eat any of our food."

I went to the kitchen with tears in my eyes. I wanted to unlock the door, but I got yet another tongue lashing.

Bina: "If you dare open that door and go out to your brother, don't you dare come back."

I could hear how Bella was enjoying it. She was laughing so hard, I just wanted to die. I slowly walked back to my bedroom and embraced the humiliation. I had no idea why Moses was even with a woman like my mother. I could even hear him vouch for me.

Moses: “Mara (But), Bina.

Bina: “Mara (But) Bina ya eng (for what)? Ke gaka ka mo (this is my house). If you don't like the way I raise my children – there's the door.”

Time passed so slowly, I could barely get any shut eye. By 4am, I was already up. I couldn't sleep. I tried sneaking out of my room to get some food, but my mother was right there in the lounge. I couldn't get passed her.

Bina: (sleepy) “You'd better be going to the bedroom to take a bath. Other than that, go back to bed.”

I didn't understand why I was being punished like that. Slowly, but surely, I was starting to regret being alive. 5Am finally came and my headache had become worse. Just the other day I was injured by Mathilda, my high school rival, and then I was being starved by my own mother; in my own house. I dragged my feet to the bathroom and dragged them even more when I was getting dressed. My body felt rather weak. I know

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perhaps I was exaggerating, but I was a very active person and I didn't eat a lot, but I had never survived on one meal a day. I couldn't exactly call the sandwiches I had during break a meal, since we were just sharing to keep us going through the day. I looked in the mirror and needless to say, I looked like proper shit. The bags underneath my eyes were incredibly dark and I looked like I hadn't slept in days. Emotionally, I was doing a lot worse than I was physically. Upon leaving, I couldn't even sneak out a piece of bread, as my mother was already up watching me. Bella was having the time of her life, eating right before me. I was broken. I walked out and found Malachi waiting for me as usual. I tried to compose myself as best I could.

Hazel: (faint smile) "Hey."

Malachi: (frowning) "Are you okay?"

Hazel: (nodding) "Yes."

Malachi: (frowning) "Why don't you look so good?"

Hazel: "I didn't get much sleep. Other than that, I'm fine."

Malachi: "Are you sure?"

Hazel: "Yes, now can we please go?"

Malachi didn't look convinced, but he knew how much I hated it when he fussed and nagged over me. I just prayed that he didn't ask me anything else. Luckily, he didn't. Most people would have thought I was seeking attention or something and that I should have just told my brother about the situation, but when you are so tired of feeling like a burden, like you are the one putting your brother's life on hold, you'd understand. I was quiet throughout the entire ride to school. The sun felt like it was blasting right through my eyes. I could barely keep them open. I got out of the car and felt as if my legs were about to give in on me, but I soldiered on. My friends could both see that I wasn't doing okay, but I masked the pain as always. They were talking the entire time, while I just barely listened. It was Thursday, which meant we had a test period just before break, meaning we would have five periods instead of four. I could barely hold on any more. I felt weak, light headed as if

everything around me was becoming blurry. I barely lifted my finger.

Mrs. Louw: "Yes, Hazel?"

Hazel: (stuttering) "M... May I please be excused?"

Mrs. Louw: "Okay, but don't take too long."

I got up slowly.

Mrs. Louw: (frowning) "Hazel? Are you alright?"

All I remember is taking one step further and landing on the floor. Mrs. Louw ran up towards me, but all I saw was blurred lights and from there it was darkness.

Mrs. Louw: "Hazel? Hazel? Are you alright? Can you hear me?"

I slowly opened my eyes and saw Mrs. Louw along with Kg and Otlile right behind her. They looked as if they had been crying. My head felt really light and I could barely lift it.

Hazel: "Wh... What happened?"

Mrs. Louw: "You fainted, dear. But don't worry, your brother is on the way."

I panicked. He wasn't going to take the news very well.

Mrs. Louw: "Here, eat something. You should be up in no time."

She handed me a chocolate bar and a bottle of coke. I gobbled it so fast without a care in the world. They most probably knew what was wrong, but at that point I didn't care. I didn't feel embarrassed at all.

Otlile: "Her brother is here, Miss."

Mrs. Louw: "Okay, let's get you up. Girls, get her bag, please."

Mrs. Louw was kind enough to help me up and walk with me to the parking lot. Malachi looked gobsmacked to say the least.

Malachi: (shocked) "What happened? Are you okay? Is she okay?"

Mrs. Louw got me into the car while Otlile and Kg handed me my school bag. They waved goodbye at me, while Mrs. Louw was talking to Malachi.

Mrs. Louw: "She fainted. She was assessed by the school nurse and her blood sugar levels were extremely low. That is usually caused by fatigue and in most cases – hunger."

Malachi: (frowning) "You mean she was starved?"

Mrs. Louw: "We suspect so. Look, we don't know what is happening at home, but we take such issues seriously, you remember that when you were here."

Malachi: "I will sort it out. It won't happen again. There is no need for therapy."

Mrs. Louw: "Okay, but it is standard procedure."

Malachi: "Okay, thank you so much, Mrs. Louw."

Mrs. Louw: "You take care now. Bye Hazel, I'll see you on Monday."

They had given me the following day off as they wanted me to visit a doctor. Private schools. I couldn't imagine spending a day at home, while Kg had to fuss over me. He had to work and make ends meet. I couldn't do that to him. He got into the car and drove away. The entire time he was looking at the rear view mirror with rage-filled eyes. Halfway home, he stopped the car on the side walk.

Malachi: (angrily) "Why didn't you tell me?"

Hazel: "Tell you what?"

Malachi: "Why didn't you tell me that she was starving you, Hazel?! Do you have any idea how angry I feel like right now?!"

Hazel: "I didn't want to stress you out, Malachi. You already do so much for me. It just isn't fair."

Malachi: (teary) "I'd die for you, Hazel. Don't you get it? You are my sister. You and I only have each other."

Hazel: "We also have Mam'Rose."

Malachi: "She won't be around forever. One day you will know who she actually is."

Hazel: "So what now? I can't expect you to watch me the entire time."

Malachi: "You leave her to me. I'll sort this whole thing out."

He got back on the road and drove like a mad man. I knew then he was really angry. As soon as we got home, he took me out of the car and took me straight to his room outside. It was his own bachelor pad, with a kitchen, a bedroom, a lounge area and bathroom. My mother saw us heading there and immediately started shouting, but Malachi was seeing red.

Bina: (shouting) “And then? Malachi, o nagana gore o mang o tlo ntsha Hazel skolong ka nako e (who do you think you are taking Hazel out of school at this time of the day)?!”

Malachi was so angry, that he nearly put his hands on her neck.

Malachi: (livid) “I give you money for groceries and you decide to starve her?! Your own daughter, Mama?!”

Bina: (shocked) “Aowa (No), she's exaggerating.”

Malachi: “She fucking fainted at school! And you simply call that exaggerating?!”

Bina: (scared) “Okay, maybe I may have overdid it. Askies (sorry).”

Malachi: (angrily) “You are yet to feel the wrath of your ancestors, Mama! You are an evil woman. You think that the world owes you but you did all this to yourself. Koko wa lla ka wena (granny is crying for you). You are the only grandchild she hasn't seen in a long time. She wants to see you, so that she can ask you for forgiveness and so that she can also forgive you. If you don't go soon, she'll be another angry ancestor on your list.”

Malachi had a few episodes while I was growing up where he would speak in riddles about death, and ancestors and punishment. He would occassionally see things that no one else would see – much like Mam'Rose. He would see things before they even happened, like premonitions. He was speaking in so many riddles that day, I couldn't understand what he was saying. I mean, the only grandmother I knew was Mam'Rose. What was he saying?

Bina: (worried) “What are you talking about? How dare you make a mockery of my life?”

Malachi: “You never listen to my warnings. I have always warned you, but you never listened. I warned you about Moses; I warned you about being involved with a married man, but you just never listened. He will die and everyone will claim you killed him. As the Bible says, you reap what you sow, Mama.”

My mother looked really worried. She looked baffled.

Bina: (angrily) “Stop with your bullshit, Malachi! Just stop it! You're just like your father!”

Malachi: “I never chose him as my father. I am still paying the price for what he did to you – 25 years later. At least I am not miserable. From now on, Hazel will stay in my room outside. I will no longer help you with any food, nor will I ask you to do anything for her. If I so much as hear that you did or even said something to her, I will rip your throat out myself. Do you understand me?!”

He was spitting fire. I had never seen him angry like that.

Bina: "Ye.. Yes."

Malachi: "Hazel, go get all your clothes from the house. I'm taking you to Mam'Rose today. We'll come back later."

Finally, I got to take a breather from my evil mother and sister. He didn't have to tell me twice. As weak as I felt, I went straight to the house and packed all my clothes. I didn't even have the time to pack them decently. I thought she might come back to tell me where to get off, but I assumed that Malachi had her on her toes out there. I hurried and took whatever I needed and out I was. My mother was very displeased. She looked at Malachi with so much hatred. I knew that deep down he was hurt by all of that. She never treated him the way a mother should have, and I was next in line of that treatment. I went straight into Malachi's room and dropped my clothes. He locked and we drove off, leaving my mother stunned.

Hazel: "I bet she is already cooking up a new plan to make my life a living hell."

Malachi: "She'll humble herself real soon. Just you wait."

Hazel: "What did you mean by Moses will die?"

Malachi: "Exactly that. I had a vision. He is going to die and Mama will slowly lose everything she values most."

I didn't even want to ask what that was.

Hazel: "Malachi, what did you mean when you said, I'll find out real soon who Mam'Rose really is?"

Malachi: "I'll tell you some other day. It is not the right time. Just hold on a little longer, I'll explain everything when the time is right, okay?"

Hazel: "One more question."

Malachi: "Yes?"

Hazel: "Why does Mama always tell you that you're always like your father?"

Malachi: (sternly) "That is just something too painful, I also can't tell you about it right now. The wounds are just too deep."

Hazel: "What about my father?"

Malachi: (chuckling) "I thought the previous question was the last one?"

Hazel: (laughing) "Sorry."

Malachi: "It's okay. Your father was a white man."

So, the rumours were right.

Hazel: "Hmm, no wonder I look the way I do."

Malachi: "He was really good to her and to me, you know. He was really the best."

Hazel: (puzzled) "Then what happened?"

Malachi: "He had his faults, but Mama also fucked that up the moment she had the chance. He was going to choose her, but she failed to show him that she was going to help with stability in his life. I don't blame him. How could he leave a life of wealth and security for a woman like Mama?"

I wished I had more details about my mother, but sadly, I just never received them. My mother never told me anything about my father, and the furthest details I got were the ones Malachi gave me. I really appreciated that he was honest with me at all times.

Hazel: (sigh) “Are you and I meant to suffer like this, though, Malachi? I mean, we didn't ask our fathers do hurt Mama like that. I feel like we're being punished.”

Malachi: “The only person punishing us is Mama. God would never bring us into this world only to punish us like this. You are beautiful, intelligent and you have a beautiful life ahead of you. Trust me, your breakthrough is bigger than you think. Once the hardship is over, you won't believe it.”

Hazel: “Why are you still living with Mama when you could have gone and left the minute you had the chance?”

Malachi: “Because... despite it all, she is still my mother. I don't know, I guess I am still yearning for her love. The love that she never gave me. A part of me still wishes that she could just one day apologize and hug me, you know, tell me that she loves me. I went through so much hardships, and Mam'Rose made it so much easier for me. I didn't want you to experience all that, so I made sure that I stay. Besides, you know I lost out on the scholarship because I couldn't go to varsity that year.”

Hazel: “Yeah, but that was because you had a car accident, remember?”

Malachi: “One day, one of these very days, I will tell you everything you need to know – including the day of the accident and what actually caused it.”

Hazel: (sigh) “When?”

Malachi: “Let's make a deal; the day you write your final Matric exam paper, I promise to tell you everything you need to know.”

Hazel: “Ah, why not on my 18th birthday?”

Malachi: “Because your birthday is in May, and that wouldn't be right. I want to tell you when you're emotionally and spiritually ready – and that's when you finish your exams.”

Hazel: “Alright then. Deal.”

Romans 3:14 - ““Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.”

“The healthiest response to life is joy.” — Deepak Chopra

Hazel

It's always just so amazing how you think you know a person, but then in reality, we just don't – especially family. After my intense conversation with Malachi, I realized that I didn't know my mother nor my family at all. I mean, all I knew was that Malachi and I were so close, most probably because we were both neglected by our mother. She hated our fathers, and that resulted in her intense, unforgivable hatred towards us. I still had no idea whom my father was, although Malachi had some sort of sense who his father was. He just didn't tell me – it was just too painful to even talk about him. I on the other hand, was always at the receiving end of Bella's atrocious words about how I didn't know my father while she had hers. It seemed as if Moses was someone far from perfect, but only time would tell. After the intense conversation I had with him, we finally arrived at my grandmother, Mam'Rose's house. I was so excited to see her, that I completely forgot about all the drama back home. I found her watching tv and I ran towards her and gave her a big, fat hug. It was so soothing to my soul to feel the warmth of

someone who actually cared about me. She hugged me back, but she felt awfully frail. I broke the hug and took a good look at her; she had lost quite an amount of weight and there was less meat on her face. She wasn't really a big woman, she just had enough weight on her to be a healthy woman.

Hazel: (frowning) “Koko (granny), o sharp (are you alright)?”

Mam'Rose: (faint smile) “Yes, my baby. Why wouldn't I be?”

Hazel: “Koko, I know you. You are usually active, but you seem as if you are sick.”

Malachi: “I agree with Hazel on that one. What's wrong?”

Mam'Rose: (faint smile) “I'm fine now that you're here. It's so good to see you – both of you.”

Hazel: “You have no idea how good it is for me to see you.”

Mam'Rose: "Malachi, are you staying for lunch?"

Malachi: "I have some errands to run, but I'll come by later for dinner."

Mam'Rose: "Hmm, still hanging out with Bethuel and his crew?"

Malachi: "You know why I have to do it, Ma."

Mam'Rose: "No judgement. I am still praying for you."

Malachi: (nodding) "Thank you, I'll see you guys later."

He left us while I was in wonder. What did Koko mean? Perhaps the rumours were true. But what if Malachi was a gangster too?

Hazel: (frowning) "Koko, what did you mean by that?"

Mam'Rose: "By what?"

Hazel: "You asked Malachi if he's still hanging out with Beast and his crew. Koko, is he a gangster too?"

Mam'Rose: (laughing) "Why would you think such a thing of your brother?"

Hazel: (shrugging) "I don't know, I guess because of the question you asked."

Mam'Rose: (frowning) "What if he is a gangster?"

Hazel: "Pardon me?"

Mam'Rose: "What if he is a gangster? Would you love him any less or look at him differently?"

Hazel: (shaking head) "Of course not, Koko. I love my brother so much. I knew if I had done something along those lines he

would never look at me differently. I love him too much to judge him for anything.”

Mam'Rose: “And what do you think of Bethuel?”

Hazel: (frowning) “I don't understand, Koko. I mean, why are we talking about him? He's Malachi's friend, isn't he?”

Mam'Rose: (chuckling) “I didn't ask you that. I asked you what you think of him.”

Hazel: “Uhm, well, I don't really know.”

That felt like a million dollar question. You see, my grandmother was a very funny person when she needed to be. I could never tell if it was a part of a prophecy or if she was just being her plain old silly self.

Mam'Rose: (chuckling) “You know alright. What do you think of him?”

Hazel: “Well, I think he is a nice guy. I mean, he is never mean to me, nor Malachi. He never asks me stupid questions like other people do. He never calls me funny names like others do and he really seems respectful.”

Mam'Rose: “Hmm, I see.”

Hazel: “Why do you ask?”

Mam'Rose: “No reason.”

Hazel: “Koko, I know you too well.”

Mam'Rose: “Let's just say; you'll get to know Bethuel more than anyone ever has – soon.”

Hazel: (frowning) “Koko, is this one of your riddles?”

Mam'Rose: (laughing) “Come on, now. I never give away the good bits of my prophecies.”

Hazel: “Hmm, alright then. Well, can you at least tell me about my future?”

Mam'Rose: “All I'll let you know this time is that you will reach greater heights than your stupid sister. You will reach dreams far better than your mother ever has dreamt of, and you will reach your destiny before you even know it. Trouble looms, just as it does for everyone. Unlike some people, you have to fight for what's yours – and you'll end up losing something really precious to you, but when God giveth, He taketh. Just like Job, you'll lose something valuable at the hands of someone you think you love, and you'll gain even more by the grace of God.”

I couldn't understand what she meant; I mean my grandmother always gave clear prophecies to others, but to me, she just always spoke in riddles. I'd always catch up really late when the vision actually occurs and becomes a reality.

Hazel: “Koko, mara (but), you always give me riddles. Why?”

Mam'Rose: "Believe me, my baby, it is not by choice. Your ancestors favour you and Malachi so much, that they just give me what I tell you. Your visions always come in riddles, so it means it is up to you to always figure it out. You'll become a greater person than everyone thinks. You have a good heart, unlike your mother and sister. I can't actually blame your sister, your mother partially is to blame for the way she is."

Hazel: (sigh) "Those two, neh."

Mam'Rose: "Now, tell me what happened this week."

Hazel: (frowning) "I thought you'd already seen what happened to me."

Mam'Rose: "I don't know everything, child. All I know is that your spirit is heavy and saddened and that tragic things happened to you this week. Now, make me some tea so we can talk all about it."

Hazel: (surprised) “Wena, koko (you, granny)? Tea at this time of the day? I thought you'd ask for a glass of wine.”

Mam'Rose: (chuckling) “I never said I wouldn't want wine. Tea first – then wine for me.”

Hazel: “Hmm, only if I get to have some.”

Mam'Rose: “When you're 18.”

I chuckled as I went to the kitchen to make her some tea. We had a very good, candid conversation about life, my mother, my sister and about what had happened that week. My grandmother was always so strong – yet, she managed to shed a few tears as I told her about what my godforsaken mother had done to me. Her being mean to me was something I could take, but her starving me was just plain inhumane.

Mam'Rose: (teary) “One day, you'll understand why your mother is as cruel as she is today.”

Hazel: (sigh) “But it doesn't make it right, Koko.”

Mam'Rose: “It doesn't

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yes, but one day, you'll understand why she is the way she is – based on your profession.”

Hazel: (excitedly) “So, you know what I'm going to be when I finish school?”

Mam'Rose: (chuckling) “Hazel, you have your demons, but you honestly mean to tell me that you have no idea what you're going to be when you finish school?”

Hazel: “Well, not exactly.”

Mam'Rose: “Tell you what; after tomorrow, you are going to have an epiphany and you'll know what you want to do for a living.”

That was rather refreshing to hear. For once, I had confirmation of what I'd actually be doing for a living. I already knew what I had in mind, but I just wasn't too sure.

Hazel: "But I don't know if I'll be able to study, Koko. With Malachi sacrificing his life and all for me - "

Mam'Rose: "Let me stop you right there. Malachi didn't have to do what he did for you, but he did. If he hadn't, you'd be even more depressed than you are now. You never realize this, but every time your mother wrongs you in the worst possible way, something bad happens to her. She has done so much bad unto you and your brother, that your ancestors are really displeased with her. They are angry and an angry ancestor is a dangerous one."

I knew what she meant – she had always instilled in me that I needed to pray and be diligent and that I'd be rewarded.

Hazel: "Speaking of ancestors, Koko. Malachi promised me that he would tell me the truth when I turn 18."

Mam'Rose: "So? You don't believe him?"

Hazel: "I do, it's just that..."

Mam'Rose: "It's just that what?"

Hazel: "I'm dying to know the truth. I don't feel good about Malachi knowing so much while I don't. What if Malachi dies or something bad happens to him before I get to know the truth?"

Mam'Rose: "He won't. Does that answer your question?"

Hazel: "It's not fair, Koko."

Mam'Rose: "Let nature take it's course. You'll know the truth – even sooner than expected."

I gave up on trying and by the time I wanted to make supper for us – Malachi appeared with some food, along with Beast. I didn't expect that. I mean, Mam'Rose didn't judge anyone nor

chase anyone away, but I didn't expect Beast to come through with Malachi.

Malachi: "Ma, I hope you don't mind me bringing Bethuel here to eat with us. He is a bit lonely."

Beast: "Really, Malachi? You just have to tell the entire world about my feelings?"

Malachi: "Drama queen."

Mam'Rose: (laughing) "It's always okay to have guests. Please, do come in, boys."

Bethuel walked in alongside Malachi. He smiled at me as always. He gave me such a warm, innocent smile and gave me a brink wink. I think I was the only one that saw that, to be honest.

Mam'Rose: "Thanks for bringing dinner, boys. Hazel was about to cook for us."

Beast: (excitedly) “I would love to taste some of your cooking, Haze. I hear you got mad kitchen skills.”

He had this really quirky chuckle, but it was somehow kind of adorable, that it just made me blush.

Hazel: (blushing) “It seems as if Malachi just talks too much. He honestly lets on too much about me.”

Malachi: “Beast, stop it, man. That's my sister.”

Mam'Rose: “You really don't have to be so overprotective. Malachi, your sister is going to be a woman one day. The same way you are a man – she'll have needs. Just like you.”

I was so embarrassed. I was nowhere near ready for the sex talk.

Mam'Rose: "I didn't mean to embarrass you, Hazel. Malachi, please, get us some plates for this Pizza and a glass of wine for me."

Bethuel: (smiling) "May I have a drink in your house, Koko?"

Mam'Rose: "Please, call me Ma or Mam'Rose. Koko makes me feel way too old. And yes, you may."

Bethuel smiled and rushed outside to fetch his beer. Malachi was a drinker and smoker, but he never drank in Mam'Rose's presence although she knew that he drank. What Bethuel did was very unconventional, but very respectful and thoughtful to be honest. I never thought Kasi (township) guys were like that. He came back with a few beers and asked Malachi to put them in the fridge. Malachi seemed a bit annoyed at his friend's habits.

Mam'Rose: "Oh, Malachi, come on, now. I don't know you as this stiff. You always hide your drinking and smoking and I don't even know why."

Malachi: “Out of respect, Ma. You raised me so well that I don't want to offend you in any way.”

Malachi called Mam'Rose Mama, while I called her Koko. She was very hands on with him, even with me, but I felt that their relationship was more complex and more personal than it was with her and I. It just felt a little too deep. She dug Malachi out of a very deep hole, one that he would never forget.

Mam'Rose: “Nonsense. I raised you well enough to know that alcohol and smoking don't make a person; they don't define a character – not always, you know.”

Malachi: “Okay, Ma.”

He brought the plates and we started eating. Bethuel opened one beer and started pouring out a drink for Malachi, of which they hardly did. They always drank out of the bottle, but I think out of respect for Koko, they chose to drink out of glasses. I thought it was really noble of them. Malachi was very uncomfortable at first, but Mam'Rose reassured him that it was completely okay for him to drink. After a few glasses of wine,

and a few glasses of beer, they were so chatty. Of course, I wasn't allowed to drink any of it. Malachi was listening attentively to Koko, when he started having one of his episodes. He started making those weird noises and burps, much like Koko.

Mam'Rose: (burping) “Malachi, I know you see it too. Let it out; tell us what you see.”

Malachi became a little agitated and just kept breathing.

Mam'Rose: “Remember what I taught you when you embraced this gift. You are not supposed to hide anything. You know the consequences thereof – no matter how painful it may seem to the receiver. Now, take a deep breath, and tell us what you see.”

Malachi's eyes had completely changed. His eyes were completely dilated and his voice had changed slightly.

Malachi: (groaning) “It's not looking good. Moses is not in a good space. His ancestors want to save him, but it seems too late.”

Mam'Rose: “Tell us what you see.”

Malachi: (burping) “Moses is going to be poisoned. He will die of poisoning and it will look like Mama's fault. Mama's charcoal heart has caused her to draw enemies unto herself – and unto us. He will die and it will look like it was her fault, and everything will slowly start to change. I see her losing everything – the shebeen, her money – everything. Koko wa Ila (granny is crying); she is crying for Mama. She is only holding on for a little much longer, so that she can see us – and Mama. If Mama doesn't forgive her – she will be in an even bigger hole than she is now. Aunt Sophie left this earth while she has cursed Mama and her children. She needs to make amends or else nothing, but trouble will follow her. Hazel, rest assured that your breakthrough is near – even in the least expected places. Bethuel, you're stronger than you think.”

Mam'Rose: “Is that all you see?”

Malachi: (groaning) “Yes.”

Mam'Rose: “You do know the consequences of withholding information from your ancestors.”

Malachi: “Yes, I'm aware and I am willing to bear the consequences.”

Mam'Rose: “You do know that you won't shield her forever, Malachi.”

Malachi: “Then I shall shield her for as long as I can.”

And just like that; dinner was ruined by Malachi's vision. He didn't exactly tell us everything, but he just told us what was about to happen to our mother. What puzzled me was he mentioned Koko. The only Koko I knew was Mam'Rose, so most definitely something was up and I guess I was nearing the truth as Mam'Rose said.

Proverbs 12:22 - “Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, but those who act faithfully are his delight.”

“The best portion of a good man’s life is his little nameless, unencumbered acts of kindness and of love.” — Wordsworth

Malachi

My name is Malachi and I'm 25 years old. I've had a very rough childhood – all because of my mother. She has had her fair share of trouble and pain – yet she still chose to reciprocate that unto her children – well at least two of her children. She had a good man – a very good man by her side, but she chose to just lose all of that because I was a child born out of rape. I remember everything she has done to me – tragically. I suffered, but my grandmother, Mam'Rose, made it all easier for me. Things became really hard for me when I started having dreams and visions at the tender age of 9. She helped me through it. If it wasn't for her – I'd be a dead man walking by now. When Hazel was born and I saw my mother taking the very same route she had with me, I vowed to protect her. Life is bad for a man in this life, but even ten times worse for a woman. I didn't want my sister to go down the same path, more especially when I had a vision of what my mother's life would be like when I was 13. I didn't want her to endure all

that hardship even though she most probably deserved it. If life was twice as bad for both Hazel and I, then my mother would endure the wrath of the ancestors – worse than her own parents and siblings. I didn't want that. I wanted us to have a good life; a breath of fresh air and I wanted us to break the generational curses. After my rather intense vision and me imparting it to Mam'Rose, Bethuel and my sister, Mam'Rose met me outside just before we went home. Yes, I know, I was selfish for not telling them everything I had seen in the vision, but I just didn't want to do it. I knew what the consequences were, and I was prepared to endure it all.

Mam'Rose: “Hmm, I see you never learn.”

Malachi: “What are you talking about, Ma?”

Mam'Rose: “You know very well what I mean.”

Malachi: (sigh) “I know, call me selfish, but I am prepared.”

Mam'Rose: "It's not about being fit or prepared enough to bear the physical pain. You shouldn't have lied to her – to them."

Malachi: "I didn't lie to them – I just withheld the truth."

Mam'Rose: "Malachi, you and I both know they are destined to be together. You've seen it many times in your dreams."

Malachi: "I don't dispute that; I know what they showed me, but I don't think that Hazel is ready for this."

Mam'Rose: "You do know that you can't prevent every pain coming her way, right? You do know that I won't be here always, right? But what you can do is prevent the one she is going to marry."

Malachi: "I am fully aware, Koko. You have moulded me into the person that I am. And besides, only Hazel can stop that."

Mam'Rose: "Word of advice, Malachi: you cannot be so reckless about your visions. If you are shown something you need to

tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Or else, your own life will bear the consequences.”

Malachi: “As I've said, Ma. I am fully aware and ready to bear it all.”

Mam'Rose: “One of these days, when you meet the love of your life, I do hope that you change your mindset. Life is too short, Malachi. The truth will be out soon regarding your maternal family, so you don't have to protect Hazel from everything. It is just plain impossible.”

I heard what she said loud and clear, but I was willing to risk it all for my sister. She needed to at least get her degree then I would be able to live my life. I didn't mind sacrificing so much for her. She was way too fragile to cope with the harsh reality of life. I wasn't trying to be perfect, but I just wanted her to have the life that I couldn't have. I didn't mind being a late bloomer. It was finally time to head back home, and I saw how great Hazel and Beast were chatting. Little did they know what their blossoming love was up against. Life can be so unfair at times.

Beast: (smiling) “Malachi, are you ready to go?”

Malachi: “Yeah, I was just greeting Ma goodbye.”

Hazel: “I so wish I could stay here.”

Malachi: “Not now, Hazel. Ma needs time to herself. She has raised us even when she didn't need to. You'll be back.”

Hazel just nodded. I got into the car, while Bethuel sat next to me in the passenger seat, while Hazel sat at the back. The drive back home was amusing – something completely different. I could feel my body already betraying me and giving in. I knew then that my punishment was set for not telling everyone the complete truth given to me by my ancestors. I had to bear it until we got home. Beast and Hazel continued their chat, while I drove with my mind drifting afar. When I finally got home, I dropped Hazel off and gave her the key to my room, while I went to drive Beast off.

Malachi: "Hazel, ka boa (I'll be back). I'm just taking Beast home."

Hazel: "Okay. Be safe."

I drove to Bethuel's house, while he inquisitively stared at me.

Malachi: "Are you going to tell me what's on your mind?"

Beast: (frowning) "O ra bjang (what do you mean)?"

Malachi: "I mean, it's either you want to say something or you have a serious crush on me. That's the only way I can explain why you're staring at me like that."

Beast: (chuckling) "No, man. I'd never have a crush on you. It's just that – I know you've always been spiritual and all, but I get the feeling you're keeping something from me. Why do I get the feeling you didn't tell me everything you saw in your vision?"

Malachi: (sternly) "Have I ever lied to you whenever I got a vision about you?"

Beast: (shaking head) "No. Never."

Malachi: "Then I told you everything."

Beast: "Well, alright then."

Malachi: "I have one question for you, though."

Beast: "Shoot."

Malachi: "Why are you still working for him?"

Beast: (frowning) "You mean Dragon?"

Malachi: "Yes."

Beast: “The same reason you're also working for him.”

Malachi: “Come on, you know what I mean.”

Beast: “Look, bro, I work for Dragon for the same reasons you do – to earn a living. I know, we're both smart guys and we can most probably earn a living doing something legal and sane, but we don't have a lot of opportunities. I have to support my family – just like you have to support yours. Sure, you're just our mechanic, but you remove the trackers of the cars we steal, so basically you are a criminal just like I am. I am not judging you, but just like you – I pray we can both be successful like Dragon one day and remove ourselves from this shitty situation.”

Malachi: (shaking head) “Dragon is not successful, Beast. All he does is exploit young kids like us to work for him.”

Beast: (nodding) “I hear you, bro. But until our miracle comes – we're Pretty much stuck doing this thing.”

Malachi: "Not for long. Anyways, let me go back home. I don't want Hazel to be alone."

Beast: "Cool. See you tomorrow."

Malachi: "Sharp."

Hazel

I decided to take a shower and get into my pajamas. I made some space for myself in Malachi's closet. I didn't want to overtake his entire wardrobe. I felt so bad, I mean what if he decided to bring his girlfriend over? That's if he even had one. I had never seen him with a girl before, coming to think of it. Anyway, my day with him and my grandmother was really nice. It was also nice being around Beast. I didn't think anything else of him other than the fact that he was Malachi's friend, but he did seem reliable and his loyalty to my brother was absolutely heart warming. I decided to catch up on some homework

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since I had a hectic two days. My school teachers didn't expect me to come to school the following day, but I couldn't stay home and risk being bullied by my mother and sister again. I had spoken to Kgaugelo and Otlile a few hours before, and Kg was mostly worried about me not being able to make it to her birthday party, but I wanted to. I mean, of course, I might have still had to ask my mother for permission, but I had to be there. I felt really full after the dinner we had, even though I wasn't very convinced about Malachi's vision. I got the strange and yet strong feeling that he was hiding something really deep – mostly from me. I had no idea what it was for, but I figured that he knew what was best for me. I trusted him with my life, and I wasn't about to doubt him then. A few minutes later, Malachi came back.

Malachi: “I thought you'd be sleeping by now.”

Hazel: “I just wanted to catch up on some homework.”

Malachi: (nodding) “You really don't have to go to school, you know. You were given a day off.”

Hazel: "I know, but I just can't see myself staying here all day. Besides, Mama will make sure that I work all day."

Malachi: "She wouldn't dare. I'll be here."

Hazel: (shaking head) "I can't expect that from you. You have a life too, you know. I can't expect you to be here at all times, Malachi."

Malachi: (groaning) "It's... my duty."

Hazel: (frowning) "Are you okay?"

I saw him instantly touch his back with one hand, while the other was steadily balancing himself with the couch. I saw the expression on his face and I knew he was in pain already. I then remembered that whenever he wasn't completely honest with his visions or readings, he would get body pains – severe ones, starting with his legs and knees, all the way to his back. They'd last for a day until he asked his ancestors for forgiveness.

Malachi: (groaning) "I'm fine. I just need to rest."

Hazel: "Well, you can't sleep on the couch in that state. Sleep on the bed, we'll trade places."

Malachi: (shaking head) "You're taking the bed – no discussions. I'll see you tomorrow morning."

I nodded even though I knew he was just being stubborn. I didn't want to push him. He was going to get irritated and most likely snap at me, so I let him be. I slowly headed to the bedroom, and I could hear him groaning in pain, but he tried by all means to bear it. It wasn't nice, but then, he would always tell me that he'd be okay. I knelt down and said a prayer, I felt that I needed to speak to God – not just when it was times of sorrow. My grandmother Mam'Rose taught me all that.

Hazel: (praying) "Dear God, I thank you for this day. Thank you so much for all you have given me, most importantly thank you so much for the gift of life. Bless me with a firmer heart, but allow me to always be kind. Help me be the best version of

myself, and please, let my mother forgive me for whatever wrong I have done unto her. Help us become mother and daughter and please, help her love me. I don't know if it is right for me to pray for such, but I think you said it's okay to pray for peace. I thank you once again. In Jesus' Mighty name. Amen.”

I felt as if a huge weight was lifted off my shoulders when I drifted off to sleep. The following morning came, and I had a very odd dream. It was so hard to even explain, but I only remembered it when I was brushing my teeth. I needed to get used to invading my brother's privacy, I mean it wasn't going to be easy for him to live with me. Perhaps I needed to ask Mam'Rose to take me back, to live in one of the rooms outside or something. I cleaned up with the dream replaying in my mind like an old movie. Surprisingly, I remembered everything that occurred in it. I was one person with very good memory. I could even remember events that occurred to me when I was as young as 3 years old. It's absolutely crazy, but I loved it because it helped me a lot academically. I walked out of the bedroom, to find Malachi in a spooning position on the couch. It was very odd for me, because he was never late. He never overslept – even when he was occasionally drunk.

Hazel: (frowning) “Abuti (brother), wake up.”

Malachi: (groaning) "Eish, ke nako mang (Oh, what time is it)?"

Hazel: "It's 6:30."

Malachi: "Eish (Oh), yoh (oh), no. I can't even get up."

Hazel: (frantically) "Are you okay? Are you going to need the hospital or something?"

Malachi: (laughing faintly) "No, don't be so dramatic. I just can't get up because my knees are locked. I can barely do anything."

Hazel: "So what now?"

Malachi: "I'll just pray. It will be over soon. I just need you to do me one favour."

Hazel: "Anything."

Malachi: "Take my phone and call Beast. He'll take you to school."

I wasn't sure about that, but then I did it anyway. I called him and he was surprisingly expecting it.

Beast: "Yeah, I'll be right there."

Hazel: "Please, don't be late, Beast. We still have to fetch my friends."

Beast: "KG and Otlile, I know. I won't be late. Give me five minutes."

He lived ten minutes away, but then I figured since he had a car as well, he was obviously going to drive to my house. I was looking at Malachi, which was most probably making him feel uncomfortable.

Malachi: "Stop staring at me. Rather go wait outside. Beast will be here any minute now."

Hazel: "Actually, I want to ask you about something."

Malachi: "What is it?"

Hazel: "I had a dream."

Malachi: "Go on."

Hazel: "I dreamt of a woman – an old woman. She looked a bit ill and she said that she wants to see us – both you and I along with Bella."

Malachi: "What exactly did she say?"

Hazel: “Well, she said; “Nako ya tsamaya, ngwanaka (my time is almost up, my baby). Tell your mother that I need to see her before I leave this earth. I need to see you as well, so that I can give you my blessings. You deserve so much more than she has ever given you. Please, tell her as soon as you can.”

Malachi sat still and his mind seemed to have drifted afar for a while.

Hazel: (frowning) “Are you okay?”

I then heard a car bell ring from outside the gate.

Malachi: “Perfectly fine. Go, we'll talk soon.”

I was a little frustrated because Malachi seemed to know who I was talking about – yet he didn't want to tell me. I didn't like the fact that he had secrets yet he expected me to be honest with him.

Hazel: “Okay, then. Sharp (bye).”

I left him staring at the ceiling, as he looked like he had completely forgotten about the physical pain he was in. I had no idea who the old woman was and how she knew me or even my siblings, but one thing was for sure – I was not going to let it slide. Someone was going to tell me the truth one way or another.

John 8:32 - “And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

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“Keep calm and carry on.” —Winston Churchill

Hazel

I walked out and saw my mother staring at me from her bedroom window. It felt a bit creepy since I asked myself how long she was actually staring out of it? I waved at her with a faint smile, but as usual, she gave me such a wicked look. She didn't wave nor smile back, as usual, but it still hurt, though. I got into the car and greeted Beast.

Beast: (smiling) “Sho (Hey), Hannah. O kae (how are you)?”

I frowned at him immediately. I hated that name, to be honest. It made me look like a real white girl.

Hazel: (frowning) “Don't call me that.”

Beast: “Hao (goodness), isn't it your name?”

Hazel: (annoyed) “Malachi o bolela thata (talks too much), man. Don't call me Hannah, I hate that name.”

Beast: “Oho, well, Hannah was a strong and admirable woman in the Bible, just so you know.”

Hazel: (surprised) “Wena o bala Bible (you read the Bible)?”

Beast: (chuckling) “Don't judge the book by its cover, hey.”

Hazel: “Anyway, let's go before we run late.”

Beast: “Okay.”

He started the car again and off we went.

Beast: “How's Malachi?”

Hazel: "Ah, in pain, but he'll live. Who knows what else he's hiding from me?"

Beast: "What do you mean?"

Hazel: "Well, I had this dream... Never mind."

Beast: "Well, alright then."

I was rather surprised he didn't nag me to carry on telling him all about it. We started off with Otlile first as always and then Otlile.

Otlile: "I just want to know, why Malachi isn't fetching us today. O tshwere ke Babi (Does he have a hangover)?"

Beast: (laughing) "Hazel, you didn't tell me you have such an outspoken friend."

Otlile: (shocked) “Hazel, you didn't tell Beast about me?! Come on, I thought you told everyone about me.”

Kg: “Goodness, Otlile, you're so dramatic.”

Otlile: “Wait until you see the drama I'll be bringing at your birthday party.”

Kg: “Whoa, it will be my day – remember. Please, don't even think about taking my shine.”

Those two. We were listening to them bicker about the entire party way before it even began. I had just remembered that I didn't tell my mom about it. I needed to ask for permission – even though she treated me like shit. Before long, we had arrived at school and only then I had just remembered something.

Beast: (frowning) “Keng (what is it)? Did you forget something?”

I was too embarrassed to even say it, I could feel my cheeks become quite warm.

Beast: (smiling) “Hah, kgante ke nnete (so, it's true what they say) about white people?”

Hazel: (rolling eyes) “Beast, I'm not white, man.”

Beast: (chuckling) “I'm kidding. You're blushing – which means you're embarrassed about something. So, out with it.”

Hazel: (embarrassed) “Eish (Oh), I forgot to tell Malachi that I didn't have lunch for today.”

I spoke so softly, I couldn't even look at Beast in the eye.

Beast: “Come on. Why would you even be embarrassed about that?”

Hazel: "Because... I don't want you to pity me or anything like that. And besides, if my friends or the other students see you giving me money, they'll think I'm dating you."

Beast: "So?"

Hazel: "Excuse me?"

Beast: "So what if they think that?"

I was speechless, I had no idea what to say.

Beast: "I just mean, you shouldn't care much about what people say. You have had people talk about you all your life, so why worry about them now? You know who you are, don't you?"

I was quite surprised, but I mean, he was Beast. He was supposed to have a don't care attitude.

Hazel: “Okay. I see. Anyway, thanks for the ride, I'll most probably get lunch from my friends.”

Beast dug in his pockets and handed me a R50 note. I had never received so much money before – not even from my brother.

Beast: “Relax, your brother asked me to give you this because it slipped his mind. I promise you, it's not from me.”

I frowned and looked at him.

Beast: “I can show you his text if you don't believe me.”

Hazel: “Come on, don't be so silly. Thank you, I hope he pays you back.”

He handed me the money while I thanked him again.

Beast: “Sharp, I'll see you later.”

Off he drove, while I was left smiling for some reason. No, I wasn't falling for him or anything like that. I had no idea what love even was. I was 16 turning 17 real soon, so I honestly had no time to think about such things. I didn't even know what it was like to kiss a boy, and a guy who was 7 years older than me was most definitely not on top of my potential boyfriend list.

Otlile: "That took you long enough, girl. Should I ask?"

Hazel: "No, you shouldn't."

Kg: "I'm also curious. Do you like him? Does he like you?"

Hazel: "Guys, he's 24 and he is my brother's friend."

Otlile: "That wasn't a no."

Kg: "Yeah, but it wasn't a yes either."

Hazel: "Thank you, Kg. Come on, don't think of such things. A boyfriend is nowhere near my mind."

Otlile: "Okay, well, nna I have my eyes set on Raymond."

Kg: "Ah, that's so cheesy, Otlile. I mean, we all know he is vouching for the head boy position next year."

Otlile: "And we also know that he likes Hazel, and she is most likely to become the head girl next year."

Hazel: "Come on, not with Mathilda in the mix. And who told you he likes me?"

Kg: "Don't tell me you never notice the way he looks at you – ever?"

I never noticed any of that. There's something about being unobservant. The moment someone tells you about something you haven't been noticing for a while, you will most definitely start noticing it afterwards.

Hazel: (shaking head) “You're ridiculous.”

Otlile: “Only one way to find out.”

Raymond was one of those really hot, high school guys. He was sporty, really gorgeous and an absolute over-achiever. He took part in almost every extra-curricular activity there was. He had a mean streak, and he had a very bad reputation amongst the opposite sex. He was the typical high school fuck boy. So, no, he wasn't going to make it on my list – ever.

Otlile: (shouting) “Hey, Raymond! How are you?”

Raymond: (smiling) “Sharp, wena (good and you)?”

Otlile: “Sharp (fine), hey, listen. My friend Kg has her 17th birthday party coming up tomorrow, so would you like to come?”

Raymond then looked at me in a way I have never noticed before. He gave me such a weird smile.

Raymond: (smiling seductively) "It depends, will Hazel be there too?"

Otile: (chuckling) "Yes, she will be."

Raymond: "Alright then. Text me the details. See you tomorrow then, Hazel."

He winked at me and left. I felt as if he completely ignored Kg, which was yet another turn off amongst other turn offs.

Hazel: "Did you see that?"

Otile: "See? I told you so."

Hazel: “No, I mean did you see how completely dismissive he was towards Kg? I mean, he didn't even greet her – nor me. That is so not cool.”

Kg: (softly) “You're reading way too much into things.”

Hazel: “Come on, Kg. You saw it too – I know you did.”

Kg: “Come on, I'm just a nerdy girl with glasses, I'm used to people dismissing me. Besides, I doubt he'll even come.”

I didn't like the way Kg had such low self-esteem at times, but what did I know? I also had the same thing. We carried on with our day and just before break time, I got called to the Principal's office. I wasn't in the mood for any more, drama, I mean, Mathilda wasn't even at school and it was actually nice attending classes without her over bearing presence. As I walked into the Principal's office, she seemed really surprised to see me.

Principal: “Hazel, please, take a seat.”

I sat down.

Hazel: "Am I in trouble, ma'am?"

Principal: "Oh, no. You're not in any kind of trouble. I just wanted to know why you came to school today? I mean, are you well? Do you feel better?"

Hazel: "Well, I think so."

Principal: "You do know that we take the well-being of our learners very seriously, right? So, we have agreed that it would be best for you to have a few therapy sessions before you get cleared."

Hazel: (frowning) "I see, but I don't think I need any therapy, Mrs. Steyn."

Principal: "It is not up for discussion, Hazel. Besides, your brother also went through this process."

I was a bit surprised.

Hazel: "Okay, I hear you. When do I need to do this?"

Principal: "Well, I don't mean to disrupt your academic record, but you need to do it now, in order for the in-house psychologist to assess you. We take what happened to you very seriously, and seeing that it has happened before to your brother, we need to act now or else we will involve social workers."

I suddenly became a bit anxious. I mean, sure, my mother was not perfect, but I couldn't imagine being taken by the government and into foster care. My mind was already running AWOL on me.

Hazel: (deep breath) "Okay."

Principal: "Alright then. You know where to find her office. She is expecting you. Good luck."

I greeted her goodbye and off I went. I had never been to a psychologist before, so it was going to be rather interesting. I finally found her door; "Dr. Sandra Speelman, in-house Psychologist". I've seen such things on movies and a few tv series, but I never really had experienced it before. It always fascinated me how psychologists and psychiatrists were able to work with the human brain. I knocked twice and she answered almost immediately.

Dr. Speelman: "Come in."

I nearly laughed at myself when I saw the woman sitting in front of her desk.

Dr. Speelman: (smiling) "Don't look so shocked. I get that a lot. Please, tsena (come in)."

I expected a white woman, since I had never even met her, but only to find a beautiful, chocolate skinned black woman. She had the most beautiful body I had ever seen; a small tummy, very small breasts and quite large buttocks and thighs. She looked like a goddess, with no wrinkle in sight. She must have been about 40 if not older, and had the most authentically unique hairstyle I had ever seen – a gorgeous haircut with blue dyed hair.

Dr. Speelman: “My name is Susan, so you really don't have to call me Dr. Speelman.”

She took out a file that had a large notebook in it and started jotting down a few things. I had seen such on tv. I was so fascinated by it all.

Dr. Speelman: (smiling) “Please, make yourself comfortable. Before we start, I'd like you to know that whatever happens in this room stays in this room. You are my patient – but I'd like you to think of me as a friend. Everything is confidential, so I won't tell anyone about what we have discussed here. Do you understand that?”

Hazel: (nodding) “Yes ma'am – I mean Susan. Eish, I'm not used to calling elder people by name without adding Mama in front of their name.”

Dr. Speelman: (laughing) “It is perfectly okay. Whatever you feel comfortable with, okay?”

Hazel: (nodding) “Alright.”

Dr. Speelman: “So, before we get into it – please do tell me about yourself.”

That question is so overrated, but in all honesty, no one actually knows the answer.

Hazel: “Uhm, well, I don't know where to even start.”

Dr. Speelman: “Let me rephrase that question: Who are you?”

The second question was even worse than the one before.

Hazel: (nervously) “Well – I'm a 16 year old – who is about to turn 17 in two months. I love reading, writing and I love watching tv sometimes and talking to my friends and my brother. I love seafood and I hate pets.”

Dr. Speelman: “Hmm, I see. Well, you see, Hazel. Firstly let me start off with this; when I asked you to tell me about yourself, the first thing you did was frown and started playing with your fingernails. That gave me an indication that you are not a very strong person – personality wise. You don't seem to know yourself

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really. When I asked you to tell me who you are – you became even worse. You became increasingly agitated. Yes, you told me what you like and dislike, but you didn't tell me who you are. But don't you worry, we'll get to that in a moment. Now, do you know why you're here?”

Hazel: “Uh, I think I do. I'm here because of the incident that occurred yesterday.”

Dr. Speelman: “What exactly happened yesterday?”

Hazel: “Well, it is more of what happened which led to yesterday.”

Dr. Speelman: (nodding) “Please, tell me.

Hazel: “From the beginning?”

Dr. Speelman: “Yes.”

I took a deep breath and explained to her everything that happened from the moment my mother wanted me to work in the tavern instead of Bella that day, and ultimately I told her about her starving me.

Dr. Speelman: “I see. And has she done this before?”

Hazel: “Yes – many times, but not this severe.”

Dr. Speelman: “So, do you consider all the other moments she wronged you – not severe?”

Hazel: (frowning) “No, absolutely terrible.”

Dr. Speelman: “Hmm, I see. You know, Hazel, a lot of us are treated in the worst ways possible while growing up, and then when we're adults, we struggle a lot with functioning around and without people. Does your mother always favour your sister this way?”

Hazel: (nodding) “Yes.”

Dr. Speelman: “I see. And have you ever asked her why she does what she does?”

Hazel: “I have, a few times – briefly.”

Dr. Speelman: “What was her response?”

Hazel: “She told me that I should know my place as a child and that if she had a choice she'd have given me to my father to raise.”

Dr. Speelman: “How does that make you feel?”

That was actually the very first conversation I had with someone who was concerned about how I felt. Sure, it was her job, but it felt so personal and real.

Hazel: “To be honest, I feel very sad and upset whenever she treats me that way. I always ask myself what I did wrong, or if perhaps I wasn't born – then she would have had a greater life. If it truly wasn't for Malachi then I wouldn't be the person I am today. He takes good care of me and looks out for me.”

Dr. Speelman: “Hmm, I see.”

She kept jotting down in her big diary.

Dr. Speelman: “Do you have any other family besides your mother and siblings?”

Hazel: (shaking head) “No, just my grandmother, Rose. She has practically raised me and has been so good to me. I don't think I'd ever cope if she were to die or something like that.”

Dr. Speelman: “I see. Have you actually lost someone you love in your life before?”

I took a moment to think about that and actually, I didn't recall ever dealing with loss. I had no one besides my mother, siblings and Mam'Rose. I didn't recall ever attending a funeral of someone I had lost – ever.

Hazel: (shaking head) “No. Come to think of it, I have never lost anyone. They are the only people I have in my life.”

Dr. Speelman: “I see. Now, I'd like to talk a little bit about the incident that happened on Tuesday. I know, you are here because of the way your mother treats you, but in therapy, we

dig deep and find the root of the problem so that you should learn to grow as an adult with a good and healthy mental state.”

Hazel: “Okay.”

Dr. Speelman: “I understand that Mathilda tripped and injured you during Hockey practise, right?”

I nodded in wonder.

Dr. Speelman: “Has she done such things to you before? Was she always so mean to you?”

Hazel: “Yes. I don't recall her ever being nice to me. She is just like a few of my other fellow learners. They are all the same towards me.”

Dr. Speelman: “Do explain what you mean by that, please.”

Hazel: “Well, she's always had a problem with me. She calls me names like “lekgoa” (white person) or white bitch. I mean, I never knew I was different from my siblings until she started pointing it out from the first grade. It didn't sit well with me because even people around home started calling me such names. It has really affected me a lot – emotionally. Whenever someone is upset with me for whatever reason, they feel the need to attack the way I look. I didn't ask to be born this way and what upsets me the most is the rumours, saying that I have a white father and yet my mother is a shebeen queen when I don't even know my father.”

I felt quite emotional as I carried on speaking about that. Tears were warming my eyes and nearly fell down.

Dr. Speelman: “I see. So, if someone attacks the way you look, what do you do? I mean, it obviously makes you upset – so what do you do about it?”

Hazel: “I don't really do anything. I just keep quiet most of the time. My two friends are always the ones to back me up along with Malachi. I honestly don't know what I'd do without them.”

Dr. Speelman: “I see. Hazel, most of the time people just tell us what they want to because they want to hurt our feelings – intentionally. They want to hurt us so that we feel small and mostly, so that we fail to conquer and be our best. Do you honestly think that Mathilda keeps rubbing you off the wrong way because you are ugly or simply because you are lighter than most people?”

Hazel: “I don't think so.”

Dr. Speelman: “You have something that she doesn't – your personality and your heart. You carry something of yourself that these people don't have. You lack a lot of self-esteem, of which I don't blame you. Your mother is the biggest contributor to all this because she never treated you like an equal to your sister. Your brother fell victim to her actions as well. I'd like to tackle something before I run out of time. You have never really experienced loss, so you are going to have a problem when you eventually do. You need to learn to depend on yourself for a change so that should you lose someone who is so supportive towards you – you don't struggle too much. Can I tell you what I think about you?”

Hazel: "Please do."

Dr. Speelman: "I think you are a very bright girl, who has demons to face like most of us. You are just so unsure of yourself because of your identity, but your life shouldn't be defined by the way you look or the kind of genes you have. You are unique – just like all of us. You will still turn heads everywhere you go because that is just the kind of person you are. Do you honestly think that when people see my name and then see me – they don't act shocked?"

I chuckled a little bit. I was guilty of that.

Dr. Speelman: "Exactly. All I am saying is that you need to identify the kind of person you are. After a few more sessions we will be able to identify your personality traits. We will unravel everything that involves your mother and siblings as well, and I can promise you that after about 5 sessions, you will be okay. I don't want you to worry or feel like what we just did was a waste of time because believe you me, you did great today."

Hazel: "Thank you."

I actually felt a bit lighter, although it was just our first session. I was looking forward to having more of those sessions. It seemed a bit futile at first – talking about my feelings, but I felt so amazing afterwards.

Dr. Speelman: "I'll see you soon. You may go now."

I walked out of that office feeling like a different person. I felt that I had been looking at life from the wrong end, and I was looking forward to changing a few things about myself for the better. By the time I walked out of Dr. Speelman's office, it was officially break time. I found my friends waiting for me at our usual spot. I quickly went to the tuckshop and bought myself something to eat along with a bottle of juice and a few snacks. It felt good knowing that I'd be sharing my lunch with them as well.

Otlile: "There you are. That took you long enough."

Hazel: "Sorry about that."

Kg: "No need to apologize. How was it?"

Hazel: (smiling) "Actually, it was quite an experience. She is a lovely lady. I think I have made up my mind about what I want to do after matric."

Otlile: "It's about damn time."

Kg: "I think you'd be a great Psychologist. You are really good with listening to people."

I thought so too, to be honest. I had always thought about taking that route, but I was just in between decisions. After that day, I knew that it was the right career choice to consider.

Otlile: "Anyway, what are you going to wear tomorrow to Kg's birthday party?"

Hazel: "I honestly don't know. I haven't even asked for permission to go yet."

Kg: "Will your mom allow you after... you know?"

Hazel: (shrugging) "I don't know. I haven't spoken to her since. She won't even look at me."

Otlile: "Eish (Oh), batswadi ne (parents, hey). You can never win with them."

Kg: "She reminds me of my aunt and my mother. They still don't get along after all these years. It's a nightmare being around them when they're in the same room."

Otlile: "Everyone has drama in their families."

I really didn't want to go into my family drama. I had had enough of that.

Hazel: "We shall see, but I wouldn't miss your party for the world, Kg."

Otlile: "Of course you wouldn't since Ray will be there."

I brushed her off and changed the topic. I had no idea what girls saw in Raymond. He really wasn't my cup of tea. I hated attention and I didn't want to be around a guy who adored it wholeheartedly. It was finally the end of the school day, and Beast came to fetch us instead of Malachi, which got me really worried.

Beast: (smiling) "Hey, girls. Shall we go?"

Hazel: "Where's Malachi?"

Beast: "He's still at his place. Wa lwala (he's sick)."

I wanted to get in the back, but Otlile and Kg beat me to it, so I had to sit next to Beast again in the front. I didn't mind, but it just felt a bit weird, I had no idea why. The ride was the usual,

with Otilie chatting up a storm about what she was going to wear at the party. Instead of dropping me off first, he dropped them off first, and then we went to my house. By then, I was starting to get nervous. I saw my mother coming out of the shebeen and she stopped and looked at Beast and I in the car. I knew then by her look that it wasn't going to end well. Beast could sense my nervousness.

Beast: "Keng (What is it)?"

Hazel: (nervously) "I... I have to go."

Beast: "Oh, you're worried about your mother?"

Hazel: (nodding) "Yes..."

Beast: "She knows Malachi is not well and that is why I went to fetch you guys. I mean, she saw me picking you up today. Besides, I told her."

Hazel: (shakily) "What if she doesn't believe you?"

Beast: “Who cares? You know that you didn't do anything wrong. Are we doing anything wrong?”

Hazel: (shaking head) “No...”

Beast: “I told you, you need to care less about what people think. O tlo phela bohloko (you'll live a tough life like that).”

I wanted to walk out, but my entire body felt so shaky. I knew I was going to get murdered that day.

Beast: “Come on, let me take you in.”

I nodded. I mean, he was my best bet, because if I had entered the yard alone, she was going to beat the shit out of me. I nervously got out of the car, while Beast did the same. He walked in right behind me and greeted my annoyed mother.

Beast: (Smiling) “Dumela (hello), Sis'Bee.”

Binah: (clicking tongue) “Mxm.”

Hazel: (shakily) “Dumela (hello), Mama.”

Binah: (frowning) “Hazel, ke tsona tse ke go godiseditseng tsona (is this what I raised you for)?”

Hazel: (shakily) “Mama?”

Binah: (shouting) “O tsamaya o nyobisa magenza ka mo ntle ka mo (you're going around fucking gangsters out here)!”

I felt so offended. I mean, I was still a virgin and I was nowhere near thinking about boys. Beast looked a little agitated, but he tried composing himself.

Beast: (firmly) “Sis'Bee, that is no way to speak to your daughter. I didn't fuck anyone and I am most definitely not a gangster.”

Binah: (shouting) “I wasn't talking to you, wena (you)!”

Beast: (firmly) “Hazel, go to Malachi's room.”

Binah: (shouting) “Oho, so now you run my house?! You're telling MY child what to do in MY yard?! O nagana gore o somang wena (who do you think you are)?!”

Beast: “Waitse (you know), Sis'Bee. I have respected you ever since I have known you, but o kare o tla ka nonsense bjanong (but it seems as if you are starting trouble right now). I don't go around calling you names despite you knowing very well what you are. Nnete e tla tswa (the truth will come out). Please, give this child a break. You have been nothing but a pain in her butt ever since you gave birth to her. Malachi is not well, and I am going to see him. Unless you have a problem with that?”

He was fuming, but he wasn't shouting at her at all. I was shocked, my mother never let anyone speak to her like that – ever. They were all afraid of her, but she was afraid of Beast. Every time he challenged her, she would back

down. She gave me a stern look and clicked her tongue before walking away from us. My heart was torn. I didn't hate her, but I thought she would see that I was not the bad guy. All I wanted was a supportive and loving mother. I swallowed hard and forced the tears back into my eyes.

Beast: (softly) "Let's go."

We went to my brother's room and found him sitting up at least. He looked a whole lot better than that morning.

Hazel: "Abuti (brother). How are you feeling?"

Malachi: "I'm a lot better. What did she say to you? I heard her shouting."

Beast: "She said - "

Hazel: (interrupting) "Nothing you should worry yourself about. Let me go change."

I gave Beast a look; I didn't want to cause trouble. Yes, my mother was not very good towards me, but I didn't want to make things worse. While I was in the bedroom, I kept thinking about the party. I had never been to one; my mother hated parties – she never even hosted any for us – not even Bella. She had a genuine dislike of parties, I mean if we dared mention the word, she would go ballistic. I had absolutely no idea why. I decided to text her on WhatsApp, although she was angry at me – I had to try.

Hazel: “Mama, may I please go to Kg's birthday party tomorrow?”

She was online and I expected her to ignore me, but as soon as I saw “typing...” I knew she was about to respond with the most vile words I had ever heard of.

Binah: “No!”

That was it. A blatantly, exclaimed No. I was defeated. She wasn't going to allow me anyway, so I should have just given

up. I sobbed a little on my bed, but then Dr. Speelman's words were playing in my head; “learn to depend on yourself a little more so that you won't feel so much pain when you lose a loved one”. Was I such a cry baby? Was I a weakling to that point? Perhaps I needed to re-evaluate myself and grow a thicker skin. I heard a stern knock on the bedroom door.

Hazel: “Come in.”

Malachi slowly opened the door and he was limping a little bit, but he could walk.

Malachi: “Are you busy?”

Hazel: “It's a Friday, so no.”

Malachi: (sigh) “Can we talk?”

I nodded. It sounded rather serious. He saw my red face and knew I was crying.

Malachi: "I didn't mean to keep things from you. I also learnt about everything along the way, just like you."

Hazel: (frowning) "What do you mean?"

Malachi: (sigh) "When you told me this morning you had a dream of an old woman, I knew exactly who you meant. I prayed as soon as you went to school and they showed me the exact person you dreamt of."

I looked at him anxiously.

Malachi: "You dreamt of our grandmother, Stephina Makwetla."

I was so confused.

Hazel: (surprised) "What are you saying, Malachi? I mean, Mam'Rose is our grandmother."

Malachi: (shaking head) “No, she is not our blood. Yes, she raised us, but she met Mama years ago when she was only 18 and took her in. She has been a part of our lives ever since.”

It really wasn't the news I was expecting, so I was swarming in shock.

Hazel: “O reng mara (what are you saying, though)?”

Malachi: “Mama ran away from home when she was pregnant with me. Stephina is our maternal great grandmother.”

Hazel: (shocked) “Is she alive?”

Malachi: (nodding) “Yes, but not for long.”

Hazel: “So why did she visit me? I mean I don't know her.”

Malachi: "Neither do I. I only met her once years ago when she went home to bury her brother, of which she never did."

I felt as if my entire life was a lie. What if the stories about me were actually true? What if she really slept with a married white man and I was a result of that?

Hazel: (shocked) "So... my entire life was a lie?"

Malachi: "No. Not completely. Mama doesn't get along with her family, for obvious reasons. You can't tell me that you think she was born this way. She went through a lot, but instead of dealing with them like a normal person, she chose to become the total opposite. She visited you in your dreams, because she is hoping that you'd get through to our mother. She doesn't have much time left. She's old, and the ancestors are calling for her."

Hazel: "So, if you can see our ancestors and all that, then you know who my father is, don't you?"

Malachi: "I don't know who your father is. The only person who knows all that is Mama. Maybe one day she will tell me."

Hazel: "Will you ever tell me about your father?"

Malachi: (sternly) "No. Not yet, at least. It's a sore subject."

Hazel: "Okay. When can we go see her? Koko Stephina?"

Malachi: "I don't know. I don't know the place, only Mama knows. Besides, we can talk about all this depressing stuff later. Beast tells me you're going to a party tomorrow?"

Beast was such a loud mouth.

Hazel: "I was, but Mama said no."

Malachi: "Don't worry about her. I'll take you. Do you have something to wear?"

Hazel: (shaking head) “No. I've never been to a party, remember?”

Malachi: “Okay. Get changed. I'll take you shopping for an outfit.”

I was so excited, though. My brother was a real father figure to me. He really wanted to see me happy at all times. I felt bad about that, of which I assumed was another weird personality trait. I needed to work on that ASAP. Perhaps I needed to jot down my feelings and discuss them with Dr. Speelman the next time I saw her. Family isn't always blood, but whatever people choose to define family as – it is everything. I knew that Malachi and I were a family, even though things just didn't make any sense. I just had hope buried deep within me that my mother would one day love me.

Proverbs 22:6 - “Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.”

“Curiosity about life in all of its aspects, I think, is still the secret of great creative people.” – Leo Burnett

Hazel

Malachi took me with him and by then, Beast was gone. We went to the nearest mall and shopped until I just couldn't anymore. I didn't want to buy too many things, so I settled for a party outfit only. I never went shopping with my mother. She would always take Bella with and buy her really nice outfits. While I on the other hand, would be taken with by Mam'Rose or Malachi. It really broke my heart. Therapy was an eye opener for me. I mean, I actually got to think of all the inequalities I had to suffer while Bella had a great time with my mother. It was really heartbreaking and just not fair. I tried not to think about it during my shopping with Malachi. So, we ended up shop hopping, until I found a short, glittery, backless dress from Mr. Price, along with a shiny head band. He even bought me a pair of heels, but I was hopeless in those. I had to stick to the theme nonetheless, so I made a mental note to pack a pair of pumps. He threw in a pair of long, white gloves from Crazy store and I was ready for the party.

Hazel: “Abuti (brother), thank you so much.”

Malachi: “It's what I am here for. Now, let's go buy a few grocery items before we go home.”

We went to Pick n' Pay which was nearby, and Malachi told me that Mama used to work there once upon a time. We took a few items, well – I did. He just told me to buy whatever we needed for food and basics, and a few toiletry items. Upon approaching the tills, I was greeted by one of the cashiers. She was nice.

Cashier: (smiling) “Hello. Goodness, you look so beautiful, wena (you). Are you coloured?”

I got that a lot. My green eyes and light brown, curly hair didn't make it easy for people to stop staring.

Hazel: (shyly) “No.”

Cashier: "Well, you are gorgeous. I love your eyes."

I hardly heard people compliment me like that.

Hazel: (smiling) "Thank you."

While she was tilling, a big, white man who looked like the manager approached her. He wasn't a nice man, and judging by his suit and cologne, he was rich.

Man: (angrily) "Sylvia, double check your cash till today before you leave! You were R50 short yesterday."

Cashier: (softly) "Apologies, Mr. Ferreira, I will be sure to be accurate today."

Man: "You'd better."

That surname rang a bell, but I heard they were the owners of the store and were filthy rich. He was about to leave, but he looked at me in total shock as if he had seen a ghost.

Malachi: (firmly) "Is everything alright, Mr. Ferreira?"

Mr. Ferreira: (shocked) "Wh... what is your name, girl?"

He seemed rather rude to be honest. I was about to answer anyway, but Malachi stopped me.

Hazel: "Haz - "

Malachi: (interrupting) "She doesn't talk to strangers."

Mr. Ferreira: (agitated) "Where do you live?!"

I couldn't understand that man's behaviour, but he was starting to make me uncomfortable. I didn't even want to answer, so Malachi did it for me.

Malachi: (irritated) “Mr. Fereirra, I don't appreciate being treated like this. We are just nothing, but customers.”

Cashier: “R620.99.”

Malachi took out his wallet and speedily paid for the food, while the man was gobsmacked as he looked at me.

Mr. Fereirra: “You look just like... no... it can't be...”

Malachi: “Enjoy the rest of your day, Mr. Fereirra.”

He grabbed the plastic bags hastily and thanked the cashier.

Malachi: “Hazel, let's go.”

We walked out with me staring back at the man before walking out of the store. I got the feeling Malachi knew who he was and

why he was asking me such funny questions. He dismissed that man's questions quickly, which could have meant that he wanted to divert the entire conversation. I let it go, though. Upon arriving at home, we found Mam'Rose standing right outside the gate.

Hazel: (frowning) “Koko (granny). What are you doing here?”

Mam'Rose: “I am waiting for you two.”

Malachi: “You could have called. I know just how much you hate being here.”

Mam'Rose: “I hate it, but I love you guys. I have come to eat dinner with you two. I hope you have some wine, Malachi.”

We both laughed at her as she was the first person to walk in before us. I was surprised because she never got along with my mother – ever. She hardly even visited her house, actually, she never did. She was starting to act a little oddly. We opened Malachi's room with my mother staring at us from the

Shebeen, without even greeting Mam'Rose or saying a word. We left the door open, while Mam'Rose sat on one of the couches. I poured her a glass of wine, while Malachi was having a beer. I started cooking right away. I didn't like going hungry at all.

Mam'Rose: "So, Malachi tells me you had a weird dream."

Hazel: "Yes, I did. Why didn't you guys tell me the truth sooner, though?"

Mam'Rose: "Ecclesiastes 3:1 - "For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven." Timing is everything, child. Now you know the truth. It isn't easy, everything is just so complicated."

Hazel: "I see. Speaking of complicated. Malachi and I went shopping for my party outfit for tomorrow, Koko (granny)."

Mam'Rose: (laughing) "How's that complicated, child?"

Hazel: “Well, I had the weirdest encounter today. We were at the till, and then this man whom I thought was the manager walked up to her and started shouting at her. When he was done, he gave me this really weird look, Koko (granny). O kare o bone spoko (as if he saw a ghost). He was so shocked to see me and he said I look like someone.”

They were both quiet for a while, but I didn't pay note to that. I was enjoying making them my famous Chicken a la king.

Mam'Rose: “Did he say who?”

Hazel: (shaking head) “Nope. Malachi stopped him in his tracks. Ag, he probably has never seen a black girl with green eyes before. I mean, I don't even know if I am indeed black. Everyone looks at me funny whenever I tick that box

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you know. It must be a stigmatized thing. I hate it, but after my therapy session today, I am determined to make a few changes.”

Mam'Rose: (smiling) "And? What do you want to be when you finish school?"

Hazel: "I'm going to be a psychologist, koko (granny)."

Mam'Rose: "Remember my words, child. I told you, after today you will know what you want to do for your career. I am happy that you are finally growing."

I smiled and carried on cooking while we carried on chatting away. I was done cooking and I started dishing up after about an hour and a half.

Malachi: "Hmm, I should get married to a woman who can cook just like you can. This is simply amazing."

Mam'Rose: "It's way better than your mother's horrible cooking."

The three of us laughed. She was right, my mother was really not the best of cooks. I had no idea why, but perhaps because

she didn't enjoy cooking much. She always hated it when I cooked nice food, she would say that I was trying to finish all the groceries before the end of the month. We prayed for the food and dug in. Halfway through our meal, my mother walked in without even knocking. She didn't step far enough into the room – just enough for us to see her.

Binah: (sternly) “Hazel, Kgaugelo's mother just called me. She says you are invited to her birthday party.”

Hazel: (nervously) “Yes, that's why I sent you that message this aftern - “

Binah: (interrupting) “The answer is no. I said it once and I'll say it again – No.”

Mam'Rose: “Binah, ga o ntumedisi (aren't you going to greet me)?”

Binah: (frowning) “I just came to say that.”

She completely ignored and disregarded Mam'Rose's question and presence.

Mam'Rose: (loudly) “Remember my words, Binah. O tlo itshola (you will regret it).”

Binah: (shouting) “I never asked you to look after my kids. You can stop trying now.”

Mam'Rose just smirked and said nothing more.

Mam'Rose: “Hmm.”

I knew she had a lot to say, but she chose not to. She most probably saw something bad was going to happen, but chose to rather keep quiet.

Binah: “Wena (you), Hazel. You may look like the most prettiest girl to the township boys, but you are not. Don't think too much of yourself. You live under my roof – so the answer is no.”

See what I mean? She always had time to just put me down without any effort. I never even did anything to provoke her, though. Was there a need for her to call me ugly? I suddenly lost my appetite and she had ruined my entire day.

Mam'Rose: "Don't you mind her, Hazel. She is just bitter."

Hazel: (sigh) "Why do I always have to be on the receiving end of her vile words? Am I that horrible, Koko (granny)? Is my existence that much of a pain for her?"

Mam'Rose: "One day, you will unravel the truth and get to know why she is the way she is. You will pity her just like I do – just like most people who know her do. Do not ever think of yourself as ugly, okay?"

I just nodded. We carried on with dinner, but I decided to go to bed early. I just couldn't stomach any more of that delicious food that I made. I was hurting, and all that again because of my mother. I prayed before going to bed and I dozed off.

Saturday finally came and it was the day of the party. I decided

not to even get up, because my mother made it absolutely clear that she didn't want me to go to the party. I slept in and completely ignored the burning rays of the sun blasting through the bedroom window. I also ignored the continuous snooze of my alarm clock. My phone was buzzing and ringing off the hook with messages and calls from Otlile and Kg. I had no heart to tell them that I wasn't going to pull through. I was depressed even before the day began. By midday, I was still in bed, until I heard the door being opened.

Otlile: “Bathong (goodness)! Mmoneng o sa robetse (look at her, still sleeping)!”

I opened the bed covers, slightly.

Hazel: (frowning) “Otlile?”

Otlile: “The one and only, babes. Get up, we have a party to go to.”

Hazel: "How did you even get in here? You never come to my house and besides, you know how my mom feels about my friends."

Otlile: "Malachi begged me to come and drag you out of bed. He said you were a mess. Besides, your mother is nowhere to be seen. One of her workers is running the shebeen. Come on, we don't have much time."

Hazel: "She already said I can't go."

Otlile: "Get up before I smack you."

I dragged my feet to the bathroom and I took a long shower. I was hoping she would get impatient and leave, but she did just quite the opposite.

Otlile: "Wow! Chomi (friend)! Your outfit is really the bomb, man! Wena o tlo phala miss party mos (you are going to outshine the party girl, hey)."

Hazel: "Don't say such, man."

I finally got out of the bathroom with a towel wrapped around me. I already found Otlile naked as she was changing into her outfit. I was a bit shocked, because I never liked being naked around anyone else besides myself.

Otlile: "Keng (what)? I have to change here otherwise I was going to ruin my outfit. Hlobola, nako ya tsamaya (take that towel off, time is not on our side)."

I slowly took off the towel as shy and just out of place I felt, but she was nice about everything.

Otlile: (shocked) "My goodness! So you have been hiding that beautiful, caramel body of yours underneath all that?"

Hazel: (shyly) "Stop it. You know I look funny."

Otlile: "I pity the day you actually realize just how beautiful you look. You are going to break a lot of hearts."

She was trying to make me feel better as always. I smiled and lotioned my body.

Otlile: “Seriously, Haze. You are too beautiful to feel out of place. You are not a freak – you are a goddess, man. Now let's get dressed so I can do your make-up.”

Hazel: “I have never worn make up before.”

Otlile: “I know. Now come.”

She started with my make up as she put some eye shadow on my eyelids. It felt a bit unusual, I was a make-up virgin until that day. She put some light foundation on my face, since my skin tone was much lighter than hers. She put some red lip stick on me, I wore my head band and I could barely recognize myself.

Otlile: (surprised) “Wow! I must hand it to myself, you know. You look like a bloody star!”

Hazel: “More like a white, disco hippy from the 60s, but I must hand it to you – you did a great job.”

Otile: “So what if you look like a curly-haired white woman from the Disco 60s? It is what makes you unique. You have to own it, babes. Feeling sorry for yourself will never cut it, Haze. Just saying.”

She had a point, though. I couldn't change the way I looked unless I wanted to go down the Michael Jackson route, but I totally understood her. Perhaps one day I'd be able to put it all in motion. She did her make up and she looked like fire as usual, and two hours later – we were ready to go.

Malachi: “Finally, I was even falling asleep.”

Otile: “A lady's job is not meant to be rushed, you know.”

Hazel: “We can go now, Abuti (brother).”

Malachi got up and I supposed he was going to drive us there even though it wasn't very far from my house. I had my heels on and I prayed not to fall with every step. As we were locking Malachi's room, my mother came out of the house still dressed in her sleepwear, looking like death itself. She looked like she had been crying non-stop.

Binah: (crying) "Hazel, please, listen to me. Do not go to that party – I forbid you!"

I was so surprised. I hardly saw her cry.

Malachi: "Get in the car, girls."

I felt bad for ignoring my mother like that, but she wailed like a widow.

Binah: (crying) "I'm begging you! Do not go to that party! If what happened to me happens to you – it will be your fault this time because I warned you!"

I had no idea what she was talking about. She was rambling and nothing made sense. I kept staring back at her and she looked pitiful instead of her usual, evil self. For the first time in my life, I actually pitied my mother.

Binah: (wailing) “Hazel! If you walk out that gate – you'd better not come back!”

She was crying and it actually tore my heart into pieces. I kept asking myself what actually happened to her at a party some time in the past? Could that have been the actual reason why she just refused us to attend parties?

Isaiah 43:8 - “Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old. “

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“Good friends, good books, and a sleepy conscience: this is the ideal life.” — Mark Twain

Hazel

The short ride to Kg's house was just too dreadful. The image of mother's agonizing screams and coarse tears was rapidly replaying itself in my mind. Otlile noticed, but she decided not to ask anything, of which I was thankful for. We finally arrived, and Otlile walked out first.

Hazel: “I'll be right there. Give me a minute.”

Otlile: “Sharp (okay).”

Malachi: “What now?”

Hazel: “Did you see her, though? Don't tell me that didn't break your heart.”

Malachi: (sigh) “Hazel, wa gola (you're growing up). You are yet to see the real devil our mother is. Don't be fooled by her crocodile tears. By tonight, she'll be back to her old self. You just watch.”

He was candidly talking about it. I couldn't believe he actually didn't feel any ounce of pain on her behalf. He had no pity at all.

Hazel: “Okay. See you later.”

Malachi: “Sharp.”

I got out and found Otlile waiting for me. She had already met with Kg, who looked absolutely beautiful. I hardly saw her without glasses, and that day she had her contact lenses on, her gorgeous afro was let loose and she had some make up on. She looked like an absolute goddess.

Hazel: “My goodness, Kg! You are slaying, birthday girl. Happy birthday, my friend.”

I gave her a warm hug.

Kg: (smiling) “Thank you. You don't look too bad yourself. What did you do with my plain Jane friend, Hazel?”

We laughed casually.

Kg: “Come, my mom has organized us some cocktails – virgin of course.”

Otile: “Oh, a girl can only dream.”

Kg: “We're not 18 yet, man. Come now.”

We went to the party venue after dropping off the gifts we got Kg. She didn't invite too many people, so most people who were there were family members and children of her parents'

friends. I loved the theme and the entire vibe. It actually made me crave a party of my own, but I knew that I'd never get my own party with my mother being that crazy. I was okay with it, though. Perhaps one day when I got older, I'd host parties for myself. I believe memories last longer, so one should make the most of it. Quite ironic for someone like me to say such. While we were eating our starters, we saw a lot of the girls at the party start whispering amongst one another. As we turned around, we saw Raymond. Ag, he actually came. Of course, he had to dress up as if it was his party and everyone around started pointing at him and talking about him. I hated that about him. He absolutely adored attention, just like Mathilda.

Raymond: (smiling) "Hey, Kg. Happy Birthday."

He actually kissed her cheek and hugged her, and gave her a rather big gift bag, leaving the three of us completely speechless. What was that guy playing at?

Kg: (blushing) "Oh, thank you."

Just when we thought that wasn't enough, he started off with Otilie, he kissed the back of her hand and greeted her, and then with me. I don't know, but I got the feeling perhaps she told him how I felt about his attitude earlier the day before. I mean, Raymond was way too full of himself to even do such to anyone.

Raymond: (smiling) "You look gorgeous, Haze."

Hazel: "Thanks."

Kg's parents called us in and started the party. We of course had to say a few words about our friend and she loved it. Then her parents surprised her with a gift; a brand new iPhone, Laptop and Sound bar. Kg was not a person who loved noise, but she adored writing and reading books while listening to music. She loved the gifts, I mean she came from a good family and they were well-off; not rich and not poor, just alright and they really loved her to bits. The music started flowing and the food as well. I mean, we had to be home by 8, because her parents didn't want an overnight party as they said teenagers get the wrong idea. While we were chatting, Raymond came back to us after chatting up nearly all the girls at the party.

Raymond: "Ladies, may I steal Hazel for a few moments?"

He smiled and he was really close to my face. I hated that. He reeked of alcohol. My mother owned a shebeen although I had never had a drop of alcohol, I knew what it smelled like. I rolled my eyes because I just didn't want to be alone with him, but Otlile encouraged me to go.

Otlile: "Go, but you can't take her where we can't see you."

Raymond: (chuckling) "Noted."

He took out his hand.

Raymond: "Let's go, my lady."

I didn't put mine in his, otherwise everyone including Kg's parents were going to get the wrong idea about that scene. We walked a bit further away from my friends, but I refused to go

into his car with him. Yes, he had a car already, courtesy of his dad. He lived in Pretoria East and was also one of the annoying, rich kids. I honestly thought that he and Mathilda would have been the perfect match.

Hazel: "I'm here, now what is it?"

Raymond: "Can we go talk in my car for a second?"

Hazel: "No, I'm fine right here."

Raymond: (laughing) "Ai, waitse (Oh, you know). Lena ma virgin (you virgins)."

I felt so offended by that statement. It wasn't false, but the way he said it – so condescending.

Hazel: (frowning) "Excuse me?"

Raymond: "Come on, Haze. You really enjoy playing hard to get, don't you?"

Hazel: "I'm not playing anything. As far as I am concerned I am not interested in you."

Raymond: (frowning) "Please, everyone is interested in me baby girl. Have you seen me? I mean, come on. Even a sad cremora like you would kill to have a guy like me."

Hazel: (irritated) "Cremora? Are you serious right now?"

Raymond: "Duh, you know you look like freak. I bet your eyes shoot green lasers in the dark. I was actually trying to do you a favour by even being polite enough to ask you to be my girlfriend. But what did I expect from a society reject and the daughter of a shebeen queen?!"

I was fuming, but I just couldn't even do anything. I wanted to slap him so hard, but I just tried to compose myself.

Hazel: (teary) "You disgust me. Stay the fuck away from me!"

I rushed towards my friends and sat down right next to Kg. I tried so hard not to cry, but my actions failed me.

Otlile: (frowning) "Hazel, what is it? What did that fucker do to you?"

Hazel: (crying) "Nothing. I am sorry, Kg, but I think I'd like to go home now."

Kg: "Did he touch you?"

Otlile: "Did he try to force himself on you?"

Hazel: (shaking head) "No, I... I don't want to talk about it right now. I'll tell you later. Can you please just call Malachi?"

Otlile: "Sure. I'll call him."

I tried not to make a scene, but I just couldn't stop crying. I felt as if my heart was ripped from my chest. The pain was unbearable. I never understood why people were just so mean to me. Was I an easy target? Or did them telling me shit make them feel better about themselves? Within 5 minutes, Malachi was there.

Kg: "Don't worry about my parents. I'll tell them you were in a hurry. They can't see you like this or else Raymond is going to go home limping."

Otlile: "Bye, babe. See you Monday."

Kg: "Nah, we'll see each other at church tomorrow."

Otlile: "Oh, kana (of course). Sharp."

I wiped my tears away and took deep breaths. The last thing I needed was my brother to cause a scene at my friend's birthday and besides, Raymond had left already, thankfully. He

was with Beast, but they both frowned as soon as they saw me. My bloody white face was always the clear give away. I was as red as a tomato and it didn't take rocket science to see that I had been crying.

Malachi: (firmly) "What happened?"

Otile: (nervously) "Nothing. Someone just upset her."

Beast: (angrily) "Did someone touch you?"

Hazel: (shaking head) "No, I just want to go home, please."

Malachi: "I'm not leaving until you tell me what happened."

Hazel: "Please, abuti (brother), let it go. He's gone already."

I just had to shoot myself in the foot.

Beast: "He?! Show us the fucker! What did he do?"

I kept quiet.

Malachi: "I won't ask you again."

Hazel: (deep sigh) "Raymond from school was here. He asked to talk to me and he said some mean things to me."

Malachi: "What exactly did he say?"

Hazel: (crying) "He... He said that... that I was Cremora, a freak with green laser eyes and that he was actually doing me a favour by asking me to be his girlfriend. I rejected him and he got mad."

They were both so unimpressed by what I told them. I could see the rage seething through their veins. Their eyes were bloodshot. Raymond could have counted his lucky stars that he had gone already.

Hazel: "Please, let it go. He is gone already."

Malachi: "Fine, but I won't let it go. A re vayeng (let's go)."

The ride back home was rather uncomfortably silent. Otilie was really sad and perhaps she felt guilty about pushing to invite him to the party. She was dropped off first and said her goodbyes. Once we got to my house, the tears were still streaming down my face, while I was silently trying to wipe them away.

Malachi: "Go in. Ke tla go bona (I'll see you)."

The Shebeen was still busy. I hated seeing people in and out of the yard – more especially at that time of the night. I unlocked the door and went into Malachi's room. I cried, as if I had lost someone or something so dear to me. No one had ever spoken to me in that manner before. I felt so disrespected and completely disregarded as a person. While I was removing my make-up, I heard a stern knock on the door. I dragged my feet

and just as I opened the door, I nearly dropped on the floor due to shock.

Binah: "How was the party?"

She looked as if she had been drinking the entire day, while her eyes were nearly swollen shut.

Hazel: (teary) "Uh, I, had fun..."

Binah: "So much fun that you cried?"

Hazel: "No..."

Binah: "I hope you'll listen to me from now on. Parties are not good for you – for girls anyway."

Just like that, she walked away without saying a word further. I couldn't understand my mother, and I just wanted to dig inside of her head to see what was going through it.

Hazel: “Mama, why didn't you tell me about Koko (grandmother) Stephina?”

She stopped and turned around.

Binah: “Because there is nothing to tell about her. She's dead to me – they all are.”

I expected that answer, but I thought I was reaching some sort of breakthrough since she actually came to check up on me.

Hazel: “She's ill, you know. She doesn't have much longer to live. Will you take us there? To see her?”

Binah: “I'm never going back there. I'd rather die.”

And just like that – she left me standing right there, wondering what on earth made my mother crack and turned her into the monster she was. I asked myself what kind of person she was

before Malachi and I came into the picture. Perhaps we were her curse, while she could have had a better life without us. I took a shower and got into bed. I struggled to sleep for a while, until Malachi walked into the bedroom.

Malachi: "Are you sleeping?"

Hazel: "Been trying to."

Malachi: "O grand (are you okay)?"

Hazel: "I think so."

Malachi: (sigh) "Haze, when God promised us this world, he didn't say it was going to be easy. I want you to know that life is going to get a lot harder for you, you know, but that doesn't mean God doesn't love you. Some of us just have to work a lot harder than others to get where we need to be. People like bo Mathilda and Raymond are simply stumbling blocks you just have to overcome. What I am saying is that this life is not for the faint-hearted. You need to grow a thick skin if you want to

survive this wilderness. I won't always be there and it is important for you to learn how to deal with mother fuckers like Raymond. I'll help you with that and Therapy will also help you. Be strong and be the person God intended you to be. Remember your name means "God sees", put all your trust in Him and have faith that it will all work out eventually. "

I really needed those words, even though it still stung like a bitch.

Malachi: "Raymond wa masepa (that shitty Raymond), is a straight up asshole, and the day ke mo tshwarang (I catch him), I'll make him regret saying that shit to you. You're a human being and no one has the right to tell you such bullshit. Little by little you'll learn to stand up for yourself and be the best version of yourself. One day, you'll learn to block out all negativity and focus on you. I love you, sis. Now go to bed. We have church tomorrow."

Hazel: "I love you too, abuti (brother)."

He gave me a tight hug and closed the door on his way out. Slowly but surely I knew that I'd be alright. God didn't promise us miracles over night. Romans 12:12 says; "Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer." Indeed, prayer and supplication was what I needed. I knew that I'd be alright, slowly but surely. I eventually dozed off after struggling to sleep for hours. I usually waited for my alarm clock to wake me, but instead – I got woken up by loud screams coming from inside of the house.

Binah: (screaming) "Yoh! Thusang (help)!"

It sounded like my mother just kept screaming. It sounded like something seriously bad had happened. Then, I heard Bella scream too and I got up. By the time I got up, I found Malachi had already opened the door. I rushed towards the house, and found my mother on the floor, bending over Moses. Bella was wailing while Malachi was trying to feel Moses's pulse. Moses looked completely pale with a bit of foam that had come out of his mouth.

Malachi: (shaking head) "He's dead."

Binah: (shouting) “What do you mean he's dead?! He can't die!
Yoh (oh), Moses! O nketsang na (what are you doing to me)?!”

Bella: (screaming) “Papa (father)!”

I couldn't believe just how true Malachi's vision just became. Little did I know that our troubles had only just started. My mother had dug a very deep hole for herself – and for us the day she met Moses. They always say; a woman can never build a happy home with another woman's tears.

Job 4:8 - “As I have seen, those who plow iniquity and sow trouble reap the same.”

“Every strike brings me closer to the next home run.” – Babe Ruth

Hazel

Someone once said that life has a funny way of showing you something; you never really know what you're going to get. Some say when life gives you lemons, make lemonade. But, what if it throws you a funeral? I was never ready for what I had just witnessed. It was the very first time I had seen a dead person in front of me. It was left ingrained in my mind. My mother was sobbing, my sister was a mess. I couldn't really comfort either of them because they wanted nothing to do with me. I tried getting closer to my mother, I even offered to make her tea but instead, she was back to her old self. She told me where to get off, loud and clear. So, I just let them be while standing aside. Malachi was nice enough to cover him with one of the table cloths until the mortuary called. Of course, news travels very fast in the township and bad news even faster. Some even skipped church just to witness the drama at the Makwetla household. The mortuary people finally came and as they were about to carry him out, a police van appeared right in

front of our gate, along with two bewildered women. One was older, most probably a bit older than my mother, while the other one was about my mother's age. They stormed into the yard without any invitation. This entire time, I was the only one outside in the yard, while Malachi was in the house with Mama, Bella, the body and the mortuary guys. The two women completely disregarded me while they were shouting.

Older woman: “Ja (Yes), o nagana gore ena ke mang (who does she think she is)?!”

Younger woman: “Sfebe se (this bitch)!”

I slowly made my way to the kitchen area, so I could see what was happening.

Younger woman: “Ja! Waitse ba rile ba mpotsa ka se tshepe (I couldn't believe it when they told me)! Binah, sfebe ke wena (you whore)!”

Binah: “Le batla eng lena mo (what are you doing here)?”

Okay, so she knew them.

Older woman: “We have come to take my brother's body! You killed him and thought we wouldn't ask for a post mortem?! O nyele (you are fucked)!”

Binah: “I don't have to answer anything to any of you. Bonang mo (look here), this is my house. Ntsweleng ka motse (leave my house).”

Younger woman: “I don't mind leaving, but I'm not leaving without my husband's body.”

The shock that travelled through my body.

Binah: “Hey, wena (you), Noma, this was my man! I wouldn't be surprised if you did this to him.”

Younger woman: (laughing) “Who would believe a home-wrecking whore?!”

Binah: “Enough people who knew that he left you for me.”

Older woman: “Only because you seduced him. What did we expect from a shebeen queen and township whore? You have mixed vegetables for children and now you want to bury someone else's husband.”

Bella: “Mama, what is happening here?”

Younger woman: “What is happening here is that I'm taking my husband's body, nana. You should know better, since you were once friends with Naledi. Your mother here decided to open her legs for my husband and created you – the bastard child.”

Malachi: “Ma weh (please), let them take him.”

Binah: (shouting) “Over my dead body.”

The two women completely ignored my mother's wailing screams, as the police took him in a body bag.

Younger woman: "I'll be back, Binah Makwetla. You'll regret the day you decided to mess around with my husband. I told you to back off, but you went ahead and had that dumb fuck daughter of yours. You'll regret killing my husband!"

They left while Bella and my mother were crying. I decided to go back to Malachi's room. I didn't want to be around drama that didn't concern me. I was about to get ready for church, when Malachi stopped me.

Malachi: "Are you preparing to go somewhere?"

Hazel: "To church, remember?"

Malachi: "You can't go – at least not today. Everyone is going to be looking at you and whispering all about you and you won't

like it. Besides, we have to cleanse the house since Moses died here. Mam'Rose will be here in a few minutes.”

I just nodded while I took a shower. So, once again, my mother's drama followed us. It didn't take long after my shower for my grandmother to come to our house.

Mam'Rose: “Malachi, Hazel. I'm here.”

I looked around for Malachi and he wasn't around.

Hazel: “Koko (granny), Malachi must be somewhere.”

Mam'Rose: “He'll be back soon. Come, let's go to the house.”

I followed her and she stopped right before entering the house, and shook her head.

Mam'Rose: (burping) “Ai (oh), ja ne (oh, well). Gwa nyewa ka mo (things are happening in this house).”

She stood outside for a while and started digging into her plastic bags full of herbs and candles. While she was about to start, my mother appeared looking rather angered.

Binah: (angrily) “O beya keng ga ka (what brings you to my house), Rose?”

Mam'Rose: (chuckling) “Wang tella (you are disrespecting me), Binah. It won't end well for you.”

Binah: “I didn't ask you to come here.”

Mam'Rose: “I came here for the children – because unlike you they can still change and reach their destiny.”

Binah: (shouting) “Ntswele ka motse (Leave my house, this instant)!”

Mam'Rose completely ignored my mother and started humming her songs while busy mixing herbs for the cleansing. My mother became so upset and frustrated, that she wanted to attack Mam'Rose.

Mam'Rose: "Take one more step – I dare you. You won't live to see another day."

My mother stepped back. She was really terrified of Mam'Rose.

Mam'Rose: "I have tolerated you more than enough. You have brought nothing but sorrow into my life. The only good thing was these children. After today, you are on your own, Binah Makwetla. You will seek my help and I won't be there. Your grandmother is now gone. She has hug on for far too long, and now she is gone. Don't be so sure that she has gone with her blessings for your children – except that one. She will bless them from the grave, while you continue being miserable. You have made too many people cry and have caused more than enough pain."

Malachi: "Sorry, I just quickly went to get some cigarettes. Is everything alright?"

Mam'Rose: "Perfectly fine, my son. I can't enter. This house is too defiled by this woman's deeds. How can you sleep with a married man, even after he had come back from his wife? He ate poison from his wife's food and as a result, they are now pinning his death on her."

Binah: "Surely you can remove it, right?"

Mam'Rose: (chuckling) "Not so long ago you were about to smack me, and now you are telling me to help you? I can only help the children. You are no longer part of my list. Badimo ba go furaletse (the ancestors have turned their back on you), Binah. You will never have a nice life ever again until you repent for all your sins and until you tell these children the truth about their fathers."

Binah: "I don't know what you're talking about."

Mam'Rose: "Very well, then. Malachi, get the candles. Let's start."

She started by splashing water around the house and the yard mixed with herbs, while Malachi was walking right behind her praying with different coloured candles in his hands.

Malachi: (shaking head) "The white one keeps burning out."

Mam'Rose: (shaking head) "Your mother is not going to have a good life after this. Dimakatso le monna ge (Dimakatso and her husband) are both very angry at their child."

They carried on with the cleansing, while my mother and Bella were in the house. After she was done, she didn't even want to enter the house.

Mam'Rose: "My job here is done."

Binah: "Ga o tsene (aren't you coming in)?"

Mam'Rose took one good look at her and chuckled as she walked away.

Mam'Rose: "I'll see you two soon. Ke sa ya kerekeng (I'm on my way to church)."

We greeted her goodbye as people were still staring at our house. I couldn't understand if it was a stigma or if a new hole had been dug open for our family. The rest of the day was very sombre and my mother didn't open her tavern as a sign of mourning for her "husband" as she called him. No one even bothered to come and ask for alcohol, they just stared at our house and passed. I hated all the attention, but what else could I do? I decided to catch up on some homework, before chatting to my friends on WhatsApp. Time passed and eventually, the days went by.

A few days later...

It had been an odd few days. My mother hadn't been eating while Bella was also a complete mess. She was staying home

instead of going to school, while the shebeen was never the same again. It was almost as if Moses had gone right along with it. There were barely any customers, yet the stock was slowly disappearing along with the money my mother had. She had masked up the courage to ask Moses's family for his documents so that she could claim for a few things, but they all blocked her. They even went to court to get a restraining order that prevented her from attending the funeral. By then, everyone in the neighbourhood were talking about how my mother was a homewrecker. Bella's confidence slowly disappeared and she no longer had nasty words to say to me. She would always say; "At least nna ke itse papaka (at least I know my father). I never thought of using it against her, but karma is quite a bitch. My school days were also quite different, Raymond was a pain in the ass as he showed his complete and true colours. He was so nasty towards me – every chance he got. I completely ignored him and at least we were not in the same class. Mathilda hadn't been back yet, and school was just bliss. I was attending therapy sessions once a week, and I was falling more and more in love with it. It was a day before the funeral, my mother was keeping tabs on social media and following the wife and sister with a fake account. She was rather desperate to bury a man who never divorced his wife for her as she had said. As Malachi was about to park right outside of the gate, we saw people gathered around our gate and a lot of smoke coming out of the

yard. As we approached, we saw the shebeen wrapped in blazing flames. Malachi quickly got out first, while I followed.

Malachi: "Ma! What happened?!"

We found our mother on the floor right outside of the shebeen, holding the left side of her face. There was a bit of blood on her face, but she seemed to have controlled it.

Malachi: (shouting) "What happened?!"

Bina: (softly) "I... I was trying to clean and... then all of a sudden, the shebeen caught fire. It exploded right from the counter and my face caught some of it. What makes me wonder is how that was even possible when I don't even have a stove in there? I don't have anything flammable except alcohol, but it exploded as if there was something already burning."

Malachi left her sitting there, while I also just sat next to her without saying a word. He asked people who were standing around to help him stop the fire. A few of them eventually

helped him and after countless hours, the fire eventually died. Luckily it didn't even touch the house, or Malachi's room outside, but the damage was already done. My mother had lost her entire Shebeen – years of hard work. I couldn't say that she didn't deserve it, but perhaps it was supposed to be a wake up call from her ancestors. Life is tough, but it is even tougher when you have nothing to believe in, no higher power that makes life's problems much more bearable and gives you hope.

Proverbs 17:11 - “An evil man seeks only rebellion, and a cruel messenger will be sent against him.”

34

“The secret of happiness, you see is not found in seeking more, but in developing the capacity to enjoy less.”-Socrates

Hazel

I had always heard people say that what goes around comes around, but I never actually took any of those words to heart, until I actually saw it happen with my own mother. I had no idea what exactly happened between her and Moses's so called wife, nor do I even know what happened between her and Moses himself. They say there are three sides to a story; your side, the other party's side and the truth. I guess we'd never know the truth because Moses was gone. Women always had a tendency of hating one another. I mean, the one person who created that mess was Moses. I doubt my mother held a gun against his head so he could sleep with her and have a child with her. They should have attended to him when he was alive, but instead they were throwing bombs at one another and they kept on hating each other while he was resting in peace. Men have it easy, I tell you. Just when we thought life couldn't get any more difficult and dramatic, that happened. My mother's face was half burnt, while her entire business was literally burnt

to the ground. Life would never be the same again – that was for sure. After Malachi and a few men from the neighbourhood stopped the fire, we attended to my mother.

Malachi: “Please tell me you had insurance?”

Binah: “I did, but then I was advised by Moses to cancel it. I mean, come on, how often do taverns and shebeens get burnt to the ground in the area?”

Malachi was so defeated in annoyance, that he just chose not to say anything further.

Malachi: “Let's go, we need to get you to a hospital.”

Binah: (shaking head) “I'll only get in the car if you are going to take me to a private hospital.”

The nerve of that woman. What in her right mind made her think that she could afford a private hospital?

Malachi: (annoyed) “Mma weh (please). Since when can you afford private health care?”

Binah: “I was still on Moses's medical aid – myself and Bella included.”

Lucky them. While we were living on hope and prayer, begging the Lord not to let us get hurt so that we didn't have to go to public hospitals, they were sorted – living off a married man's pockets. Who was I to judge, though? I mean, I didn't even know my father, right?

Malachi: (sigh) “Mama, the guy is dead. His medical aid is most probably suspended.”

Binah: (shaking head) “They take about a month to do that, and besides, I doubt Sylvia did that. Take me to the nearest private hospital.”

Malachi: (sigh) “Haze, which one is nearest?”

I quickly checked google.

Hazel: "Life Eugene Marais."

Malachi: "That's going to cost me some petrol, but anyway, a re yeng (let's go)."

Bella was in tears, hardly saying a word. She got into the car with Mama at the back, while I got into the front passenger seat. I could tell the annoyance was irking Malachi too deeply, so I just refrained from saying anything. The entire time my mother was consoling Bella who was a complete mess. We drove off while people were staring at us as always. It had become our norm, and it was truly annoying. Things got really better whenever Beast was around, because they all feared him. My brother wasn't one to mess with, but he didn't really instil fear in people like Beast could.

Binah: "It's okay, my baby. It will be alright."

Bella: (crying) "I want to bury him, Mama. I have to. He was my father."

Binah: "I'll make it happen – don't you worry."

I was a bit envious of the love and affection she showed Bella at all times. After a while, we finally arrived at the hospital. As we got out, we headed to the Emergency room reception.

Woman: "Good evening. Who is the patient?"

Malachi: "My mother. There she is."

Woman: "Is it cash or medical aid?"

Malachi: "Medical aid. Here."

He gave her the card while she started punching into the system. Once the woman frowned, I already knew what she was about to say.

Woman: (frowning) "I'm sorry, sir, but Moses Mmako's medical aid has already been suspended."

Malachi: "See? I told you."

Binah: "Patela cash geh (pay cash then)."

Malachi: (frowning) "Askies (excuse me)?"

Binah: "Come on, God knows you'd do it for Hazel. I'm your mother, Malachi."

That wasn't going to end very well.

Malachi: (fuming) "Only when it suits you. I told you that we needed to go to a government hospital, and now you have completely wasted my time and petrol! I told you about that man a long time ago – a few days ago I warned you about what would happen but you never listened. I don't have the money

to keep you here. It's either you get in the car or else I'll leave you here.”

He walked out while I followed him. Bella was walking with my mother side by side. Malachi was really irritated, but I think that masked his pain. My mother was a cruel woman – even in times of need. She got in and didn't say a word further. She started crying silently. Silently sniffing loud enough for Malachi to hear her. If I didn't know any better, I'd say she was trying to manipulate him, but where on earth was he going to get money to take her to a private hospital? She was insane. He drove to Kalafong Hospital, and wasted no time.

Malachi: “Get out and go face the music. I'll come fetch you once they're done with you.”

Bella got out with my mother and it didn't take her too long to start swearing.

Bella: (shouting) “You are so heartless, Malachi! How could you?! I mean look at her!”

Malachi: “She should have thought about that before taking another woman's husband. Don't you worry, she won't be at work today, she is mourning – remember?”

He pressed the accelerator and drove off. Only then I found the next missing puzzle piece; so Sylvia was Moses's wife, and she was a nurse at Kalafong Hospital. No wonder my mother didn't want to go there. Yoh, people have skeletons. I realized then that Malachi had always carried way too much on his shoulders. He had always bottled up his emotions and refrained himself from bursting. The entire time my mother had acted like a victim when she was a deadbeat to him and myself. She had a tendency of gas lighting, which was a common trait in narcissists. I wasn't even sure if I had to call her that, because she was so good to my sister, although she turned her into a mini-version of herself. All I knew was that my brother had it tough and that he too needed a break. I needed to think of a way out for him, so that his life could also go back on track as well. We went home and found Beast waiting outside the gate.

Beast: “Mfo (bro), ke tlile ke shiyana ka go kereya o vaile (I came rushing only to find you had already left).”

Malachi: (sigh) “Sorry, I had to take Binah to the hospital.”

He was really mad, alright to even call my mother by name.

Beast: “Di ntshitseng mo (what happened here)?”

Malachi: “Go no toka nje (it just caught fire). At least that is what she says. Kgale ke mo botsa ka Moses (I've been warning her about Moses), but did she ever listen?”

Beast: “So, what now?”

Malachi: “I don't know

but all I know is that she has no income anymore, which means she will become my problem once again – along with Bella.”

Beast: “We'll find a solution.”

I decided to give them space to bond for a little while.

Hazel: "Abuti (Brother), may I go visit my friends? I promise I won't be too long."

Malachi: "Don't you have homework?"

Hazel: (shaking head) "No, I finished it earlier on today before you came to fetch us."

Beast: "A re vaye (Let's go). We can drop her off there, and go chill at my house. Re tla shapa di beer nyana (We'll have a few beers), while waiting for your mother to get discharged."

Malachi: "Alright."

I got in the car along with Malachi and Beast as we drove off. We left Malachi's car at home, and took Beast's car. They dropped me off at Otlile's house, which is not very far from Kg's house, and Beast also lived a few houses away from Otlile.

Malachi: "I'll call you."

Hazel: "Sharp."

They drove off, as I made my way into Otlile's house. I had already texted her saying that I was on my way. She didn't seem to mind.

Otlile: (worried) "Chomi (friend), are you okay?"

She attacked me with a hug.

Hazel: "Ke sharp (I'm okay), why?"

Otlile: "I heard what happened. I mean, it is all over Facebook."

Oh, I forgot about that.

Hazel: "What are they saying?"

Otile: "Most people say that their usual spot has been burnt down, but others don't have such good things to say."

Hazel: (frowning) "Let me see."

Otile: "You have come such a long way with your therapy, I don't think it is a good idea for you to see."

I grabbed her phone from her and I saw the post in one of the Facebook groups; "Pheli Community". I scrolled past while a lot of people were quite happy to hear that my mother's shebeen had been burnt down. One even commented by saying; "Sis'Bee o layegile (Sis Bee deserves this). Akere yena o jela batho banna (she goes around taking other people's men)." That must have been a scorned reader or most probably someone from Sylvia's family. One comment caught my eye, though. "Now that the whore's tavern is gone, that glow in the dark misfit daughter of hers will have to attend public school. Lol, she thinks she is all that with her fucked up shape and laser eyes. I bet they too glow in the dark." I didn't recognize the name of the person's profile, but the last two sentences got to me. That had to be Raymond. I quickly checked his profile and

he named himself “Lord of the flies” with a topless picture of himself. Wow, that guy was really out to get me, man. I guess rejection was not his cup of tea. I took a deep sigh, and Otlile grabbed her phone back from my hands.

Otlile: “I told you, it is not worth it reading these things.”

Hazel: “Come on, you were reading them, so why can't I? Besides, I don't care what Raymond thinks about me. Clearly he is still upset about me rejecting his sorry ass.”

Otlile: (frowning) “Wait, Raymond?”

She quickly scrolled up again and was infuriated after reading that comment.

Otlile: (furious) “This guy just doesn't quit! I mean he isn't even from Pheli, Hazel! This doesn't sit well with me. Maybe we should tell Malachi.”

Hazel: (shaking head) “No, no, no. I don't want to bother my brother like that. He has enough on his plate as it is. Besides, Raymond is just Raymond.”

Otlile: “He seems a bit obsessed with you. Why would someone join a community group and still talk about you like that?”

Hazel: “I'm out of his way. He won't do anything to me.”

Otlile: “I hope so.”

Hazel: “Ag, man. Let's take a walk and go see Kg. I need something to get this entire drama off my mind.”

We walked out and headed towards her house.

Otlile: “Speaking of drama, how's your mom?”

Hazel: “Ag, her face is half burnt, so we had to take her to hospital. Can you believe she wanted to go to a private hospital

– even after Malachi told her that the medical aid would be suspended? She had the nerve to tell him – not even ask him to pay for her admission. She said and I quote; “God knows you'd do it for Hazel.”

Otlile: “Wow. That's deep, man. You know, my mom and her sister still have the very same relationship – entirely based on hate and it was all caused by their mother. Sadly, I doubt that you and Bella would ever have a sister-sister relationship.”

Hazel: “You know, apparently Mam'Rose isn't my biological grandmother.”

Otlile: “I thought you knew.”

Hazel: (frowning) “What do you mean?”

Otlile: “Everyone knows, babes. I honestly thought you knew too.”

I started wondering how much did people around me actually know about me that I didn't?

Hazel: "It seems as if so many people know way more about my life than I do."

Otile: "Not really, just that they all know your mom was taken in by Mam'Rose when she got here pregnant with Malachi. From there you were born. Word is that your mom was dating a white guy. Everyone knew about that until he disappeared and you were born. They put two and two together since you look the way you look, you know."

Well, it actually made sense hearing it from my friend and not some stranger trying to score some points with the town's "Ariel."

Hazel: "Do you know who my father is?"

Otile: (shaking head) "No, all I know is that they say he was white. It was a very long time ago. All I just hear are rumours

here and there. But, I do know a person who can help you with the answers you need, though.”

Hazel: “Please, don't tell me about my mother.”

Otlile: “No, I wasn't going to mention her. Phinah, your mom's best friend from back in the day. They used to work at the Pick n' Pay at the nearby mall. They were very tight apparently, before she left to Jo'burg.”

I have only heard a few things about her. My mother hardly told me anything, but I bet Bella knew everything and she just wouldn't budge.

Hazel: “Do you know her surname?”

Otlile: “No, but I can find out for you. Perhaps you can track her down on Facebook or something. Social media is a big help nowadays.”

Hazel: "Maybe I can even track down my mother's maternal family. They'll be able to give me information."

Otilie: "That's a start."

I was so hopeful, really. I don't even know why, but the fact that I had family out there, other than Malachi, Bella and my mother just gave me hope. Perhaps I was seeking something deeper than what I had. I guess I just needed to fill the hole in my heart; everyone wants to feel as if they belong. Yes, Malachi gave me a ton of security, but he too would have had to go and live his life and find the woman of his dreams. I wasn't too sure what I actually lacked, but my guess is that everyone around me contributed to my feelings of hopelessness. I had a very deep yearning for love, other than that from my brother. I guess I needed to know what it felt like to go visit aunts and uncles and perhaps even a father. I felt so robbed; I was not given a chance to decide for myself whether or not I wanted or even needed a father, but it was done for me. The least my mother could have done was to tell me about him. I guess only time would tell.

Matthew 7:12 - "So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets."

35

“Life is a dream for the wise, a game for the fool, a comedy for the rich, a tragedy for the poor.” – Sholom Aleichem

Two days later...

Hazel

It had been a rather hectic two days. My mother ended up spending the entire night at Kalafong Hospital, only to find that Sylvia was on duty. She most probably deliberately gave her poor service, only to be assisted the following day at 1pm. Of course, as soon as she came home, it was all my fault along with Malachi's. I could never understand that woman. Every time I gave her the benefit of the doubt, she just chose to disappoint me all over again. It was finally Saturday morning, and even though my mother was advised not to make an appearance at the funeral, she decided to go anyway. Malachi and I decided not to go with, and Bella and my bother were pissed at us as usual. I really couldn't understand the way they navigated through life. Their sense of entitlement never ceased to amaze me. While everyone else were barely hanging on a thread to just go through each day, they made sure that they

ruined your day at all costs. Bella was only a year younger than me and she had already turned into a mini Bina. I actually had a match to attend that day, so Malachi ensured to wake me up early. Mam'Rose also wanted to come with. She made sure she never missed match days. I adored that about her. Even when Malachi took part in chess when he was still in school, she attended every match, effortlessly. She always took videos and pictures on those days, as she said that memories last a life time even when people are long gone. I got my gear ready and we were about to go fetch Otlile. I already found Mam'Rose outside the gate.

Hazel: (smiling) “Koko (granny), we told you we were going to fetch you.”

Mam'Rose: “I may be a bit old, but I can take very good care of myself. Come, now. I don't want you to be late.”

Malachi locked up and there were fewer people staring at us at that point. Mama and Bella were gone – most probably at the funeral by then while we were on our way. We fetched Otlile first and then as we were outside Kg's gate, Beast appeared out of nowhere right next to us. Kg always came with even though

she was the spectator. She never missed a match – ever. We were always the tripod and I loved them to bits. I couldn't imagine my life without them.

Beast: (hooting) “Hao (goodness), you guys were going to leave without me?”

Malachi: “This is a golf, Beast. There's no space here.”

Beast: “In case you haven't noticed, I drive a VW Microbus. Now, what do you choose; go pitlagana (to be squashed amongst one another) or a ride of comfort?”

We all chuckled.

Mam'Rose: “A life of comfort it is.”

Malachi: “What are you trying to say about my car, Ma?”

Mam'Rose: "Malachi, my baby, you know I like to drink, so I want to be comfortable when doing that. Besides, Beast is here to keep you company. You can't possibly be the only man amongst all us girls. You really need a girlfriend."

Malachi was so embarrassed, as we all got out and made our way into the kombi. It was actually a lot better, since we could pack all our gear into the big boot.

Malachi: "Ke parke kae (where will I park my car now)?"

Beast: "Ko dladleng ya ka (at my house), man. Come on, the girls will be late."

Malachi followed us and parked his golf at Beasts's house. He greeted Beasts's mom, who didn't really appreciate all of us filling up his kombi like that. She was one odd lady who thought way too much of herself.

Beast's mom: "Hmm, so, which one of you is Beast's girlfriend?"

My grandmother didn't like her attitude at all.

Mam'Rose: (annoyed) “Rosinah, a se wena o ka bolelang masepao ka bana ba ba kana ne (You of all people can't possible talk such shit about these children). O re tseya bjang (what do you take us for)?”

She knew that Mam'Rose was not a subtle lady. She was always outspoken.

Beast's mom: (embarrassed) “Aowa (No), Mama. I didn't mean it that way.”

Mam'Rose: “You never mean it that way, vele (of course). Next time, think before you embarrass your son or these girls like that. You are too old for such.”

She was so embarrassed, but Beast just didn't want to entertain his mother.

Mam'Rose: “Bethuel, gata koloi re tsamaye (step on it so we can leave already), man.”

Beast: “On it, Mama.”

Indeed, he stepped on it.

Mam'Rose: “How about some music, man? Ga re ye lesong, mos (we're not on our way to a funeral, are we)?”

We all just burst into laughter. She had a flask in her hands and kept pouring wine out of it. We were so used to her, and I just absolutely adored her for always being herself. She was a medium, a church-goer and one of the most highly respected members of the community, but not once did she look down on people who didn't believe in the same faith as her. She never judged people, and she never made it a secret that she was a drinker – not an alcoholic, though, but she did love her wine. Beast laughed as he started playing music for us. He played the song “Ubuhle Bakho by Ami Faku”. For some reason I felt as if he played it for me. He kept staring at me through the rear view mirror and I just had to blush. Eish, I hated that. I turned red

without any effort, but luckily no one saw me. After about half and hour, we finally arrived at University of Pretoria's Sports Campus, L.C. De Villiers. We all made our way out of the kombi; as Mam'Rose, Malachi and Beast made their way to the stadium as our spectators and major supporters, we made our way to the team.

Luckily, we were just in time for the warm up sessions. I didn't see Mathilda, so I assumed she must have still been suspended. We warmed up and before we knew it, we were ready for the game. We were playing against Hoërskool Waterkloof, who were quite competitive in sports. My knee had healed quite nicely, and I felt as if I was on top of the world. With every round we won, Mam'Rose kept screaming her lungs out from the spectator's view. I enjoyed seeing that. I also loved seeing the pride on Malachi's face. If only my mother could have just looked at life from our point of view. After an intense match, we won the game. It was quite a victory for us and we just enjoyed playing sports. My body was also slowly maturing and I was building more muscle than anything else. My breasts were still not developing, though, but I was happy with my body. Otlile kept encouraging me to embrace the way I looked, but that was a story for another day.

Malachi: (clapping hands) “Well done, to the girls of the match.”

Beast: “I must say, you girls really out did yourselves.”

Otlile: “No offence, but what do you know about Hockey, Beast?”

Beast: “I was a rugby player at school, Otlile. Don't judge the book by its cover.”

Otlile: (frowning) “Where did you attend school, wena?”

Beast: “Di's vir my om te weet, en vir jou om uit te vind (It's for me to know, and for you to find out).”

We all laughed because we never even thought Beast could speak even a small bit of Afrikaans. He was actually so eloquently spoken in English

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I just never took note.

Mam'Rose: “Nna ke batla go celebrater (I would like to celebrate). Where are we going?”

I thought she was being her usual, silly self, but it seemed as if she and Beast got along really well.

Beast: “I say we go to Menlyn, Parrots or even Papaccino's in Silver Lakes.”

Mam'Rose: “Silver Lakes kgole bjana (is so far, tough). I need food and a drink as in yesterday.”

We all laughed. She was such a breeze and she ensured to record nearly every moment. I didn't understand why, but she just enjoyed everything that we did – more than the usual. She was extra happy, and kept making reference to the after life.

Mam'Rose: “When I'm gone, I want you guys to remember me for the way I was. Please, don't even think of wearing black at

my funeral and hiring pastor Mdluli to be the officiator. I'd haunt you all.”

We all burst into laughter.

Malachi: “I know, Ma. You specifically told me; we must all wear white and play all your favourite songs. No speeches – and NO Pastor Mdluli.”

Mam'Rose: “You forgot the doves part. I've always wanted to have doves released at my funeral. It must be three hours long – strictly. Nothing more and nothing less. You need to also bury me with a bottle of my favourite wine – or else - “

Malachi: (interrupting) “You'll haunt us all for eternity.”

We burst into laughter yet again. She was such a breeze and my friends absolutely loved her. We finally made our way to Menlyn and went to Parrots. It was March month, though. A month before my birthday, but somehow, she made the entire day all about me.

Mam'Rose: "Hazel, you sit next to me. You girls sit right next to Hazel. You don't mind, do you?"

Kg: (shaking head) "No."

Otile: "Of course not."

Waiter: "Good day, may I take your orders?"

Mam'Rose: "We girls will have mojito's."

Waiter: (frowning) "Are the girls 18 years old or older?"

Mam'Rose: (irritated) "How old are you? Are you going to serve us or not? These girls are doing their first year in varisty, wena mfana (you boy). If you don't want a fat tip, then just say so."

Waiter: "I apologize, ma'am. I was just asking."

Mam'Rose: "Stop asking. Four Mojitos, and ask those two what kind of beer they'll be having."

Hazel: "Koko (granny), since when are you so mean?"

Mam'Rose: "Wa gafa o (he's crazy). Ga le bone (can't he see you)? I'm living my best life."

Kg: "If I may ask, what do you mean, Koko (granny)?"

Mam'Rose: "They say you only live once, which is true, but I say you only die once. Why wait until you can't live any more to actually live? My babies, don't ever be afraid of saying something that comes to mind. If you like something – go for it. If you like someone – go for it. If you feel someone is an asshole – tell them! If you have been saving up for something big and you find a top that is the same price – buy it. You have your entire lives ahead of you, but no one actually knows when we'll die. You three will measure up to your own standards and amaze people. Even your own family will be jealous, but do whatever the fuck you want to do. Fuck what people think –

especially your parents, Kg. Be you – you know what I mean. Wena (you), Otlile, go be the best Actress you want to be. That is your calling, you aren't a loud mouth for nothing. And you, Hazel, your destiny is closer than you will ever realize. Don't ever punish yourself for your mistakes. Life is all about making mistakes and getting up from them. Learn from each one and be yourself. Your mother will never change – so don't ever live your life according to her standards. You, Malachi, a great opportunity is coming your way, and an even greater one is coming – choose the one that will benefit you the most. Put yourself first for once. Bethuel, you are so much stronger than you think. A lot of people think you are just a big, scary guy with no heart – but the one that is meant for you will see right through you. Your breakthrough is coming. Follow your gut and your heart and you will be set free. Not everything is about Dragon.”

That felt to me like some kind of premonition. Was my grandmother actually telling us about our future in the midst of people in a restaurant? Why did it feel to me as if she was saying goodbye? She was way too happy. The drinks finally came.

Hazel: “Koko (granny), you told me to wait until my 18th birthday to have my first drink.”

Mam'Rose: “Sometimes, you have to take the bull by the horns and jump, my baby. Drink it – slowly. It is just this once. Who knows if it might be our last?”

Hazel: “Koko (granny), you're scaring me.”

Mam'Rose: “Don't be afraid of anything. This life is only lend to us. I'm just saying, man. Come on, now. Order us some food. I'm starving.”

I chuckled and let my fears go for a change. While we were in the middle of our main course, Mam'Rose started yet again.

Mam'Rose: “So, Hazel, I hear that mother fucker Raymond has been on your case.”

I swallowed hard. I looked around and everyone was waiting for a response from me. Malachi o bolela thata man (talks way too much).

Hazel: (nervously) "I don't know what you mean."

Mam'Rose: "Since when can you lie?"

She said that while digging into her food. That made me nervous as hell. She was always calm but had come backs for days.

Mam'Rose: "Hazel, you are growing. I'd like you to grow into a person that Otlile has been begging you to grow into. Raymond ke bosepa ba motho (is an asshole of a person). Fact remains that he is upset because you are the one girl he wants, but can't have. He won't let it go, so, what are you going to do about it?"

Malachi: (fuming) "I'm going to rip his throat right out of his neck!"

Mam'Rose: "Ema pele wena (wait a minute, you). Hazel, what are you going to do about it?"

Hazel: (shrugging) "I don't know."

Mam'Rose: "What are you afraid of?"

Hazel: (shakily) "I... I, don't know."

Mam'Rose: "You know, I think you must have taken that trait from your father. I mean, instead of actually standing up to his father – he chose to be a coward and live a life he didn't want to."

Hazel: (wide-eyed) "You know my father?"

Mam'Rose: "One day it will all be revealed to you. Why do you insist on dwelling on the past you were never part of? You see, you are also stronger than you think. You are still going to endure hardships, now I will ask you again, what will you do about it?"

Hazel: "I'll pray about it."

Mam'Rose: "Okay, just like I taught you, but let's say Raymond tries what he tried again. What are you going to do about it?"

Hazel: "Tell him off."

Mam'Rose: "You know, the one thing I admired about your mother before she became the bitch she has become, was that she was strong willed. She was a real fighter; both spiritually and physically. You need to learn how to deal with emotional situations before you actually beat someone half to death. Hazel, you are one of those people who just bury their emotions. You need to learn to allow yourself to feel and be angry when you need to be. Should you need to beat someone up – then do it. Sometimes, people, need to get fucked before they try shit with you again. Remember that one day when I'm gone."

There she was again; speaking of herself in the past tense. I was convinced; she was dying. I tried to let it slip my mind, but fear

slowly crept up on me. I knew that the end was near and I had no way of stopping it. Perhaps Dr. Speelman was preparing me for a big moment in my life. Everyone was bound to experience loss in their life, but was I even ready? Ecclesiastes 12:7 says; “And the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.” We had a really great time and despite me having one Mojito, I felt a little tipsy. I guess alcohol really makes people happy. On our way back home, while we were having the time of our lives, Malachi received a disturbing call.

Malachi: “Hello? Beast, theosa (lower the) volume.”

Beast lowered it as we all listened in wonder.

Malachi: “Eng (what)?! Okay, sharp (fine). Tlogela go rasa (stop shouting). I'll be right there.”

He hung up and took a deep sigh.

Beast: “What is it?”

Malachi: "My mom has just been arrested."

Hebrews 12:11 - "For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it."

Jeremiah: 17:9 – 10 - "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it? "I the Lord search the heart and test the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds."

“Here’s to the crazy ones, the misfits, the rebels, the troublemakers, the round pegs in the square holes ... the ones who see things differently — they’re not fond of rules ... You can quote them, disagree with them, glorify or vilify them, but the only thing you can’t do is ignore them because they change things ... They push the human race forward, and while some may see them as the crazy ones, we see genius ...” – Steve Jobs

Hazel

Our entire day was ruined by that one phone call. We could have easily avoided it all by just ignoring the damn phone call. Instead of going home to nurse our drunken selves, we had to take a detour to the nearest police station in Hammanskraal. I was not even happy about it – not even the least bit. Perhaps it was the alcoholic effect, but dammit, man. I hated every moment whenever I thought of my mother. I thought of all the bad things she had done to Malachi and I and it just didn't sit well with me. For the mere fact that our victory was turned into disaster – all because of her, it just made me even angrier. When we finally arrived, I insisted on going out to get some fresh air, but all my mind was telling me

to do, was tell her where to get off. I kept trying to drink water, while taking brisk, short walks around the police station. I thought no one noticed, until I heard a familiar voice behind me.

Beast: "O sharp (are you okay)?"

Hazel: "Yes."

Beast: "You can tell me, you know. I mean, I know what you're going through."

Hazel: (frowning) "How? Your life seems so well thought out."

Beast: (chuckling) "Explain what you mean by "well thought out".

Hazel: "Well, my mother had three different children by three different fathers; she was a side chick to a married man; she ran away from home and we are here to try and get her bail

because she just wouldn't listen. Nothing I say or do in her eyes will ever be enough.”

Beast: “You know, my father was a good man. He took good care of us and his only mistake was to allow my mother to stop working until he died in a tragic car accident. I am the first born, so I had to fend for my family. Having three siblings, I have learnt that life isn't all about me. Call me selfless, just like Malachi has always been, but their well-being has always come first – above all of my feelings.”

I never looked at Beast in that way. I always thought that he was a typical “kasi” (township) boy with little to no ambitions. Okay, that was rather narrow-minded of me, since my brother was also from the township. I needed to dig deeper and think beyond the box. Beast was just another statistic; our parents would have children and expect the first borns to take care of the ones that follow. What if you as the first born have dreams? Does it mean that your dreams become invalid?

Hazel: “Beast, I am sorry... I never thought of you as - “

Beast: "I know, hence I always encourage you to look beyond what people think of you. You are way more than what they think of you. No matter what – don't doubt yourself."

Hazel: "May I ask you a question?"

Beast: "Of course."

Hazel: "When you played that song... "Ubuhle Bakho"... was it for me? I mean, it sounds silly, but I feel like you were specifically playing it for me."

Beast: (smiling) "Yes, it was for you."

I was so shocked; I actually didn't expect his answer.

Hazel: "Heh (huh)?"

Beast: "Why are you surprised? I mean, you are a real gem. I would play the song for you any day."

For the first time in my life, I actually blushed. I actually felt those butterflies for the opposite sex. Perhaps it was the alcohol, but I just felt differently looking at Beast.

Malachi: "Hazel, let's go!"

He was standing in front of my mother and Bella. They both looked like a complete mess. I wasted no time further, because I didn't want them both to think I had something going on with Beast, even though my mother looked at me – at us inquisitively. I rushed swiftly to the kombi and got in. Mam'Rose became so irritated, that she refrained from saying anything to my mother. The entire time, she kept talking to everyone else – except Bella and my mother. I didn't blame her, to be honest. We started backwards that evening with the drop offs, we started with Kg, and the Otlile, and then it was our turn, which meant that Mam'Rose would have been the last one to be dropped off.

Mam'Rose: "I'll see you soon, my flower."

Hazel: "I love you, koko (granny)."

Mam'Rose: "I love you more. Go take a nap. Your first alcoholic drink isn't child's play."

I closed the door and went towards Malachi's room. Upon approaching the door, I saw Bella and my mother walking towards the house. It didn't sit well with me, so I just had to speak up. I felt the anger boiling inside of me. I marched towards the kitchen door and found them in the lounge.

Hazel: (angrily) "So, what makes Bella so special and me not?"

Binah: (sigh) "Hazel, do you really want to throw a fit right now? When I'm at my lowest? Have you no shame?"

Hazel: "See, that's the thing, Mama. It's always Hazel's fault or Malachi's fault, but never your fault or Bella's fault. What makes Bella so special but you couldn't give that love and affection to me or to Malachi?"

Binah: "I really don't want to do this right now."

Hazel: "See, that's the thing. I've been doing this my entire life. You never cared for us, but you cared for her. Now, I am asking; what is it about Malachi and I that you don't like? Did we ask to be your children

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Mama?"

Bella: (Shouting) "Gosh, you're so selfish, Hazel! You think just because you have a white father that everything has to be handed over to you. Well, not on my watch!"

Binah: "It's okay, Bella. Hazel, you and Malachi were born under undesirable circumstances. If I honestly had my way, I'd have gotten rid of you both."

She didn't have to be so specific.

Hazel: "You still didn't answer my question."

Binah: “What do you want me to say? That yes, your father was white? Because he was. He deserted me? Yes, he did. That I despise you and regret having you? Yes, I do. That I love Bella more than the two of you? Well, yes, to some degree, yes. Why? Because her father might have been married, but at least he did his part. He never ran away from his responsibility unlike your father and don't even get me started on Malachi's father. You two are my worst mistakes and deepest regrets. If I had my way, I'd honestly have gotten rid of you two.”

Hazel: “Why didn't you?”

Binah: “Because – no matter what I tried, you two just wouldn't die. Your ancestors claim you were stronger than anything, but I think you two were just too stubborn to die. So, if you could do me a favour and just die – that would be really fantastic.”

She hurt me to the core that night. I couldn't believe that my own mother was encouraging me to commit suicide.

Hazel: (teary) "O (are you) Serious?"

Binah: "Dead serious."

Bella: (shouting) "It's bad enough your white father created an unwanted alien like you. Now, there's Malachi as well – a child conceived of rape."

Binah: "Bella, stop it!"

Hazel: "What the fuck did you just say?"

Bella: "You heard me. Malachi's bastard father raped my poor mother when she was an 18 year old virgin and then came Malachi. Why do you think she never has seen eye to eye with him? Because he is the spitting image of his rapist father."

Binah: "Bella, I said stop it!"

I felt so enraged; like an undesired and dangerous fire was burning right through my soul. The more she kept provoking me, the more I just wanted to strangle her.

Bella: "Don't you see, Hazel? You are not wanted. Do yourself a favour and just hang yourself. I mean, ropes are free, hey."

It was at that moment that I saw red, completely. I just didn't hear anything else other than their malicious words.

Hazel: (angrily) "What the fuck did you just say to me?"

Bella: "You heard me. You're a white bitch, while your brother is a product of rape. The question is what are you going to do about it?"

I felt as if I just went blank. The only thing I remember was charging at Bella's throat, grabbing her by it and trying to squeeze the life out of her. I didn't hear anything or anyone else, until Malachi showed up and pulled me from Bella.

Malachi: (shouting) "Hazel! Hazel! Can you hear me?"

He was slapping me back to life. It was only when I heard his voice that I indeed came back to life.

Hazel: (confused) "What... what happened?"

Malachi: "You beat Bella almost to a pulp. What did they do to you?"

Binah: "Are you still asking?! She deserves to be arrested! She's the devil! Look what she did to my child!"

Malachi: "In case you haven't noticed, she is your daughter too. Stop acting like you're holier than all of us and step away before I get angry."

My mother stepped back, although I felt a bit disorientated. Malachi took me out of the house to his room. He shook me slightly.

Malachi: "Hazel. What happened in there?"

Hazel: "I... I don't remember quite well..."

I saw the blood on my hands and the slight bruising on my knuckles and I remembered immediately.

Hazel: (teary) "All I did was ask her what made Bella so special. I just asked her why she loved her and not us, Malachi. My intention was purely innocent. I honestly didn't want to hurt anyone, but she just kept pushing. She just kept going and going; saying I was unwanted; a white man's unwanted child and that you were a rape child. What kind of sibling would do that shit to another, Malachi? What kind of fucking, twisted human being would go out of their way to hurt their own blood?!"

Malachi: "Calm down."

I saw the tears making their way to his eyes.

Malachi: (teary) "Yes, she is right. I am a rape child."

Hazel: (shocked) "What?"

Malachi: "My father raped my mother when she was a virgin at a party and that is how I came about."

Hazel: "But still, Malachi, that doesn't give her the right to treat us – you the way she has been and still is."

Malachi: "Let it go, Hazel."

Hazel: "You could have gone out there to live your life. Why did you stay for all her bullshit?"

Malachi: "I stayed because I knew that she would treat you the same way – even worse than she had treated me."

Hazel: “Malachi, you can't live your life like that. Yes, I appreciate you more than anything, but when will you live for you, abuti (brother)? When?”

Malachi: “When your life finally takes off. Please, get yourself in check and don't ever let those two get to you the way they have done tonight. Next time you won't be so lucky. You might even kill one of them if you continue like this. Go take a shower and then sleep. I'll see you tomorrow.”

Life had a way of being cruel to certain people; well, more cruel to certain people, rather. What occurred that evening tainted my soul; my entire well being and changed the way I viewed all my relationships in life. I saw complete evil and hatred in my mother's eyes towards me. All I wanted was to understand why she never loved me, but I guess she wasn't ready to make it up to me. I understood then what pain Malachi had to endure being hated by the very woman who birthed him. It was not easy at all, in fact, I bet it was hell. I was suffering because of the sins of my father. Yet, Deuteronomy 24:16 says; ““Fathers shall not be put to death because of their children, nor shall children be put to death because of their fathers. Each one shall be put to death for his own sin.” I had no idea what the future had in store for me nor for Malachi, but I had a deep

desire to save my brother from the awful misery he was enduring. He needed to live his own life, and that was what I intended to do for him. Ephesians 6:1 – 3 says; “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. “Honor your father and mother” (this is the first commandment with a promise), “that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.” I only intended on trying my level best to respect my mother for that very same reason. I didn't want to offend God in such a way that my life would have turned a living hell. I decided to keep my distance from my mother and Bella, and pray really hard and keep steadfast prayer for the both of them. God was my way out of that mess, and I had to keep trying.

2 Timothy 3:16 - “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.”

“Live for each second without hesitation.” — Elton John

Hazel

One week later...

It had been such a terrible week for me – emotionally. I had to keep it together, just for the sake of it, but things were just hard on my end. I just couldn't get my mother's grim words out of my head. They were literally replaying in my head like a bloody movie. After a few sessions with Dr. Speelman, they realized that I needed to have more sessions since it seemed as if my mental state was slowly derailing. I hadn't noticed, I guess. I had been avoiding my mother along with Bella every chance I got. She had been drinking every chance she got. She was hardly home and would come back drunk, so I knew that a drunk Binah meant an angry, miserable and absolutely vile Binah. I just had to stay away. I was very thankful for living with Malachi, but I felt as if I was really intruding his space. I had told him about that a few times before, but it seemed as if he was okay with it. After dropping me off at home that one

afternoon, I saw a truck delivering some sand and bricks at our house.

Hazel: (surprised) “And then? Is Mama planning on rebuilding the shebeen?”

Malachi: “No, I'm building another room. So that you can finally have peace of mind.”

I was shocked.

Hazel: (surprised) “Malachi, can you afford this?”

Malachi: “Don't worry about it.”

That's Malachi's famous words. I got out of the car and as I was about to walk into the yard, my mother walked swiftly towards his car.

Binah: “Malachi, can I talk to you?”

Yep, she completely ignored my presence.”

Malachi: “I'm headed somewhere.”

He was about to drive off, but I guess what she wanted to say couldn't wait at all.

Binah: “I hope these bricks are for my shebeen. It's about damn time you thought about your mother.”

I could see the irritability written in CAPS on Malachi's face.

Malachi: (annoyed) “Mama weh (please), this is for the room I'm building for Hazel. Why would I build you your own tavern? Ke nale zaka nna (do I have money)?”

Binah: (angrily) “What makes her so special that you just can't think of putting your mother first?!”

Malachi: (irritated) "Hazel, I'll see you later."

He stepped on it and drove off. I walked into the yard and she followed me.

Binah: (angrily) "Can't you see you're turning him against me?!"

Hazel: (frowning) "What have I done now?"

Binah: "Instead of him rebuilding my shebeen so we can have means of making a living, he is doing everything for you! Have you no shame, Hazel? Do you want to see your sister suffer? I mean, you get to go to private school with a bursary from who knows where while your sister has to hustle? Please, have a heart and talk to him. For me."

That woman had some audacity. Wasn't she the one who told me that I ruined her life? Well, both Malachi and I? I just gave her one look and walked into Malachi's room and closed the door behind her. I wasn't interested in her bullshit. She hurt me more than enough and yet everything that was happening

was still my fault. I continued with my homework while completely ignoring my mother's loud knocks on the door. After about an hour of complete silence outside, I heard yet another knock. It was fainter than hers, but I chose to ignore it anyway.

Beast: "Hazel, I know you're in there."

Oh, at least it was somebody other than my mother. I opened the door and found Beast.

Beast: "Hi."

Hazel: "Hi. O tsene bjang (how did you get in)? My brother isn't home but my mom is."

Beast: "No, a gona motho (there's no one home)."

I was rather surprised by that statement.

Hazel: (frowning) "Oh, okay. If you're looking for Malachi, as I said, ga teng (he's not home)."

Beast: "Actually, I'm here to see you."

Hazel: (surprised) "Oh?"

Beast: "Mind if we take a walk?"

That was a first. I understood also why he didn't want to come in, I mean what were people going to say if they saw Beast visiting his friend's 16 year old sister?

Hazel: "Okay, give me two minutes to change."

Beast: "Okay."

I closed the door while I went to the bedroom to change into casual clothes. I went out and found him outside, smoking.

Beast: "Do you mind if I smoke?"

Hazel: (shaking head) "No, Malachi is a smoker. I'm used to the stench."

Beast: (laughing) "Okay."

We walked out of the yard and started walking slowly. I didn't even know where we were going or what that was about.

Hazel: "So, what is this about if I may ask?"

Beast: "Hmm, you're getting straight to the point. I see you're evolving. I like it."

I smiled. I think I was blushing. I don't even know why. I didn't look at Beast that way.

Beast: “Anyway, I wanted to talk to you about something – away from the walls around your house. How much do you love your brother?”

That was an odd question.

Hazel: (frowning) “I love him very much. I'd do anything for him.”

Beast: “Would you let him live away from you for a little while? Just until he gets his life on track again?”

Hazel: (frowning) “I think so. What's this about? Is he leaving?”

Beast: “Not exactly. How good are you at keeping secrets?”

I felt like we were playing a riddle.

Hazel: “I'm very good at that.”

Beast: "What about judging people?"

Hazel: "Well, I am not God, so I don't judge anyone. I myself am not perfect."

Beast: "Okay. What would you say if I told you that I'm a gangster?"

Hazel: (chuckling) "Uhm, well, I wouldn't really be surprised. This is the township and people talk, you know."

Beast: (chuckling) "True, but well, I do a bit of stealing here and there and Malachi and I work for someone – someone dangerous and big in this industry."

Hazel: (shocked) "What do you mean? What exactly does he do?"

Beast: "Ag, he just fixes the cars, you know, repairs them so that they can be sold to other owners, he removes the trackers for us and gets paid for that."

I wasn't sure how I felt about that. I mean, I had absolute shock written all over my face.

Beast: "I see you're shocked, but that is the only way to make fast cash around here."

Hazel: "So, Malachi became a criminal for me?"

Beast: "You said you weren't going to judge."

Hazel: "I didn't mean it like that, it's just that – what would happen to me - to my family should he get caught? I mean if he gets arrested then he would get a criminal record and then that would be tickets for him. He wants to be an engineer."

Beast: "I know, which is why I asked to talk to you today. I don't like the fact that he is into this business just like you don't. Which is why I came to ask you to apply for him."

Hazel: (frowning) "Applications don't open until September."

Beast: "I know, but Harvard applications are open for the Second Semester."

Hazel: "But if I do, then he'll be gone by then."

Beast: "Which is why I asked you, how much do you love your brother?"

That was a hard pill to swallow. I felt like I was choosing between myself and his happiness.

Hazel: "Beast, don't get me wrong. I really love my brother, but I am afraid."

Beast: "Will you be able to be selfless enough to let him go?"

Hazel: (teary) "What will I do without him? He is the one who protects me."

Beast: "I can do all of that – if you agree. I'll make sure that your mother doesn't touch you."

Hazel: "I... I want the best for him, I really do."

Beast: "Then let's help him get out of here. Taking care of you won't be hard for me to do. I'll step up to the plate."

I wasn't quite sure what he meant, although I had to ask.

Hazel: "Do you mean as a brother, or...?"

Beast: (laughing) "Come on, Hazel. I'd never take advantage of you. You're 16 - "

Hazel: "Almost 17."

Beast: “Nonetheless, you're still a teen. I love you the way Malachi loves you – like a brother should love a sister. I'd never do that to you.”

Hazel: “Why are you doing this? I mean, he could go to Varsity next year, right?”

Beast: “So much is going on that I can't tell you about. Malachi has it really tough and with your mother having no form of income, it will strain him even more. If we do this for him, he can be a better man than he is now. I love him and I want to see him succeed.”

Hazel: “What about you?”

Beast: “What about me?”

Hazel: “I mean don't you want to go study?”

Beast: "That was a wish of mine once upon a time, but that is a story for another day. We can't all succeed in the same path. So, what do you say?"

I was terrified of the entire idea, to be honest. I mean, I really wanted the best for my brother, at the same time I felt like Beast was hiding something really big from me. I got the feeling he wanted Malachi gone since they were involved in something dangerous with the guy they were working for. Nonetheless, it would have been awfully selfish of me to refuse trying at least.

Hazel: (deep breath) "Okay."

Beast: "Good, I was hoping you'd agree. Here, punch in your cellphone number so that I can send you the application link. Don't even worry about tuition, I'll have his registration covered and you can apply for some bursaries on the second link."

Beast really seemed like he took his time researching and thinking all that through. I just had no idea why then? I mean

he could have waited, but then again life waits for no one. It wouldn't have been fair for Malachi to stick around and wait for me to be successful while his life just kept going downhill.

Hazel: “Okay, I'll keep you updated.”

Beast: “Hazel, if you ever need anything – anything at all, please, do not hesitate to let me know.”

I appreciated his concern, to be honest. It came from a good place. At least he wasn't mean to me nor did he try to hit on me like that ass hole Raymond. I thanked him once again and as I walked back home, I received the application link as he promised. He was really serious. Everyone around the kasi (township) looked at Beast as an ambitionless gangster, but in truth, he had more education than most of them. He was a good friend; who just wanted his friend to succeed in ways he couldn't. I admired that. It takes real courage to steer your friend into a good direction. Proverbs 18:24 says; “A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.” I knew that Beast would lay his life for my brother, and vice versa. John 15:13 says; “Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his

friends.” I was terrified of a life without my brother, well, without him being with me physically, but I had to ask God to rid me of any potential envious thoughts, so I knelt down in the bedroom immediately after returning home.

Hazel: (praying) “Father God, I humble myself before you. (sigh), It has been a really rough, couple of months, actually it has been a really tough few years, but nevertheless

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You never failed to pull me through. God, you know me from the inside out and only You know my heart. You have blessed me with a good life, although I have struggled at the hands of my mother. If it weren't for Malachi, I wouldn't be where I am today. All I ask is that you steer me into the right direction, Lord. I ask that you do what is best for my brother. Should this be his calling, please, let him be able to go study and actually be happy. Allow him to succeed and put himself first. I thank you for everything, and I ask you for peace and tranquillity in my life. I pray this in Jesus' Mighty Name. Amen.”

Beast

My name is Bethuel “Beast” Monama. I am 24 years old, born and bred in Atteridgeville. They say that most people born in the township should always make it their mission to leave and be better people, so that their children should be subjected to better in order to be better, but some of us just aren't meant to leave the township – well, at least not now anyway. Malachi has been my friend for as long as I can remember. He knows everything about me and I of him. He has pulled me out of some really dark shit, and I will eternally be indebted to him. Yes, the people say the right things – I am indeed a gangster. I specialize a lot in car hijackings, but no one actually wakes up one day and decides to be a criminal for a living. I did it because I had no other choice, being the first born of five children, and being the only son, I had to make it my mission to show my sisters and my mother that I could be the man and take good care of them. Thankfully, I wasn't born stupid, so I managed to finish school with really good grades, but like most black children in this country, I had no means to further my education and I couldn't wait on an opportunity while my family was left starving while hanging on a thin thread all because of hope. I did my best to step up when my lousy father left my mother along with the rest of us. My mother broke her back cleaning up after white people, until she was left injured and couldn't stand for too long, which meant she had to lose her measly job. I vowed that they'd never go hungry ever

again, and in turn, I have built my mother a house big enough to ensure that they each had their own bedroom, while I kept hustling. I am not proud of what I do, but I am proud that I am able to feed my family. One day, everyone will understand what I had to endure to be where I am. Unlike me, Malachi stands a very good chance at being the best of the best, and he can't do that while being a mechanic for a low-life criminal like Dragon. The longer he becomes stuck in this place, the further he will succumb to being just another statistic, with washed up dreams. After my long talk with Hazel, I finally felt like things were falling into place. I needed to get Malachi out of that place as in yesterday, that way, Dragon wouldn't turn him into another me. That would really end Malachi. I was walking back to my house, when I found him in his car right outside my house.

Beast: "Ekse (hey). I thought you weren't around."

Malachi: "I wasn't. I just needed to clear my head. My em o tlo mpethisa top (my mother will end up driving me mad)."

Beast: "Ska mo tseyela hlogong (don't take her to heart). Dintshang (what's up)?"

Malachi: “Ne ke re ke go shapele round re shape tse pedi nyana (I thought I'd come by and see you while we have a few beers).”

Beast: “Sounds like a plan. Let's go buy from Bra Pieter.”

Bra Pieter was Sis'Bee's biggest competition and since her Shebeen died down, his business had been booming. We walked in and found him selling himself as usual. He trusted no one to handle his cash.

Bra Pieter: (Smiling) “Hehe, bona ke bo mang (look who it is). To what do I owe the pleasure of Pheli's most well known gangsters walking into MY tavern?”

Beast: “Bra Pieter o rata drama, waitse (you love drama, you know). A o ngaye tse pedi (give me two beers). Heineken.”

Bra Pieter: “Malachi, how is your mother doing? I mean it must not be easy for someone like her to lose everything, can it?”

I could tell Malachi was getting really annoyed. Yes, he didn't appreciate his mother's treatment and attitude, but he didn't like it when someone spoke ill of his mother.

Beast: (clicking tongue) "Keep the change, Bra Pieter, re jagile (we're in a hurry)."

Bra Pieter: "Okay, but you know what the Bible says, right? Modimo ga fe ka letsogo (God doesn't bless by hand)."

I didn't like Sis'Bee either, but for someone to boast about another's downfall. He should have been careful. The tongue is a dangerous weapon. It can speak both life and death. We got back into the car and drove to my house and parked right outside, and started drinking. I could tell by the loud sigh Malachi made after one, huge gulp of beer, that a lot was on his mind.

Beast: "E tla ka tsona (talk to me)."

Malachi: "Eish, mfana (Oh, bro), life e boima (life is hard)."

Beast: "I know what you mean."

Malachi: "I have decided to build another room for Hazel to stay in, and my mother has been on my case about rebuilding her shebeen."

Beast: "Jou em (your mother) is ungrateful."

Malachi: "Tell me about it. Can you believe just the other day, she cornered me and basically told me that now that Bella's father is gone, I have to step up to the plate and pay for her school fees, just so that a tshwane le Hazel (she could be just like Hazel)?"

Beast: (wide-eyed) "That's insane! O e topa kae wena five blocko ka kgwedi (where on earth will you get five grand per month)?!"

Malachi: "Tell me about it."

Beast: “Bjanong o di bala bjang (so, what have you decided to do)?”

Malachi: “Well, Bella is also my sister.”

Beast: (shocked) “Aowa (No), Malachi, mfo (bro), don't do that to yourself. You're already breaking your back for them. You can't do that. If she can't afford to get a bursary, of which she won't because her marks are pure shit – a tsene mo kasi (let her attend school here in the township).”

Malachi: “I get what you mean, but Malachi, you have a life too, you know. O gcinne neng go ba le medi (when was the last time you even had a girlfriend)?”

Malachi: (clicking tongue) “Mxm, ah fokof (fuck off),
Beast. Medi e tsena kae mo (where do girlfriends fit in here now)?”

Beast: “Ke no re (I'm just saying), you never put yourself first. It won't end well for you. Sometimes, you need to choose you and find some happiness for you.”

Malachi: “It's not that easy, man. You of all people know what I'm going through.”

Beast: “That's different, my mother and siblings appreciate everything I do for them – no matter how big or small. I've never had my mother tell me shit the way Sis Bee tells you and Hazel. You need to put your foot down at times.”

He knew I was right, but getting through to him would prove to be harder than I expected. Halfway down our drinks, Dragon called me.

Beast: “It's Dragon. Since when does he call me at this time of the day?”

Malachi: “Answer it. You know how he gets when you don't answer his calls.”

Beast: "Ekse (Sure), Boss."

Dragon: "I need you in the warehouse. Bring Malachi with you."

Beast: "Now?"

Dragon: "Of course now. Don't keep me waiting."

Just like that, he hung up on me like the asshole he's always been.

Malachi: "Go vayang (what's up)?"

Beast: "He wants to see us right now at the warehouse."

Malachi: (surprised) "Why? I mean ga wa ya roundong maobane, mos (you weren't out on a job last night, right)?"

Beast: "I guess there's only one way to find out. Let's go."

We drove there, which wasn't very far since it was right at his house, the one he had in Atteridgeville. We found him dressed up as usual; there is something about Township criminals, the moment they make it, they feel the need to overcompensate and show everyone who's boss. He always dressed in expensive clothes – even when there was no need for it. He was a tall, but rather thin man, and expensive clothes and cologne made people fear him. All the stories going around about him were a bonus to his profile. He had connections almost everywhere, but one could only be so rich.

Dragon: "Took you long enough."

Beast: "Re fihlile mos (we're here, aren't we)?"

Dragon: "O nale go itebala wena (you seem to forget yourself)."

Malachi: "Why are we here, boss?"

Dragon: "I need you two to do a job for me."

Beast: (surprised) "What do you mean the two of us?"

Dragon: "Exactly that, JJ was involved in a car accident, so I am one man down. Ke nale (I have an) order. A black Mercedes. Turns out there is one he has been spotting ko (in) Pretoria East. The woman works in Menlyn, and she is there now. If you leave now, you can be able to get the car for me by tonight."

Beast: "Boss, Malachi ga chune di job (doesn't do these jobs). He's our mechanic."

Dragon: "Are you going to tell me how to do my job, Beast?"

Beast: (firmly) "No."

Malachi: "Fine, I'll do it."

Dragon: "See? He's a big boy. More money for you, Malachi. Now, go, I don't have all day."

1 Corinthians 15:33 - "Do not be deceived: "Bad company ruins good morals."

“You choose the life you live. If you don’t like it, it’s on you to change it because no one else is going to do it for you.” – Kim Kiyosaki

Malachi

In life, each one of us are born with the free will to make choices; some more than others, but overall each day comes with a choice. I didn't want to do it – but then, what other choice did I have? What kind of man would I have been if I let my family starve? Perhaps if I rebuilt my mother's Shebeen, then I wouldn't have had to struggle or be emotionally and financially overloaded. Sure, when Dragon told me to go do the job, I acted hastily and impulsively. I had no idea how to use a gun. Beast wasn't very impressed with me, but if he could do it, then so could I, right?

Malachi: “I know what you're thinking.”

Beast: “Do you now? Tell me.”

Malachi: "Come on, Mfo (bro). Don't be like that."

Beast: "Malachi, do you have any idea what you've gotten yourself into? What if something goes wrong or you end up shooting the woman?"

Malachi: "Let's hope it doesn't get to that. Besides, I need the money, Beast."

He kept quiet almost the entire way until we got there.

Beast: "Open the cubby hole."

I did as told and found two guns, and masks in there.

Beast: "Take a gun and a mask. Put it on but don't you get out of the car. You only get out when I tell you to do so, got it?"

Malachi: "Okay."

Beast: "Do you know how to use a gun?"

Malachi: "You know I've never used one before."

Beast: "This is how you cock it, this is the trigger. Be very careful – the trigger is very sensitive, hence the safety is on. You only release if it's a do or die situation – got it?!"

Malachi: "Yeah."

He put on his mask and got out. I was right behind him in the parking lot. The car was parked and he was about to open it so easily, until I saw a woman's arm hold the door from the inside of the car. Beast pointed the gun at the woman, while I was watching from inside of our car. They seemed to have been struggling and I could hear them both since my window was halfway opened.

Beast: (shouting) "Get out of the fucking car!"

Woman: "Please – don't kill me!"

Before I knew it, I heard a gunshot and a scream. I blinked thinking that perhaps it was all my imagination, but it wasn't. The woman was lying on the floor with a bleeding leg, screaming for help as Beast got into the car and reversed swiftly.

Beast: (shouting) "A re vaye (Let's go)!"

He drove ahead of me, while I didn't even have time to compose myself. It is amazing what adrenaline rush can do to you. I was driving in such high speed, worried that we might be chased by the police. I don't even know how we got out of Menlyn Park parking, but we did. Beast off ramped, and I had to follow him. Within approximately 15 minutes, we were back in Atteridgeville. We went to the warehouse, while he got out as if nothing had happened.

Beast: "Do your thing, Malachi. Ntsha di tracker moo (remove the trackers)."

I got out and my legs felt wobbly, my chest felt as if it was closing in on me while my face felt so hot. I tried taking a few steps ahead of the vehicle and before I knew it, I was consumed with the urge to vomit. I just bent over over the nearest space I found next to the car and let it all out. It felt as if my body was getting rid of the shock that had consumed it. After a good two minutes, I felt a little better although Beast was far from amused.

Beast: “Nako ya vaya (time is not on our side). Are you going to do the job or not?”

I wiped myself and got to it. It always took me less than 10 minutes to do the job. I had become such an expert, it wasn't too hard to do. I found two vehicle trackers in the car and disposed of them the way we always did. Dragon came by afterwards.

Dragon: “And then? Whose vomit is this?”

Beast: “Malachi's. I told you, he's not meant for this.”

Dragon: "There's a first time for everything. Let's have a look."

He started inspecting the car as always; for dents and damages. If the car came back with damages, he lowered the payment.

Dragon: (surprised) "Ke masepa a eng a (what is this shit)?"

Beast: "Oh, that. Small glitch. I had to shoot her."

Dragon: (angrily) "Did I not tell you to do a clean job?!"

Beast: "She was resisting. Would you rather have had me get arrested in the mall?"

Dragon: "No, but -"

Beast: (interrupting) “I got the job done. Wa re gafa or bjang (are you paying us or not)?”

Dragon: (chuckling) “If you weren't one of my best, I'd have killed you a long time ago.”

He took out two envelopes from his suite pockets, and handed one to each of us.

Dragon: “Here. I'll call you for the next one.”

Beast walked towards my car without saying a word, while I opened it as it felt a bit hefty. I was quite alarmed to come across so much cash in an envelope; all R200 notes.

Dragon: “You did good today. Keep it up and you'll be where I am.”

I walked towards the car to find Beast smoking outside. He threw the cigarette away as soon as he saw me and got into the passenger seat without saying a word.

Malachi: "Say what's on your mind."

Beast: "I have nothing to say."

Malachi: "Why did you tell Dragon that she was resisting? I mean I saw you. You deliberately shot her."

Beast: "I wanted to show you how quickly things can go wrong in a split second. You are not made for this Malachi, you have a future unlike some of us, but if you choose to fuck it up then be my guest."

Malachi: "Don't be like that. You know why I have to do this."

Beast: "Drive."

I said nothing further and drove off. As I said, every single day is filled with the will of choice. Ephesians 1:4 – 5 says, "Even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we

should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will.”

One month later...

Hazel

It had been a rather frenzied month, with juggling school, family and life itself, but above all else, life indeed went on. My sister was not talking to me, of which I was absolutely glad because we hardly spoke anyway. I hardly even made my way into the house, and my mother had basically gone from Pheli's most famous Shebeen queen to the town's famous drunkard. She'd go drink all day at Bra Pieter's tavern and end up causing a fight there. I had no idea where she even got the money to get drunk from, but well

we hardly even saw each other. I was also happy because it was the 22nd of May and I was finally 17. I knew that there wasn't any money for a birthday party, well, at least I begged Malachi not to give me one. It just wasn't fair considering everything he had done for me. He built me a room from scratch and gave me furniture. I was even afraid to ask where

he had gotten the money from, but I was happy to finally give him the space he needed. I promised myself and him that I'd make it up to him one day. I mean, he had given me more than I could have ever imagined. I also managed to apply for Malachi just as I promised Beast, although I hadn't received any news from Harvard. It was a real mission to get a copy of his ID and his matric certificate, but I spun a story and he believed me. I'd also taken some time to start looking for Mama's friend Phinah. I had no idea what her surname was, but Otlile promised to help me look. I'd also started looking for Mama's family members, for some or other reason. I guess I just needed a sense of belonging like most people were yearning for. It was also nearly June exams, so half the time I was tired, but I managed. The first thing I did when I woke up at 5am that day, was to thank my Lord and saviour for yet another year of life.

Hazel: "Father God, it is me again, Hazel. Dear God you have favoured me in ways I could never have imagined. You have pulled me out of the darkest tunnels of which I never even thought I'd ever pull through. I would like to thank you, dear Lord. Thank you for your kindness, your mercy and your grace. Thank you for letting me reach my 17th birthday, without any tough tragedies at that. Thank you for everyone in

my life, and I am still praying that one day my mother and I would get along like a real mother and daughter. Your mercy remains consistent and so does your love. You are indeed a God of love, as promised in Zephaniah 3:17 which says; “The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing.” You are indeed a God of mercy, as promised in Lamentations 3:22 – which says; “The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.” You are indeed a God full of Grace, as said in James 4:6 which says; “The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.” You have given me a gift not many could have today, I woke up and it is only by your grace. Ephesians 2:8 says; “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.” I will be eternally grateful to you, Lord. You have blessed me with immeasurable love and consistence, for that, I ask you to help me be the best I can be. In Jesus Name I pray, Amen.”

From there onwards, I couldn't sleep. I was woken by messages and missed calls from Otlile and Kgaugelo and of course, Mam'Rose. Malachi posted me on his WhatsApp status. He had

been doing that without fail for as long as I could remember. Facebook and Insta was the usual, people from school even wished me a happy birthday – even the least expected person, Mathilda. A simple Happy Birthday message. It was odd, but really nice of her since she never really did that for anyone at all. I didn't expect anything from my mom and sister, and it was actually a norm, so it was okay. Beast also sent me a long, happy birthday message. I got up and decided to embrace the breezy morning, when I found Malachi right outside my door, holding a cake with one candle in the middle.

Malachi: (smiling) “You didn't think you were going to dodge me just like that, did you, birthday girl?”

Hazel: (smiling) “Malachi, I did say no birthday party, didn't I?”

Malachi: “Does a cake mean it's a party?”

Hazel: “Good point. Come in.”

Malachi: "Oh, no. You wanted to watch the sunrise and bask in the ambience of the morning wind, so, let's do it right here."

He lit the candle and looked at me.

Malachi: "Make a wish."

I took a deep breath and closed my eyes. It really didn't take me long to figure out what I wanted to wish for, so I wasted no time and blew out the candle.

Malachi: (smiling) "Happy Birthay, sis."

Hazel: "Dankie, Abuti (Thank you, brother)."

Malachi: "Sit right there, I'm going to get us some dishes and champagne."

Hazel: (laughing) "Bathong wena (Goodness), it is 5:30 am. Besides, who told you that I drink now?"

Malachi: "You only live once. It's your birthday after all."

I chuckled as he went back into his room, leaving me outside under our garden tree holding the cake. It was a beautiful morning. I always loved mornings; I felt that they really brought hope, you know.

2 Corinthians 12:9 - "But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me."

“It is impossible to live without failing at something, unless you live so cautiously, that you might as well not have lived at all – in which case you fail by default.” — Anonymous

Hazel

My brother really made my morning that day. We ate some cake together, reminiscing on the good old days, while sitting underneath our garden tree. Of course, my mother and sister passed us as if nothing was happening, but I didn't mind. I had my brother and that was all that mattered.

Malachi: “Tsamaya o hlapa (Go take a bath). Re kgone go shapa stroll (so we can take a walk).”

Hazel: (surprised) “Re ya kae (Where are we going)?”

Malachi: “You'll see.”

Hazel: “No parties, remember?”

Malachi: “Noted.”

He smiled at me while I took the rest of the cake to my room. The champagne had already got me a little buzzed up. I took a shower and chose to wear a simple jean and Tshirt. I wasn't even sure where he wanted me to go, but I just decided to go with it. As I walked out of my room, I found him waiting right outside for me, dressed in a rather formal manner. His golf was sparkling clean – cleaner than usual.

Hazel: (chuckling) “Malachi, since when do you wear formal clothes? I mean this is the first time I have seen you in a tie since your matric dance.”

Malachi: (smiling) “What can I say? It is a rather auspicious day.”

Hazel: (frowning) “I did say no parties, right?”

Malachi: “Yes, and that is all I promised. Now, shall we?”

He extended his arm for me to hold onto, and he had a devious smile on his face. I knew that smile. He had something big up his sleeve, but he just wouldn't budge. I didn't want him to spend any money on me. He had already done enough for me, by buying me furniture for my room and topping it all off with a very big and comfortable bed. I didn't ask him where he got the money, though. It would have been rude and ungrateful of me.

I decided to play along as we got into the car. He even opened the car door for me as he said to me that he was my chauffeur for the day. He was always pretty much my chauffeur, but I guess I just had to play along. He asked me to record the entire moment, of which I did. He played a list of all my favourite songs, and I just loved singing along with him. It was just so amazing how my brother knew me from the inside out. He was basically the first man I had ever laid my hands on since birth. I knew that without a doubt, the man who'd marry me would have had to have the same character. I think him making me sing along and record ourselves in the car was just a distraction because I had no idea where we were headed. After about half an hour, I realized we were right at the gate of Villa Thai Spa in

Centurion. I hated surprises because I was and still am a cry baby.

Hazel: (teary-eyed) “Malachi, what is this?”

Malachi: (smiling) “Ask no questions, hear no lies, my lady.”

He got out of the car without responding any further and opened my car door. By then, I was already in tears before the main event. I had no idea who I had taken that from because my mother was anything far from a cry baby. I got out of the car with my hand in Malachi's and we walked straight to reception. We were met by two ladies, who were really nice.

Lady 1: (smiling) “Good day, you must be Mr. Makwetla, right?”

Malachi: “Yes, here she is. Please, take all the time you need with her and give her the treat of her life.”

I was so gobsmacked that I just stared at him with words failing to grace my mouth with their presence.

Lady2: (smiling) "We'll take good care of her, I promise."

Hazel: "Malachi, what's happening?"

Malachi: (smiling) "Happy Birthday, Haze. I'll see you later."

With that said, he kissed me on my cheek and left me standing right there. I kept looking back at him, but he just waved goodbye at me and drove off. The ladies took me in while I was still trying to process it all. The spa was so beautiful, I mean it was my very first time in any spa.

Lady 1: "You may get in there to change."

Lady 2: "I'll take your phone. Don't worry, I was strictly instructed to record every moment in here. I wouldn't dare to steal it. Your brother does not mess around."

Hazel: (voice breaking) "I.. I'm sorry... Which treatment will I be getting today?"

Lady 1: "You'll be receiving the full day package, darling."

By full package she meant an entire treatment package which consisted of six treatments. I was so stunned, I was afraid to ask how much it cost. I got undressed in the changing room and I was even given a complimentary gown and slippers, which I was allowed to keep since Malachi had bought them apparently. I walked out and the ladies were waiting for me. The second lady was already filming me as instructed.

Lady 1: "Let's give you your breakfast first, dear."

I was given a complimentary drink which was a choice of either sparkling champagne (alcoholic or non-alcoholic) or juice. I opted for juice, but the first lady motivated me to go for the alcoholic wine to ease my nerves. I wasn't sure about it, but I thought she was an expert. While I took a few pictures of myself, with the second lady's aid, I was given a light breakfast, consisting of pancakes and fruits and some

yoghurt. Afterwards, I was ready for my first session. The wine was buzzing through my body and I was already calm by then. I wasn't sure about drinking that early in the morning, but then you only live once, right? I was taken to one of their rooms and was immediately ordered to lie on my front, with my robe taken off. They started with an entire full body massage, with aromatic oils. That was the first time anyone had ever touched me before in my life. It felt so good, so relieving. That took about 60 minutes, from there I went on to have a full body hot stone massage, and then a spa full body massage, both of them took another 60 minutes each. Furthermore, I was given a facial, along with a head, neck and foot massage, a pedicure and a manicure. I had never felt so relaxed in my life before. It was as if my dramatic life was wiped away from my memory. It was finally lunch time, and I was given a complimentary lunch and drink, while enjoying the beautiful view of the trees. I wasn't really big on pictures and all that, but I absolutely loved the fact that every moment was being captured. After 8 hours, I felt renewed, refreshed and completely blessed to have such a thoughtful idea for my birthday, all thanks to my brother. I posted one video of myself eating in one of the robes on Instagram, with the caption #Birthdayvibes. Both my friends commented, along with Mathilda. I was still surprised as to why she was being so nice to me, but she most probably didn't want to be suspended again or something. My brother

eventually came to fetch me, and I greeted the warm staff. It was indeed an unforgettable day.

Malachi: "So, is it what you expected?"

Hazel: "Abuti (Brother), I absolutely loved it! Yoh, I always see such on tv, but to experience it myself is something else. I can't thank you enough, Abuti (brother). I never imagined I'd ever go to a spa at my age."

Malachi: (laughing) "That's what big brothers are for. I love making you happy. I don't want you to marry the first idiot you lay your eyes on all because he'd be doing nice things for you. These should begin at home."

He had a good point. He was a really good father-figure to me, he treated me really well despite not having the need to. He did it all because he wanted to, and I think that was the fact that touched me whenever I thought about him and all he did to me. I knew I was indeed blessed. Isaiah 41:13 says; "For I, the Lord your God, hold your right hand; it is I who say to you, "Fear not

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I am the one who helps you.”

Hazel: “I had such a good day, although I am saddened it has indeed come to an end.”

Malachi: “Who said the day is over?”

Hazel: (frowning) “What now?”

Malachi: “You'll see.”

Hazel: “No parties, Malachi. You've already done so much.”

Malachi: “Okay.”

He kept driving, leaving me in awe and wonder, I mean it was already after 5pm, and getting dark. It was a Saturday, yes, but I thought I had an eventful day and it was just enough for me. I

realized the direction he took was to Mam'Rose's house. It made sense since I never spent my birthday without seeing her. I thought nothing of it, when he stopped me from getting out of the car once we reached the gate.

Hazel: "Keng (what is it)?"

Malachi took out a red blindfold. He really watched too many movies.

Hazel: (frowning) "Wa bona, bjanong (You see now)?"

Malachi: "Put it on. I promise I'll never surprise you like this again - if you don't like it."

I was curious indeed, so I just gave in. I let him put it on me and he aided me into the house. It was really quiet, with a few noises from people whom I assumed were from the outside rooms. He asked me to watch my step, and I could feel we were entering the house. I couldn't hear anyone, but I could

feel the aura that people were around the room. Once he took off the blindfold, I saw everyone.

Everyone: (screaming) “Surprise!”

I was in awe. My grandmother's entire house was decorated – just for me. She was sitting on a chair, with Kg and Otlile around her, and also Beast. I wasn't really that surprised, since he was my brother's best friend. Mam'Rose looked a little frail, as if she had lost quite a load of weight. Her face wasn't as lively as I was used to seeing it and she had a walking stick in her hand, but I was so happy to see them. Surprises always got the best of me, I bawled in tears, with Malachi comforting me.

Hazel: (crying) “You guys! I told you – No parties!”

They all laughed at me while they gave me huge hugs. I finally went to Mam'Rose and I bent on the floor. I always appreciated her words of comfort and special prayer on birthdays. She looked into my eyes, as if she could indeed see a part of my soul – if not all of it. Everyone was silent, they knew that Mam'Rose took birthdays very seriously.

Mam'Rose: (smiling) “Hazel Hannah Makwetla, my beautiful, golden baby girl. How I wish to see you prosper and become the person you are meant to be. Life has its stumbling blocks, and you will rise above them all and be successful. Know that you look the way you look, are the way you are for a reason. Yes, you grew up without a father, but one day, those who have once let go of you will desperately make their way back to you – in the most fortunate events. When you were born, I knew you were going to glow and shake up a few people's lives, although you still haven't seen it. Many people are envious of you, Hazel, because they see what you can't see. They see the precious gem you are that is destined for greatness. You are one of the few whose blessings remain consistent. Keep praying and grow deeper into faith and you will be blessed in abundance. Your ancestors favour you greatly, and I cannot wait to be one of them who'll look out for you til you breathe your last breath on this earth. Deuteronomy 28:1-14 says; ““And if you faithfully obey the voice of the Lord your God, being careful to do all his commandments that I command you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth. And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, if you obey the voice of the Lord your God. Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the field. Blessed shall be the

fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground and the fruit of your cattle, the increase of your herds and the young of your flock. Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl.” I have raised you well, my darling Hannah. The love you have given your brother shall in turn favour you. Always strive to be yourself, no matter what. Always stay the humble one you are and you will see God's glory and eternal blessings befall you.”

She kissed my cheeks, while the rest chanted “Amen”.

Beast: “Koko (Granny), I don't mean to ruin such a beautiful moment, but can we eat and dance, please? I am starving.”

Mam'Rose: (laughing) “Wa phapa wena (you're so forward).”

I was so happy to see my friends and it was a small, intimate party, just the way I'd have planned it myself. We danced, ate and had so much fun. Mam'Rose was her usual self, but she seemed a bit tired, so she went to bed a lot earlier than usual. She asked me to come see her before I went home. After a few hours, it was finally time to go home. We were still teens, so we couldn't sleep out. I went to see

Mam'Rose, who was already in bed. I knocked first before she let me in.

Mam'Rose: "Tsena (Enter)."

I took a good look at her and it is amazing what one can see without the crowd and noisy atmosphere. I actually saw her face ridden with feeble lines. She was not that old – yet she looked as if she had aged ten years in a spur of weeks.

Hazel: (frowning) "Koko (granny). Are you okay?"

Mam'Rose: (faint smile) "Hazel, come sit next to me."

I sat next to her and she held my hand. Her hand was rather shaky, which scared me. She reached for her drawer in her bedside table and took out a jewellery box and handed it to me.

Hazel: (surprised) "Koko (granny)..."

Mam'Rose: "Open it when you get home. Happy Birthday, my love."

She kissed my forehead and that really made me feel a bit uneasy. Usually people kiss your forehead when they want to say goodbye, isn't it? I looked at her and she was smiling at me like the most beautiful angel I had ever seen.

Mam'Rose: "Go now, I need my rest."

I took one good look at her before leaving and made my way out. Something in my body just shook and gave me an increasingly uneasy feeling. I didn't want to show it to the rest of the clan, as we left. Malachi dropped me off first, and I saw my mother stumbling into the yard. She stopped when she saw me, for once.

Binah: (drunk) "Oh, Hazel, ke wena (it's you). Ah, I thought it would be Bella. She would help me get into the house – eseng wena (not you)."

I kept quiet while trying to unlock my butler gate.

Binah: “And then? O tswa kae (Where do you come from)?”

That was the longest conversation we had had ever since I beat Bella to a pulp.

Hazel: “I went to see koko (granny). It's my birthday.”

Binah: “Oh, kana (I remember). The 22nd of May, how could I possibly forget. The second worst day of my life.”

Yes, she just had to say that and try to ruin my day, but I didn't let her. I quickly ran into my room whilst completely ignoring her. She stumbled and fell a few times, but managed to pick herself up and walk into the house. I took a moment before opening that gift. Something felt to me as if it was the very last gift I'd ever get from Mam'Rose. I opened it and found the most beautiful necklace I'd ever seen in my life. It was that of a purple diamond cross. There was a tiny note in it which read; “wear this at all times and I'll be right with you.” The finality in

those words were the final nail in the coffin. I tried calling her, although I knew she was sleeping, but she didn't answer. After the third call, I let it go. I knelt down and tried to fight away the horrible feeling I had inside of me. I know, I had made immense progress with therapy, but I don't think I was ever prepared to lose her. I tried to sleep, but I just couldn't. I tossed and turned for hours, no matter what I tried. That dull, inexplicable feeling deep within my gut just wouldn't go away. Immediately as midnight struck, I heard Malachi knock on my door. I quickly jumped up and opened the door. I found him frantically staring at me.

Hazel: (worried) "What is it?"

Malachi: "She's gone. Mam'Rose o re tlogetse (Mam'Rose has left us)."

I knew right there and then, that she was saying goodbye on my birthday.

3 John:1 – 2 - "Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, as it goes well with your soul."

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“Life imposes things on you that you can’t control, but you still have the choice of how you’re going to live through this.” —
Celine Dion

Hazel

I felt as if my soul had temporarily left my body. It just didn't even make any sense. I looked at Malachi and blinked a few times hoping he'd say that he was pulling an awful prank on me, but he was dead serious.

Hazel: (shocked) “What do you mean Mam'Rose is gone? I mean, I don't understand.”

Malachi: “I mean she has passed on, Hazel. I'm sorry.”

It took literally less than ten seconds for the shock waves to start travelling throughout my body. I felt as if my heart was about to stop, my stomach was entangled in all sorts of knots, while my legs felt numb.

Hazel: (shocked) "I... I think I'm going to be sick."

I tried to take a step further, but nearly fell onto the ground. Malachi caught me just in time. I felt dizzy all of a sudden as he put me on the couch. His words felt like distant echoes, while I had the entire previous day, my 17th birthday playing like a movie in my mind.

Malachi: "Sit tight, I'm going to get you some water with a bit of sugar."

I was trying to think how I could have missed all the signs, until my mind took me back to the day we won the hockey game, and went out to eat with Mam'Rose. Her words were ingrained into my mind; "When I'm gone, I want you guys to remember me for the way I was. Please, don't even think of wearing black at my funeral and hiring pastor Mdluli to be the officiator. I'd haunt you all." I remembered well how she was giving us strict instructions on how to officiate her funeral. But what on earth killed her? Malachi didn't seem too shocked, so he must have known something. It really hurt me, I mean why on earth keep

such a deep secret from me if she was indeed ill? He gave me a glass of water.

Malachi: "Here."

He sat right opposite me and I got to take a good look at him. He looked down the moment I didn't take my eyes off him and I knew he was hiding something from me.

Hazel: "Why didn't you tell me?"

Malachi: "What do you mean?"

Hazel: "Why didn't you tell me she was ill?"

He was a bit stunned, so I knew my suspicions were indeed confirmed.

Malachi: (sigh) "Try to sleep, I'll see you later. I have to take care of her body."

Hazel: (teary) "I'm coming with you."

Malachi: "No. You're not ready. Beast will be there with me. It's late and cold. Stay in bed. I'll see you later."

He got up swiftly and left me on the couch. Tears started streaming down my face, slowly. My throat felt so dry, even though my saliva and the water kept hydrating it. The thing about grief is that no matter what you try, do or say, the pain won't go away until it has been released by the mourner. My granny was gone, and I just didn't even see it coming. I started questioning so many things; I started questioning God, my existence and everything that was happening around me. Surely if God really loved me then He would have kept her alive long enough to see me succeed and give her what she deserved in life. Why would He decide that my mother is the only person that I deserved in my life apart from Malachi? It had barely been a day, but I felt as if I was slowly sinking into a deep hole. After overloading my brain with deep thoughts, I must have fallen asleep.

Mam'Rose: "Hazel."

Hazel: (frowning) “Koko (granny)? You're alive? Malachi said that - “

Mam'Rose: (interrupting) “No, I'm gone. He wasn't lying to you.”

Hazel: (crying) “Why didn't you tell me that you were dying? Why?”

Mam'Rose: “What good would that have done, Hazel? You were going to be depressed and deprive yourself of living all because you were going to be scared about my death. I didn't mean to hurt you in any way, remember, Malachi knew because he saw it in a dream. I don't want you looking for someone to hold accountable, I want you to go out there and live your life – the way I raised you to.”

Hazel: “But how when you're gone? We had so many dreams and plans. I had so much I wanted to do for you.”

Mam'Rose: "Our timing is not God's, my child. I am safe and happy where I am. I'll be sure to look over you all day, every day. Rejoice, for God is with you. Learn to be at peace with death, for it is a reality and something all of us have in common. I love you, Hazel, stay strong and never give up on your dreams."

I woke up for some reason and realized the sun was already out. I looked at my phone and it was 6am. I felt wetness on my cheek and as I held it, I realized I had tears coming out. My room felt so warm, I could still smell Mam'Rose's presence. I then remembered that it was just a dream, but it felt as if she was in the room. She was still so beautiful. She told me to accept the situation, even though it was going to prove to be hard, but I had to try. I couldn't cry forever, but it was not going to be easy. I tried taking a shower and it too proved to be a mind-numbing task. I just wanted to be in bed, then I remembered one of our lessons in Life Orientation was about mental health. The feeling of being uninterested in doing daily tasks, were one of the first signs of depression. I just had to pull through – I had to. I tried making myself some food, but halfway through boiling some water for tea, and spreading one of the slices I took out to eat, I got bored and decided not to continue. Mam'Rose was very well known in Pheli and before

8am that Sunday, almost everyone was talking about her on the Pheli Facebook page. They were saying good things and most of them were telling people how she helped them. I was reeling in the news, while crying. My friends were texting and calling to check up on me. They even wanted to come see me, but I asked them not to. I just needed to be alone. After what felt like eternity, Malachi came back.

Malachi: "Hazel, ke boile (I'm back)."

Hazel: (teary) "What killed her?"

Malachi: "Cancer, ovarian."

Hazel: (crying) "How am I going to cope without her, Malachi?"

Malachi: "You will. Remember, for as long as you are still alive, it means that God isn't done with you. I don't want you to stress yourself like this. June Exams are coming and you have to do your level best. Remember the ultimate goal here, for you to be the best Psychologist that Pheli has ever seen."

Hazel: (sniffing) “Psychiatrist. I want to be a Psychiatrist.”

Malachi: “Even better. Hang onto that goal and do it for Mam’Rose.”

I nodded as he hugged and comforted me. I had no idea what the future led, but I knew that it was all going to be alright. A few days passed, and life had been a little hectic. I was asked to attend extra sessions with Dr. Speelman, due to the fact that I had become seemingly withdrawn. I was just overwhelmed with everything that had been going on, and the planning of Mam’Rose’s funeral made everything worse. My mother acted like she just didn’t give a flying fuck about her death, while her mysterious daughter emerged out of nowhere, demanding everything to be handed over to her. We had no idea she even had a daughter, but Malachi knew since he just knew everything about Mam’Rose. It was a battle and a half, but Malachi refused to give her a single cent. He even managed to get her removed from the property. Malachi was organizing the entire funeral with Beast’s assistance. I was only doing the minor tasks, like picking out her last outfit, organizing florists, and all that. I was really glad that Malachi kept asking me for

input. I felt that it gave me some sort of closure. It was the day before the funeral, and Malachi had asked me to go and bathe Mam'Rose and also clothe her. I wasn't sure if I was even ready, although I kept insisting throughout the entire week that I wanted to do it. He didn't want to let the morgue employees do it, so he wanted to give her something meaningful. As we drove to the morgue, I was growing increasingly weary. I had never actually seen a body of a deceased person before, and it felt as if it was going to be worse than that. Mam'Rose was alive just a few days prior, and now I was going to see her lifeless, lying on a metal table like a doll.

Malachi: "Are you ready?"

Hazel: (nodding) "Yes. I think so."

Malachi: "I'll be right with you. It's just that, I can't touch the body. It wouldn't be right."

I nodded while I could feel my entire body trembling. He walked hand in hand with me and threw the last bit of his cigarette away. We were met by one of the workers at the

mortuary. She led me in and I felt cold almost immediately. I had always seen morgue fridges on tv, but I got to experience it in reality.

Worker: "There she is. I'll leave you guys right to it."

She had a plastic covering her body all the way to her neck, and her face looked so tranquil. I had never seen her so at peace before. I found myself staring at her, with both fear and intrigue.

Malachi: "Are you okay?"

Hazel: (nodding) "Yes. Where do I start?"

Malachi: "Anywhere you want. Remember, this is her last time being bathed and prepared before we sent her off. Speak to her, so you don't be afraid."

I nodded while he was standing right behind me. I took out all the necessary cloths that I had brought with me to bathe her. I

had a bucket of warm water that Malachi requested for me to use next to me. I started washing her face, and with every single touch I added onto her body, I felt a tinge of sadness. I tried speaking to her, but words failed me. I finished washing her, as dignified as possible, and then I clothed her in her favourite white dress. It was quite funny because it was still new. When I was going through her clothes, it had a big note on it which read, "Bury me in this". I couldn't speak, but the tears were doing the work for me. Malachi stood up and held my hand.

Malachi: "Thank you for doing this. Let me take over from here."

I just nodded while standing next to him. He then started to gently massage her ears and spoke close to her face.

Malachi: "Koko (granny), you've raised us so well. You have loved us unconditionally, and for that, we shall always be thankful. You have lived, you have loved and you did God's work. It is now your time to leave this earth and be one with your ancestors. Watch over us and guide us, don't look back. We accept God's fate. Come, Hazel, we can go now."

I took one last look at her and we walked out. I had to be busy that entire day, as we had to wait for her body to arrive home at her house. My mom was nowhere to be found, while Bella didn't care about helping us. Otlile and Kg were such darlings. They came to assist, along with a very surprising guest Dr. Speelman. I didn't expect her there, but she came wrapped in a doek and all, and assisted with giving people cookies and tea. The body had to arrive at 5pm, so Malachi and Beast were organizing a few gents to cook the meat at the back of the house. The tenants were really taken aback by her death, and they were all there assisting us as well. It was really beautiful to see so many members of the community and of the church coming together. I barely had to do anything. In black culture, it is custom for someone to sit on the mattress, where the deceased used to sleep, so since I was the only one close to her, I had to do it. Kg and Otlile were sitting with me in there, and I was never alone. People came and gave their condolences, usually in forms of money, and I kept them safely. Mam'Rose's daughter, Gontse, was told not to set foot at the house, or she'd have gotten arrested again. I was called out to come and welcome Mam'Rose's body into the house. Malachi had hardly had any sleep that entire week, and he was doing the work Mam'Rose asked him to do. Usually, an elder of the family

does all that, but we hardly knew anything about her family, so Malachi was in charge. I saw the mortuary car opening the door, and seeing that white casket, I knew that the finality had hit home. The church people led a song and the rest of the people started singing, while the casket was being carried into the yard. People started crying even before the casket entered the house. Before they entered, Malachi had to pray for it. He did so, and they put it in. I was in the empty lounge, we had to take out all the couches and tv to allow for more space and to allow mourners to come and offer their condolences. It was not a great feeling, and it just evoked all sorts of emotions that I had been running from the entire week. We had to view her, and it was the most painful thing I had to do. Yes, I saw her in the mortuary, but seeing her lying in that casket, in her own lounge, felt like the ultimate reality. I wailed and was taken to her bedroom. I didn't even see who was holding me, until I heard her voice.

Dr. Speelman: "Here, drink this."

She gave me a glass of water. I gulped it and managed to finish it. Sugar water has always been a cure for a bereaved heart, well, a temporary cure.

Dr. Speelman: "I know what you're going through, but believe me when I say that you're going to be more than alright."

Hazel: (crying) "I don't think so."

Dr. Speelman: "Yes, you don't think so right now, but as time goes, you will. Rest, I'll come see you a bit later."

She went out while Kg and Otlile came to sleep with me in the bedroom. I must have dozed off while ignoring all the activity inside and outside the house. The morning of the funeral finally came. The school gave the three of us an exception that we wouldn't be going to school. The Principal was very understanding too. I got up early along with my two friends and we got ready. She specifically asked us not to wear any black, or else that she would haunt us for all eternity. We respected her wishes and ensured that no one wore black – not even as an accessory. In the morning, the church pastor held a brief service in the tent just outside of the gate, so we all gathered there just before he was about to start. Malachi was so busy cooking the entire night, along with volunteers from the community, but he managed to come and sit in for the

service. The beautiful coffin was right in the middle, just in front of the podium, draped by the beautiful, purple blanket I had bought her. It is said that it keeps the deceased warm from underneath the grave. Her favourite colour was purple, and ever since I had known her, it became mine too. Her beautiful picture was laid right beside the coffin. I was proud to be a part of that process. It was rather packed and those who didn't get seats, didn't mind standing right outside of the tent to catch a glimpse of the service.

Pastor: “Good morning, my fellow people. We are gathered here today to celebrate the life of Rose Moloko. Yes, in other circumstances, we would be saying that we're here to bury her, but as instructed, we're all dressed in white. Just like Rose, she had a heart filled with purity, and nothing and no one can dispute that. She was sent here by God himself, and just like many others, her time on this earth is up. We too are faced with the same fate eventually, so we should vow to make the most of our time here whilst we still can. Hebrews 11:3 says; “By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.” Everyone who knew her, knew she was good at seeing the unseen. That was her Godgiven gift and she put it

to good use. So many people sitting in this tent, can vouch for that and say that Rose helped them incredibly.”

While the pastor was about to continue with his moving words, in stormed Gontse, Mam'Rose's daughter along with people we didn't even recognize. They were about ten if not more.

Gontse: (shouting) “Ashibale, Malome (There they are, uncle)!”

Oh, the so called uncle she was talking to, could be taken by one hit from Malachi if he dare tried.

Malachi: (angrily) “What is this? Didn't the police tell you not to bother coming here or else there'll be trouble?!”

Gontse: (shouting) “I'm not leaving here without my mother's body! I told you that you have absolutely no right to bury MY mother!”

There she was again, making an incredibly irritating scene, and Malachi just wasn't having it. He was so tired, sleep-deprived

and I could tell by his reaction that he was just down-right annoyed.

Malachi: (angrily) “You have exactly ten seconds to get the fuck out of here, before I drag you out of here myself!”

His eyes were bewildered. He wasn't playing with them.

Uncle: “Okay, at least let us be part of the funeral. Let us bury my sister in peace.”

Malachi: “Your sister didn't want you here and you know very well why.”

Uncle: “Please, let us just be here and we will leave afterwards.”

Gontse: (angrily) “Don't you dare negotiate with these dogs,
Malome (Uncle) - “

Uncle: (reprimanding) “Thola wena (you shut up)!”

Malachi: “Fine, join the rest of the members – outside the tent.”

The rest of the family noticed that we weren't playing. I was not in the mood for any drama to be honest, and seeing how she handled the entire situation, proved everything right. I knew that whatever it was that Mam'Rose was angry about, she had every right to be. Gontse was ill-mannered, she never visited nor called Mam'Rose from what I gathered although I didn't know the entire story. Something told me that she was after money, of which Mam'Rose wasn't rich, but knowing that her mother had all those rooms built on her property, she wanted every single one of them. She didn't even look good for someone her age. She was most probably in her early 40s, but she looked ten years older. Alcohol kills a person's youth faster than any other thing I knew of. Malachi signalled to the pastor to continue and so he did, gracefully so. I loved every single moment of that service, my grandmother's few friends from church spoke so well of her as well as some members of the community. They were all indeed touched by her death, and instead of us crying that she had left us, we were crying because of joy, the joy she had brought to us over the

years. She was the most selfless woman I knew. Sure, she had her own demons, like most of us, but she never hid herself from others. She always said that pretence was an immense waste of time, whereas you could actually cut off a whole lot of fake relationships if you present your true self, before they emerge and grow into toxic ones. I promised myself to at least try and be half the woman she was.

Revelation 21:4 - "He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."

41

“Health is the greatest gift, contentment the greatest wealth, faithfulness the best relationship.” —

Buddha

Hazel

The funeral went so well and my grandmother received the most dignified funeral I'd ever witnessed. Indeed, we kept it short and sweet as instructed. And yes, she did receive her white doves and we released them just as she wanted. Gontse was so distraught, or she was pretending to be, I don't know, but then, she was crying hysterically almost throughout the entire service at the burial site. Once we came back, we had the dj play all her favourite music and people were drinking after the food was served. In the townships, we call it “Di Visnons”, which means after tears in English. I only changed my shoes and put slippers on. I was already tired of sitting on the mattress, so I sat down with my two best friends and relaxed in the tent while catching up. Malachi was by then also with his friends. While we were eating some cookies and cold drink, Gontse appeared yet again out of the blue. That chick was slowly becoming a nuisance.

Gontse: “Hazel, kopa go bua le wena (may I speak to you)?”

Hazel: “Can't this wait? I'm really exhausted.”

Gontse: “It won't take long. Since she was my mother, I'd like you to return the keys and surrender all the monies given to you throughout the week, please.”

She had her hand stretched out even. The unashamed nerve of that woman.

Hazel: (shocked) “Excuse me?”

Gontse: “O nkutlwile (you heard me).”

Otlile and Kg were quiet throughout, and I must admit, it must have been hard for Otlile to do because keeping quiet was really not her speciality.

Otlile: (laughing) “Hehe, ja, neh (oh, man). I've seen it all.”

Gontse: “O reng na wena (What are you even saying)? I'm not talking to you in any case, I'm talking to Mr. Jacobs.”

Otlile: “I don't care. We're all here, so if you're speaking to Hazel in our presence, then you're speaking to the three of us. Bona mo, sesi (look here, sis), I don't care who you are or which hole you crawled out of, but you being here was a favour, okay? You have a restraining order against you, which means being on this property is against the law. Hazel has tolerated you long enough. You never came to visit nor did you even call to check up on your own mother. Now that she's gone you want to cash in all her hard work. If I were you, I'd go join the rest of your family and drink with them. Don't ever bother her like that again, or else you'll have to deal with me.”

She looked a bit frightened by Otlile, I mean she was a bit chubby amongst the three of us and she could beat someone senseless when mad.

Gontse: “Fine, at least mfe klipa nyana ke reke set nyana (at least give me R100 to buy a set of beers).”

The nerve. We just looked at her until she got the message and left us in peace. I couldn't understand how her mind worked to be honest. My mother and Bella were nowhere to be seen the entire week, so which better way to make herself be seen than the after tears of a woman who was once a mother figure to her? She stumbled amongst people until she made her way to our table. Malachi was just opposite me, and his brief smile faded away really quickly once he saw my mother.

Binah: “Yes, banyana (girls). Le reng mowe (how are you)? Le nwa eng (what are you drinking)?”

She smelled like half the brewery itself yet she still wanted more alcohol.

Kg: (softly) “Aowa (no), Mama Hazel (Hazel's mother), we don't drink.”

Binah: (chuckling) “Oh, I forgot. You are the goody-two-shoes tripod of Atteridgeville. You guys should be very careful, you know. Men will be all over those innocent thighs of yours.

Everyone can tell you three are virgins, but I know my Hazel won't be one for very long. That's what happens when you decide to hang out with gangsters.”

I couldn't even hide my frustrations any more. She literally went out of her way each and every time to mock and antagonize me.

Hazel: (irritated) “Mama, o nyaka eng mo (what do you want here)?”

Binah: “O ra bjang (what do you mean)? Ke tlile di visonseng (I came to the after tears), just like everyone else.”

Hazel: “Then what are you doing here – on our table?”

Binah: “Hehe, waitse wena (you know), Hazel, you think you're the next best thing since sliced bread, don't you? You think that just because you're light, you're pretty, just because you speak so eloquently, you're smarter than the rest of us. Well, I have news for you – you're not. Bella is prettier and way smarter

than you'll ever be. I don't even get why you want to be a Psychologist.”

Hazel: “Psychiatrist - “

Binah: “Whatever! That's for stupid people who couldn't be doctors.”

Hazel: “Oh? People like you? I mean you wanted to be one, didn't you? Then what happened? Oh, wait, I'm sorry, you had Malachi and then me and we stopped you from doing all that, right?!”

She got up and tried to lunge at me, but stumbled aback. I was so angry, I just didn't want to stop. I was so filled with intense rage, that I just wished she had hit me, perhaps then she would have released all the anger she had against a child she gave birth to.

Hazel: (angrily) “Mpethe (hit me), Mama, Mpethe (hit me)! It is what you want to do, isn't it?! Kill me if you wish! You should've done that a long time ago!”

Binah: “Believe me, I tried! I tried to kill you – both of you but you just refused to fucking die!”

I marched right in front of her and looked her dead in the eyes.

Hazel: “Now is your chance! Do it right now!”

Kg: “Hazel, leave her.”

My mother grabbed my throat weakly with her trembling hands. The power she had wasn't enough to choke anyone. Everyone was gasping out in shock, while Malachi came running towards us really quickly. He grabbed my mother away from me, but I just wasn't satisfied. I was burning with fierce fury, and I felt I was about to go on rampage had no one decided to stop me. I was about to go after her, when Beast gently put his hands around my shoulders.

Beast: "Girls, I'm taking her for a short walk. I'll be right back."

I just saw Malachi take my mother and shove her into his car as he drove off with her. I could never understand why he never killed her for all he did to him. Beast grabbed me gently and enforced my hand in his. I could feel the contrast between the two hands, mine was fiery hot, burning with anger, while his was nice and warm, filled with serenity. For someone so widely feared amongst our neighbourhood, he could be one of the calmest guys I knew. I didn't say anything and neither did he. We just walked while the tears just wouldn't stop racing down my cheeks for a few minutes. My heart was beating abruptly while my head was pounding at the same pace as my heartbeat. Eventually, I managed to calm down. How? I had no idea. I wasn't even aware that I could turn into an enraged person from time to time.

Beast: (smiling) "Feeling better?"

Hazel: (sigh) "I'm so embarrassed."

Beast: "There is absolutely no need to be. Why?"

Hazel: (shrugging) "I mean, the way I reacted..."

Beast: "Hazel, is it the first time your mother has ever provoked you as such?"

I shook my head, embarrassed.

Beast: "What did you do the previous times when she did that?"

Hazel: "I don't know... Usually I'd just ignore her."

Beast: "You ignored her until you eventually burst when you beat up Bella, right?"

Oh, of course he knew about that. He and Malachi practically spoke about everything. I just nodded in shame.

Beast: “Malachi tells me you have therapy twice a week. So, tell me, why haven't you tried to control your anger?”

Hazel: (embarrassed) “I honestly don't know.”

Beast: “Let me tell you a short story about the danger of anger. I know a guy, well, I once knew him. He was a very quiet guy and hardly said much to anyone, really. He hardly had any friends, no girlfriend – nothing. Then, one day, someone at school provoked him. He tried ignoring that guy, but he just kept coming. He provoked him the entire day, until the guy snapped in Mechanical Engineering class. He completely lost it when the bully was all up in his face. He took one of the metal objects and stabbed the guy right in the eye. It only took him one shot to kill the dude. Because everyone didn't expect it from him, they became afraid of him. Even though he didn't go to prison, that is something he now has to live with his entire life. What I am saying to you is that anger and wrath can bring about so much calamity. It only takes one moment to do the unthinkable, whereas you could have avoided all that. Your mother is no good for you, I totally get it, but you also have so many unresolved issues, and I'd like you to take the time to

work through them – the same way Malachi worked through his.”

Hazel: (sigh) “It's not that easy, Beast.”

Beast: “It actually is. Identify the problem, speak to your psychologist about it or write about it in a diary or something – meditate, anything to keep you from hurting someone. I don't want to see you making the same mistakes your mother has made. You are too bright for that.”

He managed to calm me down. I had no idea how he did it, but he did.

Hazel: “Thank you, I'll try.”

Beast: “Do that. Now, let's go back.”

We walked back, completely oblivious to the fact that we were walking hand in hand. People were staring and whispering, but we thought it was the usual. People used to stare at me all the

time, that it became a norm for me eventually. Malachi was talking to Otlile and Kg and he frowned when he saw Beast and I. Only then, did I realize that my hand was in his, so I quickly let go.

Malachi: “Le tswa kae (where do you two come from)?”

Beast: “I just took her for a walk. She was really angry.”

Malachi: “Hmm, are you going to be alright, Haze? I just need to go somewhere really quickly. I'll be right back.”

Hazel: (nodding) “I'll be fine.”

Beast: “O ya kae (where are you going)?”

Malachi: “Come with me. Lona (you guys), if someone tries to bother you again, go inside the house.”

We agreed and they left. Of course, Kg and Otlile stared at me.

Hazel: (frowning) "What?"

Otlile: "So you're just going to do us like that? You're going to completely ignore the fact that you didn't just take a walk with Beast, in broad daylight? You two were walking like a couple, dude."

Kg: "You were even ignoring all the stares, which you don't do very often."

Otlile: "Yeah, so, what's up with that? Are you two like, a couple?"

Hazel: "What? Don't be insane, guys. He is my brother's friend."

Kg: "That doesn't answer the question, though."

Otlile: "Yeah, and you hesitated."

Hazel: "Please, Beast is not my boyfriend, okay? I don't even have a boyfriend and besides, he is what? 8 years older than me? Come on, guys."

Otlile: "If you say so, but that's not what people think."

Hazel: "I don't care what people think. You encouraged me not to care, didn't you?"

Otlile: "Yeah, but - "

Hazel: "But what?"

Otlile: "Nothing, just be careful. We're almost at the end of our high school careers. The last thing we need is complications like boyfriends."

Kg: "I think we should make a pact."

Hazel: "A pact?"

Kg: "Yes, none of us vow to date until the very last day of our matric paper."

I was up for it since I hadn't even had a boyfriend to begin with in any case. I had no one in mind and I didn't want to begin dating either.

Otlile: "Deal."

Hazel: "You're on."

Kg: "Good."

Otlile: "Uhm, hypothetically speaking, say one of us breaks that pact. Then what?"

Kg and I both laughed.

Kg: "Well, then, I guess you should pay a fine."

Otlile: "Name it."

Kg: "I don't know. A day at the spa – for all of us."

Otlile: "I can live with that."

Hazel: "Keng o kare (why does it seem as if) you are planning on giving up on it any way?"

Otlile: "Don't be silly. I can stay a virgin for that long. I'm not as naughty as you think I am, you know."

We laughed and carried on with our usual banter.

Malachi

I had had such a demanding week. With planning Mam'Rose's funeral and dealing with all the drama Gontse was dishing out, I was practically living off energy drinks that entire week. I hadn't had a chance to do a few jobs as Dragon asked us to, and I didn't mind losing a few Rands to be honest. I wanted to give my grandmother the funeral she deserved. It was the least I could do. After taking my mother back home, even though she tried to ruin the last bit of the day, Dragon called me while I was on my way to Mam'Rose's house. I was in the car with Beast, and I could tell that he and my sister were getting close. I had no problem with him as a person, but I didn't want my sister to be thinking about boys. She was too young for that.

Malachi: "So, what were you and Hazel talking about?"

Beast: "Nothing major, I was just coaching her on her anger and how to manage it."

Malachi: "She has her psychologist for that."

Beast: "I was just trying to help her. Besides, she has been going to therapy for months. You see it working out for her?"

Malachi: "What are you trying to say? Dr. Speelman helped me. She can help Hazel too."

Beast: "Hazel is not you and I am in no way doubting Dr. Speelman's methods. I just think that you should try new methods, you know."

Malachi: "Such as?"

Beast: "Stop shielding her from the truth. Expose her to it. Be honest with her and tell her everything. It worked out for you, didn't it?"

Malachi: "That was different."

Beast: "Come on, Malachi. You have seen the anger streak she has. If she's not careful she might end up fighting at school. She needs to know the truth so that she can be settled. At least let Binah tell her the truth about her father. Just like she did to

you. That way, she can find a way to heal and face life head on.”

Malachi: “I'll think about it.”

Beast: “Cool.”

Malachi: “Off the record, I hope you're not planning on dating my sister.”

Beast: “I'm not.”

Malachi: “Good.”

Beast: “Alright then.”

We made our way to Dragon's house and found him already anxiously waiting on us.

Dragon: "Wow, you two look rather dapper today."

Malachi: "It was my grandmother's funeral."

Dragon: "So I've heard. What an eventful one at that."

Beast: "Why are we here?"

Dragon: "Straight to the chase. Since you two haven't been doing anything this whole week and basically gave yourselves a week off, I have a big job for you today."

Beast: "What kind?"

Dragon: "Cash-in-transit. I have an inside man, one of the guys who'll be handling the money, and I need you to rob the van that is on its way as we speak."

Beast: (worried) "But... Malachi isn't equipped for such."

Dragon: "Equipped or not. He can decide for himself. This time, you both get to walk away with R1 million to split amongst yourselves. Do a clean job, I might add something extra in there."

I could see the look Beast's face, but half a million rand could do me just fine. I could be able to leave that life – for good.

Malachi: "I'll do it."

Dragon: "I like the sound of that. Now, you have approximately 15 minutes before the van offloads the money from all the atms at the garage across the corner. After that, you need to drive to my second house, where I'll meet you."

Beast: "Fine. Let's go."

Dragon: "No, you can't take that jalopy you call a car. Here, take the Mercedes. No

one will suspect two good-looking guys like you, in white suits to add on top if it. Don't forget to wear your masks. And do not damage my car.”

Malachi: “Noted.”

We got into the car, and I saw how displeased Beast was, but I was too focused on the job at hand.

Beast: “You don't have to do this, Malachi.”

Malachi: “We don't have a choice. Besides, it will be our last job.”

Beast: “I won't lie, but I have a bad feeling about this one.”

I didn't respond to him, because the truth is that I also had the same bad feeling, but usually I ignored it. That day, I had no idea what came over me. The idea of having half a million rand in my hands by the end of that day, just blew me over. I felt I could get away with it if I did it just that once.

Proverbs 30:5 - “Every word of God proves true; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him.”

“Live in the sunshine, swim the sea, drink the wild air.” — Ralph Waldo Emerson

Malachi

Dragon and I were dressed in suits, and ready to go. We were ordered to go rob the cash-in-transit van that was going to collect money from the atm's at the nearby garage. It wasn't that bad since it was in the area – the bad news about that was that it would have been quite easy for people to recognize Beast and I. Perhaps not facially, but our body structures and the fact that we had white suits on meant that we had just gone to Mam'Rose's funeral. Everyone was up and about. It was a Saturday, which meant there were functions almost everywhere in the area. I felt uneasy, but I still went ahead and did it – biggest mistake of my life. Mam'Rose was most probably turning in her grave. She was barely cold in the ground, and there I was, already preparing myself to rob a cash van. I was ashamed, but I still prayed before the job anyway. I know, most people would call me a hypocrite, but why wouldn't you pray? All I wanted was to do something to ensure that my family had a future and something to eat – even if I had

to die during the event. I was deep in thought, smoking, while Beast wasn't even thinking of a smoke.

Beast: "Get yourself out of that madness in your head, Malachi. It is nearly time to go."

The two guys went in, while the driver was in the vehicle. One was outside of course, holding a gun and ensuring that no one got anywhere near the vehicle, while the other got the keys out and started getting busy with the atm's. I immediately knew that the guy with the gun, was not our guy because he seemed too serious for that. The guy who was busy unlocking and unloading the money from the machines, was too fidgety and his eyes were wandering everywhere. It was as if he was looking for our car.

Beast: "You see that one right there? That's our guy."

I was right. We waited patiently for them to offload the money, while they made one more stop. They headed into the garage and took money from there. That took an extra 10 minutes from our time. We were about to leave as they guy was

dragging his feet with the bags of money, when we saw a police car in one of the filling stations.

Malachi: "Shit, the cops."

Beast: "That has never stopped us before. Come on, we gotta go before we lose this chance."

My heart was beating way too fast. I wasn't even thinking straight. I just decided to go with it. It was now or never. We got our masks on and headed right towards the guys. The one with the gun was about to shoot, but we quickly apprehended him. The idiot with the bag didn't even waste any time, he threw the one he had in his hands, while swiftly going into the van and taking three more bags. Beast threw them to me, while I threw them in the car. By then, people started spreading, running around while some were screaming. That was our mistake. The policemen trying to fill up heard everything and immediately we were caught in a near-impossible situation.

Policeman1: (pointing gun) "Alright! Put your guns down, fellas. No one needs to get hurt here!"

Beast: “You put down your gun, motherfucker.”

I could have sworn I saw two guys in the van – yet only one was out and pointing his gun at Beast. I looked around trying to see where the other one was, and just my luck, he was right behind me.

Policeman2: “Freeze!”

I did the unthinkable, I shot him in the stomach out of impulse, and the next thing I knew, people were running around, while bullets were flying. Beast shot the other cop in his thigh, while the one guy we had apprehended managed to grab his gun. He shot at Beast, and then at me, but he missed – or at least I thought he did. The bullets hit the front of the Mercedes, uncontrollably, until Beast shot him twice in both thighs as well. I was in so much shock, it took me a while to register what had just happened. Both policemen were groaning, along with the injured security guard. They were all on the floor, and people were screaming.

Beast: "Get in the car! Bro, get in the fucking car!"

Only when Beast started banging the car, that was when I caught up and my mind shook me back to reality. I got into the car with so much adrenaline rush throughout my body. I drove as fast as I could out of Atteridgeville into Soshanguve. Luckily, the car we were driving was an Automatic, so I only had to use one of my feet. What surprised me was halfway through the drive, I started feeling numbness and cold in my left leg.

Beast: "Dintshang (what's up)? Why are you turning your face like that?"

Malachi: "I... I don't know... My leg feels weird."

Beast: (shouting) "Shit! You got hit! Pull over!"

Malachi: "I can't. People will see us. We're nearly there."

Beast looked at me with so much concern.

Beast: "That will take forever. You'll lose more blood than you already have. Turn here."

I managed to drive, which was rather surprising.

Malachi: "Where are we going?"

Beast: "To my aunt's house. She's a Nurse. She'll help us."

He directed me to the house, until we made it. Oddly, he had a key for the gate as well. The aunt looked young and very happy to see him.

Aunt: (smiling) "Bethuel! This is a nice surprise."

Beast: "Shh, Aunty, wa rasa (you're making noise). I need your help."

As soon as I drove into the yard, Bethuel closed the gate. He rushed to my side and the aunt was shocked.

Aunt: (shocked) “Mara keng tsona tse (what on earth is this)?!”

Beast: “Please, aunty. I need your help. Malachi, can you walk?”

I tried to walk out, but only my right leg had sensation, the left one had none. I dropped onto the ground and Beast quickly got me up.

Aunt: “Yoh, yoh, yoh (oh, oh, oh, no)! Quickly, get him inside the house!”

He did as told and carefully placed me onto the couch. I was starting to feel a bit dizzy and disorientated.

Aunt: “Make sure he stays awake, wena (you), Bethuel! Let me go get my kit.”

Beast: “Malachi, mfo (bro), stay awake!”

I tried with everything in me to stay away, but I was in and out of consciousness. Each time I fell asleep, Malachi would slap me back to reality. He and his aunt were working rapidly against time to save me, I suppose. I could hear bits and pieces of conversations in between my consciousness.

Aunt: “Ne le etsang (what were you doing)? I thought you said you were done with this shit?”

Beast: “Come on, aunty. Ro ja eng (what are we going to eat)?”

Aunt: “You are way too smart for this. For someone who went to such an elite school and who even played rugby and chess, wang makatsa (you never fail to surprise me).”

Beast: “I did what I had to do.”

Aunt: “It is done. I stitched him up, but you have to go. You know how your uncle feels about you.”

Beast: "Yeah, I know. Hold on, I'll be right back."

He quickly went out, while the aunt kept trying to wake me up.
About two minutes later

Beast came back with some cash in his hands.

Beast: "Here, take this."

Aunt: "No, no, no, Beast. You know I have never asked you for anything."

Beast: "It is my thank you to you. I know, you're risking so much for us."

Aunt: "What will I do with all this money?"

Beast: "Go shopping or something. I owe you my life, aunty."

Aunt: "Okay, but don't make this a habit. Now, go before someone sees you."

Beast carried me out and placed me into the car. By then I was half-awake.

Beast: "Malachi, we need to stay focused. We also need to go into hiding – just until you gather enough strength to be able to walk again."

Malachi: "Where are we going to go?"

Beast: "To an ex girlfriend of mine who stays right here in Sosha. We also have to ditch the car later tonight."

Malachi: "Okay."

He got into the driver's seat and drove off. By then it was a little dark, I assumed it was already after 6pm.

Malachi: "Hey, Beast. I'm sorry."

Beast: "It's okay. Don't worry about it."

Beast

I knew that that day's job wasn't going to end well – I just knew it. Even after I told Malachi, he completely ignored me. I couldn't blame him because we both went and did the job together – despite my disapproval. Greed is something really dangerous. Out of all the jobs I had done, that was by far the most dangerous one. My friend got caught in the firing line – it should have been me. I should have known better than to keep involving him into the madness I called life. I could handle it, but as for him, it was another story. I parked right at Sonto's gate. She was one of my recent exes. She dumped me for the life I lived yet she never fell short of anything. She called the money, blood money, even though I took good care of her, but well, that was people for you. Luckily she had her own house, so I didn't have to worry about anything. I hooted until she came to the gate. I switched off the car lights, because I knew that she was never going to open had she seen the bullet-ridden body of the car.

Sonto: (shocked) “Bethuel?! O beya keng mo (what brings you here)?”

Beast: “Open the gate and I'll tell you.”

She saw my blood soaked clothes and was immediately against the decision she was about to take.

Sonto: (shocked) “No! What is that on your clothes? Is that blood?! I'm sorry, but I can't do that.”

Beast: “Sonto, kao kopa toe (I'm begging you). Come on, you remember how good you had it because of me? Have you forgotten that I built you this house? What's an old favour for a friend?”

She contemplated it for a while but ended up opening for me.

Sonto: “It's just this once, Beast.”

Beast: "Noted."

I quickly got into the car and drove in.

Beast: "Help me get him inside of the house. He's injured."

She did as I asked, but she was pissed as hell. I could manage her.

Sonto: "Mind explaining what the fuck is happening?"

Beast: "I wish I could, Sonto, but you know what my life is like."

I headed out of the house and walked back in with the bags we took from the garage.

Sonto: (shocked) "No, no, Bethuel! Are you making me an accomplice to a crime now?! Maybe I should call the police."

Beast: “And tell them what? That your ex boyfriend built you this house on blood money, bought you your car with blood money and right now as we speak, he has hidden some of that blood money in your house?! Come on, Sonto, the last thing I need from you right now is judgment.”

She kept quiet and just looked at me.

Beast: (sigh) “Look, I didn't mean it like that, honestly. It is just that, I feel you always judge me whenever I need your help. Just this once and I promise you I'll never bother you again. Okay?”

She nodded without saying a further word.

Beast: “Thank you. I need to change in another set of clothes.”

Sonto: (wide-eyed) “What makes you think I have male clothes lying around?”

Beast: "Sonto, I know you have a boyfriend who sleeps here every now and then. Don't be like that."

She went to her bedroom and came back with a jean and Tshirt and a jacket for me.

Beast: "Thanks."

I changed right in front of her and she tried acting all shy.

Beast: "Don't look at me like that. You're used to this. Give me your car keys."

Sonto: "For what?"

Beast: "Okay, listen. I need to burn that car, so I need you to tail me and come back with me. Can you do that?"

Sonto: "I will only if you tell me what you did this time."

Bethuel: "I'll tell you right after we burn it. Please."

She agreed, reluctantly.

Beast: "Malachi, ka boa (I'll be back)."

He was sound asleep, though, but I knew he wasn't going to be awake by the time we got back. So, I took the risk and left the money in Sonto's house, while I got into the Mercedes and she got into her car. It was so dark outside, which was the perfect time to do what I had in mind. I asked her to go get us some petrol from a 5litre bottle and we drove after one another to an open veld. I poured petrol all over the car, and set it alight without even thinking twice. I got into her car and waited along with her. I had to make sure that the car burned to the ground without fail – otherwise evidence would have been left behind. Who knows what passer byers would have done?

Sonto: "So, are you going to tell me the truth or not?"

Beast: "I went on a job for Dragon. He asked us to rob a cash van and things went south. We ended up being involved in a shoot out. I couldn't leave him at a hospital, so I got him help to at least get the bullet extracted and stitched up."

Sonto: "You really care about your friend that much, huh? I thought you vowed that he'd never follow the same path as you did."

Beast: "He chose that path for himself – despite me being against it."

Sonto: "So, what now? Dragon is expecting you, isn't he?"

Beast: (Sigh) "Yes, he is."

Sonto: "How much did you guys take today?"

Beast: "I don't know, most probably R2 million if not 3."

Sonto: "And how much did he say you'll be getting?"

Beast: "R1 million."

Sonto: (shocked) "Each?"

Beast: (shaking head) "No. To split amongst the both of us."

Sonto: (laughing) "What the fuck?!"

Beast: "What?"

Sonto: "Uyathanda ukuropiwa, neh (You enjoy being ripped off, don't you), Bethuel?"

Beast: "O ra bjang (what do you mean)? I've worked for Dragon for years."

Sonto: “Yes, and what exactly do you have to show for it? A measly few thousands every other week and a Microbus, which you had to save for, for years by the way, while he gets rich off your own hands. You worked your ass off – sacrificed everything – including our relationship for that fucker. Now, he drives all the expensive cars in the hood, while you are just his puppet. Do you honestly think he is going to give you so much money?”

Beast: “Dragon will never do that to me.”

Sonto: “That was before. Once he knows you set his car alight, he will take so many damages off the list and you'll most probably end up with R200 000 each – if you're lucky.”

I must admit, she had a point – a good one at that.

Beast: “So? What do you suggest?”

Sonto: “Rip him off. Give him a portion of the money while you two stash the rest. You're a smart guy, you can carry on

working for him, and slowly build your own business. That way, you'll be free from him.”

Beast: “He'll know. I mean, his own mother is a sangoma and she does all these rituals for him.”

Sonto: “Nothing and no one beats God. Your friend is highly favoured – use that to your advantage. No one can touch you guys. Modimo ga fe ka letsogo (God doesn't bless by the hand). This is your way out.”

Beast: “How much am I supposed to give him, though?”

Sonto: “Only one way to find out. Let's go count the money.”

Beast: “That will take us all night.”

Sonto: “I used to date you, remember? I have a machine that counts notes. Now come on.”

She was about to drive off when my phone rang.

Beast: "It's Dragon."

Sonto: "Don't answer him. Let's count the money first – then you'll figure out what to tell him."

Beast: (frowning) "Why are you being so nice to me? I mean why are you helping me?"

Sonto: "Because you're a good guy, Beast. Despite all that has happened between the two of us, I still love you. I want you to excel like other people. Do you honestly think that I enjoyed you being a criminal? Risking your life for someone like Dragon? He can get your replacement any time. I mean you've been his right hand man for years, yet he can't bring himself up to get you a bursary to further your studies or something. Don't become entrapped in this life forever, Beast. You're the mighty Beast, after all."

I chuckled alone as she drove off. I sure did fuck up while we were together, but if only she knew that my heart had already belonged to someone else – she just didn't know it yet.

Matthew 21:22 - “And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith.”

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“In three words I can sum up everything I’ve learned about life: It goes on.” — Robert Frost

Beast

We drove back to Sonto's house and Malachi was still asleep. I let him be while Sonto wasted no time and got straight to work.

Sonto: “Take out all the money from the bags and put it on the table.”

I did as told. I was very careful with the one from the van because I needed to enter the code carefully. It was sent to me before we even did the job. After entering the code, no powder splashed so we were safe. Sonto came back with her money counter system, and we were good to go. It took us longer than expected to count all the money, but not longer than 15 minutes.

Sonto: “That's it. R3 459 67, 99 to be exact.”

I was in total shock.

Beast: "That's nearly R4 million."

Sonto: (excitedly) "Exactly."

Beast: "Well, I gave some to my aunt for stitching Malachi up."

Sonto: "That didn't put any dent in your pockets."

Beast: "I don't get it. Dragon told us we were only going to get R2 million."

Sonto: "Now you finally see what a fraudster he is. Now, what are you going to do about it?"

I started thinking long and hard, but I didn't have all the time in the world. Dragon called me for the 16th time, and I finally answered.

Beast: "Boss."

Dragon: (angrily) "Took you long enough! Where the fuck are you guys, Beast?! I'm at the other location – where I specifically told you to come and you are nowhere to be found! Cops told me my car was seen burnt to the ground!"

Beast: "About that, we ran into an encounter. Malachi got hit and we had to go into hiding. Just when we were about to leave Sosha, some guys robbed us of some of the money."

Dragon: (hysterically) "What?! What are you even saying?! Just tell me where you are so I can personally come and fetch you!"

Beast: “No can do, boss. I have to wait til dawn. Those guys were actually Hawks. They said that they knew you sent us and that they were following us.”

Dragon: “No one gave me such information!”

Beast: “You don't have connections with the Hawks, boss.”

Dragon: (angrily) “You'd better not be lying to me, Beast! Or else, you won't get paid for the useless job you did! I expect you here tomorrow 9am Sharp!”

Just like that, he hung up the phone. He had always been one rude mother fucker, but that, that was just uncalled for. Sonto just made me think long and hard about the way Dragon had been treating me all those years.

Sonto: “So?”

Beast: “Fuck him. I'm going ahead with your plan.”

Sonto: "How much are you willing to give him?"

Beast: "I'll give him R2 million."

Sonto: (frowning) "Isn't that like absolute daylight robbery? I mean you're basically robbing yourselves here."

Beast: "The key isn't to become millionaires here, Sonto. I mean giving him R2 million, we'll be left with just over R1.6 million to split amongst the both of us. We'll both have just over R800 000. That's more than enough for me to start a brand new life."

Sonto: "So, what now? Are you going to leave Pheli?"

Beast: (chuckling) "No, Pheli is my home."

Sonto: "I see. Well, it is already dark outside. I suppose you two aren't going home?"

Beast: (shaking head) "I think we should look for a hide out. I've bothered you enough."

Sonto: "Stay, please. I mean, your friend is injured. He should wake up any moment now. You guys can leave in the morning."

Beast: "Are you sure?"

Sonto: (nodding) "Yes."

Beast: "Okay, I'll sleep on the couch, and Malachi can sleep in the spare bedroom, if it is no bother."

Sonto: "Nonsense. You can sleep with me."

I looked at her surprised.

Sonto: "What? Don't act like it is your first time in this house. I mean, you did buy it for me."

Beast: "Hmm, okay. I just don't want you to get the wrong impression about me."

Sonto: (laughing) "Beast the mother fucker telling me that "he doesn't want me to get the wrong impression about him"? Have you forgotten that I know you too well, Bethuel?"

Beast: "You haven't called me that in a very long time."

Sonto: "Yes, I guess some things never change."

She helped me split the money into the same three bags, although that time, I kept Malachi and I's share separate. I went to check on him and he was starting to wake up.

Malachi: "Where... where are we, Beast? What happened?"

Beast: "You got shot. We're at Sonto's house in Sosha."

Malachi: (surprised) "Sonto?"

Sonto: (smiling) "Hey, Malachi. I'll go cook for us."

Malachi looked at me in an odd way. I knew very well what he was thinking.

Beast: "What?"

Malachi: "Really, Beast? Sonto?"

Beast: "Come on, man. It's not what you think. We're over."

Malachi: "Oh, if you say so. What about Dragon? Isn't he going to skin us alive?"

Beast: "Go get cleaned up and eat first. I'll tell you everything."

He got up and he felt a whole lot better. He went to take a shower, while I went to chill in the kitchen with Sonto while she was cooking. I found myself reminiscing about the good, old days. I knew it wasn't right, but she and I were rather toxic towards one another. I loved her and she loved me – too much. I couldn't choose her over my life, which ended our relationship. Nonetheless, she loved money too much and I just wanted to give her the life she wanted – the life she needed, but I didn't want to sacrifice my own happiness in the process. Yes, I had cheated on her a few times, but I was young. We were dating since high school and she knew me inside out. A person who knows all of you is a dangerous one. They can kill you when you least expect it. I found myself staring at her voluptuous body. Sonto wasn't just any girl, she was a little on the meaty side, wearing size 38, but my goodness, I could never get over her beautiful, big breasts. A lot of people would ask me what I saw in her, and for me, a woman's beauty isn't defined by the way she looks. Sonto was beautiful, with short hair and she would change her hair colour ever other week. Everything she did suited her and she excelled in just about everything. She never made it to University, and how I wish I had made that happen for her. I just wanted her to be the best version of herself. I felt like I

failed her in a way, I mean I was her first – and she was mine, although she didn't know that.

Sonto: “O batla beer (do you want a beer)?”

Beast: “Please.”

She handed me a beer, while I thanked her, and of course, I just had to fall into the same old routine. I held her hand gently and stared in her eyes.

Beast: “Sonto, I'm sorry...”

Sonto: “I know.”

She tried removing her hand, but I held it firmer.

Beast: “I'm serious. I know, I've made a lot of shitty choices, but you were by far the best one of them all.”

Sonto: "Well, too bad you could never love me more than your life."

She ripped her hand out of mine, while my heart slowly sunk to the pit of my stomach.

Beast: "I didn't mean to ruin your evening."

Sonto: "You didn't. Let's not talk about the past, please."

Beast: "Okay, then tell me about your present. I saw those clothes in the bedroom. Who is he?"

Sonto: "Don't act like you don't already know. I know you have guys watching my every move."

Beast: (laughing) "Is it that obvious?"

Sonto: “Well, your boy Sporo isn't exactly one to keep a secret. Nonetheless, I appreciate that. Sosha isn't very safe at night and they keep me safe whenever I'm at the groove, you know.”

Beast: “The protection is for you – not him.”

Sonto: (laughing) “Okay.”

Beast: “Do you love him?”

Sonto: “I don't know, do you love your bitches?”

Beast: “Really, Sonto? I've changed.”

Sonto: “If you say so.”

Her phone kept ringing and she kept ignoring the phone.

Beast: "It's okay, you can answer him."

Sonto: "I don't want to do that with you here."

Beast: "Well, then, let me excuse myself."

I got up with the beer in my hand and went to the lounge. I switched on the tv, while trying very hard not to think about what she could have been telling him. I must say, sitting there knowing that I made all that happen and I couldn't even enjoy it with her, hurt like hell. I had the chance to leave that life, but I chose to stay. Just like Malachi, I still chose to put my sisters and my mother first, while I still suffered. Perhaps it was high time that changed, although I didn't love Sonto the same way I used to. I knew I loved someone so deeply, that it was forbidden. How on earth was I even going to continue living a lie, should I have chosen Sonto? Malachi finished taking a shower and Sonto lend him one of her boyfriend's outfits. We had dinner and I informed him of the entire plan. He wasn't very happy about it, but once he heard about how much we were getting out of it – he was reeling. I took that as an opportunity to finally let him see life through the eyes he always had.

Beast: “On one condition, though.”

Sonto looked at me suspiciously.

Malachi: “What condition?”

Beast: “You leave this life and go study – abroad.”

Malachi: “Beast, life abroad is shit expensive. I haven't even applied and there's no guarantee that I'll get in.”

Beast: (sigh) “Do you remember two months ago when Hazel asked you for your ID and Matric Certificate?”

Malachi: “Yes...”

Beast: “I asked her – begged her to apply at Harvard for you. I was looking at courses you could love and she did that. The first opening would be in September.”

Malachi: (shocked) “Why, Beast? I mean, you know how much I have to protect my sister. She'll never survive without me.”

Beast: “That's because you created that mess. Had you taught her how to survive without you – she'd be just fine right now. It's time for you to live your life, Malachi. I'll be here to look out for her. Go and be the man you intended to be. It is your time.”

Malachi: “No, we don't even know if they have accepted the application or not.”

Beast: “Then you'll have R800k to start a new life and make that happen. Come on, Malachi. Don't let this opportunity pass you by.”

Malachi: “But Hazel...”

Beast: "I'll be there for her – no matter what. You need to leave – for her sake too. You need to allow her room to grow."

Malachi: (teary) "Okay, I'll do it."

Beast: "You'll also have to tell her the truth – the whole truth about her father before you leave. That's the least you can do. She can't survive this life without a thick skin."

Malachi: "Promise me if anything happens you'll call and let me know. Please."

Beast: "I've known you my whole life, Malachi. You have my word."

Malachi: (teary) "Not many would do what you're doing for me, Beast. You're not just my friend, but you're my brother. I appreciate you."

Beast: "Don't get all mushy on me, now. Come on. Have a beer. That bullet must be doing its job on you, man."

The three of us laughed while we enjoyed the rest of our meal. The truth is that I also felt a bit teary. He was my best and basically only friend, but he had to go and do it. My life had steered a different direction. I didn't want to do crime anymore, but obviously, I couldn't have quit immediately. The guy would have grown suspicious and most probably ended up killing me. I just wanted to see my boy succeed. After our meal

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Sonto gave us more beers as we watched tv.

Sonto: "Bethuel, I'm going to sleep. O tla tla (you'll come)."

Beast: "Sharp."

Malachi: (laughing) "And then?"

Beast: "Ska nthoma (Don't start with me)."

Malachi: "Are you two planning on getting back together or something?"

Beast: "No, this is a two bedroom in case you haven't noticed."

Malachi: (laughing) "Bathong (goodness), Beast. O sa mo rata die kind, neh (you still love this girl, don't you)?"

Beast: "Come on, man, Malachi. O bjang mara (what's up with you)?"

Malachi: "I'm just asking."

Beast: (clicking tongue) "Mxm, I'm going to finish the rest in the bedroom. Good night."

Malachi: (laughing) "Use a condom."

Beast: “Wa bona why o sena medi (do you see why you don't have a girlfriend)?”

Malachi: (laughing) “It's by choice! Voetsek (piss off)!”

I closed the bedroom door while he was still laughing out loud. I hated that. I hated it because he was right. I still loved her, but I was no longer in love with her, and that was not an easy thing to tell someone. I guess I did what I did that evening because I wanted to say sorry for everything I had done to her, and to thank her for harbouring us that evening. I found her in bed already. I hated sleeping with clothes on, but out of respect for her I didn't take my Tshirt and my briefs off. I got into the blankets and immediately when I realised she wasn't clothed at all, my penis betrayed me.

Beast: “Eish (oh)...”

Sonto: “Keng (what is it)?”

Beast: “Eish (Oh), Sonto, man. Why o sa apara (why aren't you dressed)?”

Sonto: (chuckling) “Come on, you taught me that two people of the opposite sex who love one another do not sleep clothed.”

Beast: “Is that what you also say to him?”

I thought I'd make her angry, but instead, it seemed as if she was getting more aroused by my responses. She got on top of me without warning, and spread her legs. She placed her naked body on top of my crotch, leaving me instantly hard.

Beast: (softly) “Sonto...”

Sonto: “Shhh... I still love you, Beast. I've always loved you. I always will love you. I'm not angry at you, but now that you have finally seen the light, we can do this life thing together. We can try again, you know?”

I tried responding, but my lips failed me. She placed her warm, tantalizing lips on mine and our tongues instantly romanced one another. I found myself caressing her luscious breasts and made my way down to her decadent rump. She still smelled the same, felt the same and her skin was still as soft as it was before. I had no idea what came over me, but a man is a man, right? I gave in and made love to her, well, I actually fucked her and she liked it that way – always had. We were at it all night and by morning, I was filled with regrets.

Sonto: (smiling) “Good morning.”

I got up without even saying much. I didn't even have time to take a shower. I didn't know why I felt so weak around Sonto, but she just had that thing. I only realized after we had fallen asleep that we didn't use a condom.

Sonto: (frowning) “Beast, keng (what is it)? Don't be like that.”

Beast: “We didn't use a condom, Sonto. How could we be so irresponsible?”

Sonto: (smiling) "It's alright, I mean, I'm on the pill. Besides, I wouldn't mind carrying little Bethu."

Beast: (annoyed) "What the fuck, Sonto?! Did you do it deliberately?! Are you trying to trap me?!"

Sonto: (shocked) "Excuse me?! Ungithata kanjani, wena Bethuel (what do you take me for)?!"

Beast: "You did just admit it right now, didn't you?"

Sonto: "I fucking love you and you treat me like this?! I shouldn't have let you into my house last night!"

Beast: "Maybe you shouldn't have. I'm sorry for wasting your energy."

I got out of the bedroom and she was swearing at me.

Sonto: (shouting) “Fuck you, Bethuel! Masimbakho, uyangizwa (fuck you, you hear me)?!”

Malachi: “Mfo (bro), what the fuck was that all about?”

Beast: “Let's get out of here.”

Malachi: “What about our ride?”

Beast: “We'll get an Uber or something. A re vaye (let's go).”

Malachi: “Let me get my shoes.”

He quickly headed to one of the bedrooms to put on his shoes, while I dug into one of the bags I had stashed for Malachi and I and took out a few notes. We had carefully stashed them in thousands. I took out notes worth R50 000 and placed the m on the table.

Malachi: (frowning) “And then?”

Beast: "I'm leaving it for her."

Malachi: "So, let me get this straight; you ask your ex for help, then you sleep with her. She's cussing you out after a night of hot, rendezvous and now you're basically paying her? It won't go down well, you do know that, right?"

Beast: "We're toxic for one another, man. This way, she'll get pissed at me and delete my numbers. A re vaye (let's go). Daai man o re emetse (that guy is waiting for us)."

Malachi: (shouting) "Sharp, Sonto. Thanks for your hospitality!"

We walked out and started walking.

Beast: "We look like shit in this guy's clothes, man. Who the fuck still wears Uzzi in this day and age?"

Malachi: (laughing) "Wa bora, jo (you're so boring, dude)."

We managed to find a taxi. We didn't look suspicious at all and made our way to Hammanskraal. While we were taking a walk, I recalled all my steps, and then remembered that we couldn't go to Dragon's house with our money. So, we quickly devised a plan and went to yet another open veld, where we would go back for the money. We dug a big hole and stashed the money there. We finally made it to Dragon's house, and he looked pissed as fuck.

Dragon: "You two fuckers took long enough."

Beast: "Ah, mara (but), Boss, I told you that we ran into some trouble."

Dragon: "I made a few calls. I'd like to find out who those fuckers are that stole my money."

In my mind I was silently laughing. That guy actually thought it was his money.

Dragon: “Hand it over.”

By then, I had totally forgotten that I unlocked the bags while we were taking money from them. I swallowed hard thinking he was going to realize it. I was doomed. He tried opening it, and then stopped and stared at me.

Dragon: “O emetse eng (what are you waiting for)? Give me the code.”

I sent him the code from my phone and crossed fingers. He punched in the code and the bag opened. So many scenarios were running through my mind, but I immediately thought of only one person who was smart enough to do that – Sonto. Dragon was a real son of a bitch. He actually made us count all that money for him. If I didn't know better, I'd have said that he wasn't good in Maths. Both Malachi and I were annoyed, but what could we do? We were his puppets, while he was the boss. After an entire hour, we counted R2 million.

Dragon: “Are you sure?”

Beast: “Mara (But) you saw us writing down and counting it, didn't you?”

Dragon: “Count it again.”

That fucker made us count the money three times! Three times! Imagine that. I was annoyed, but I knew it was all a test.

Malachi: “There. R2 million.”

Dragon: “Hmm, alright. Since you two fucked up – I can't give you so much cash. My car has been burnt to the ground.”

I had no idea why he was even crying because he had insurance for that.

Dragon: “I'll give you two R20 000 – to split amongst one another.”

That crazy fuck. So, he actually planned on ripping me off, didn't he? Sonto was right – yet again. By then, I felt like a complete fuck. I messed up yet again and I owed Sonto my life. Of course, Malachi and I had to react as if we were pissed. We were loaded while that fucker thought he was ripping us off.

Beast: (angrily) “What the fuck?! Pila, pila, o re tseya bjang wena, (what do you actually take us for), Dragon?! We're not your slaves!”

Dragon: (angrily) “You are a slave – you work for me! If you don't like it – then quit.”

I knew then that I was supposed to back down, but I was angry at myself for not listening before. That guy was ripping us off without any shame in the world.

Malachi: “Let's go, Beast. Leave him.”

Beast: “No. You think you're all that, don't you, Dragon? I have a family to feed and I risked my life for you – we both did. And now, you're going to thank us like that?! O re leboga ka masepa, mos wena (you're thanking us with a plate of shit)!”

Dragon got so angry that he got close to me. He wanted to punch me, but he knew he wouldn't have managed.

Beast: “I dare you to even try that.”

Dragon: (angrily) “Since you think you're all that. O nagana gore o metse marete, neh (You've grown a pair of balls, haven't you)?! Well then, you're a big boy, so I take my offer back. The two of you are a team – so you both walk away with nothing.”

Malachi: “Dragon, you can't do that.”

Dragon: “Says who? I can and I just did. Now fuck off!”

I gave him one last look. I knew I had more money than I had ever needed, but it wasn't about that. It was about the main

fact that he was so disrespectful towards me – towards us. The mere fact that he just didn't give a flying fuck about my feelings whatsoever.

Beast: “Well, then, you can find yourself a new slave. I am done.”

Dragon: “We shall see how you're going to feed your humongous family. You'll come back crawling before you even know it. You need me more than you think and you know it, Beast.”

Malachi and I walked out of there and for a man in my position, I was supposed to be over the moon, but I was just so upset. It just didn't feel right for a man to take advantage of someone as young as I was and then to throw me out like I was a piece of rubbish. I tried breathing in and out until I felt myself calming down a bit. Malachi and I went back to dig up our money back and headed straight home. At least one good thing came out of that heist; we got an opportunity to start afresh and get the lives we've always dreamt of. Dragon stole a part of my youth, but that didn't mean that he got the best parts of who I was.

1 John 1:9 - “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

“If you spend your whole life waiting for the storm, you’ll never enjoy the sunshine.” —Morris West

Hazel

After Malachi and Beast left, we found ourselves rather irritated because Gontse started making outrageous demands, asking me for money. When I said no, she even tried laying a hand on me. Things got out of hand when Otlile finally lay a hand on her. The party had to end, thank goodness. Everyone went home and I was left all alone in Mam'Rose's house. I waited for Malachi to return, up until I must have fallen asleep. Before then, I was filled with deep thoughts of my life, I kept wondering if I was actually ready to face life alone. I mean, I had no other choice. I had to do this life thing alone, because we were all born with individual destiny in any case. I got up the following morning, which was a Saturday. I looked at the time and it was about 7am. I was still quite tired from everything, but I had to get up either way.

Whoever came up with the line “Life works in mysterious ways” was indeed right. He knew exactly what he was talking about

because at that moment, I received an email notification with an Email header which read “RE: Response to your application”. I opened it and it seemed that it was the second time they had responded to the application which I had sent weeks ago. My heart skipped a few beats as I started reading. “Dear Mr. Makwetla, we at the University of Harvard are pleased to notify you that your application to join our University in our Faculty of Engineering Sciences. Below is a copy of your acceptance letter, please do let us know within two weeks whether you accept the invitation or not, so that we can get all your affairs in order. We look forward to hearing from you. Kind Regards, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.”

I was looking forward to seeing my brother prosper, but at the same time fear kept creeping up on me like an annoying stalker that just wouldn't cut ties with me. Fear is a natural part of life, although fear of the unknown can cripple the mind and the body, leaving one fully-ridden with anxiety. While I was slowly thinking of the future, in walked Malachi.

Malachi: “Hey, o sharp (are you okay)?”

Hazel: “Ke sharp (I'm okay).”

Malachi: "I've brought you some food."

He looked a little distraught for some reason, as if he had a lot on his mind. I dismissed it as he was still reeling from Mam'Rose being gone. He brought me some Chicken Lickin'.

Hazel: "Thank you."

Malachi: (scratching head) "How about we sit in the lounge. I want to talk to you about something."

Right there and then, in walked Beast. They were both looking rather suspicious.

Hazel: (frowning) "Are you two going to spit it out?"

Beast: "Spit what out?"

Hazel: “Akitsi (I don't know), but you both look weird.”

Malachi: “Sit down, please.”

I sat down without touching my food as I didn't even take my eyes off him. He couldn't even look me in the eye.

Malachi: (sigh) “I've decided to tell you everything – or rather what you need to know.”

Hazel: (frowning) “What are you talking about?”

Malachi: “I want you to know everything; about our family – our real family and most importantly – your biological father.”

I was alarmed immediately. I mean, I had always known that Malachi knew a few things, but I didn't ever think that he knew everything. I had no words, so I listened attentively.

Malachi: (sigh) “Our mother left Mokopane when she was just 18 years old. My biological father raped her and she fell pregnant with me, as a result she left and along her way to Pretoria, she met Mam'Rose and that is how she became a part of her life.”

I was so heartbroken, I mean I had always thought that my mother was just being hateful towards Malachi for some or other reason. Never in my wildest dreams did I ever think that what Bella said to me that night I beat her up was actually true. My poor brother; it was really hard for him to grow up with a mother who blamed him for being a result of rape. I started being teary-eyed; not just for his awfully sad story, but because I dreaded the part where he was about to tell me about my own father. I kept asking myself what if my father was worse?

Malachi: “Fast forward, she got a job right here at the town Mall at Pick n' Pay – the one you and I went to a few weeks ago. She had a stable and good life, although she just never really attended to me. She met a really good man who loved her and adored me along with her – a white man named Phillip. He was her best friend's boyfriend's friend. He came to Atteridgeville nearly every single day; he took care of her – of

us, and she never lacked a thing. They were so in love as far as I can remember, but it all changed one day when she took me with her to his apartment unbeknownst to him, when he arrived there with his parents – and his fiancée.”

I was flabbergasted right there. I mean, sure, I expected a bad story or something, but I was simply hated by my own mother because my father had a woman he wanted to marry and it wasn't her?!

Malachi: “She was already pregnant with you at the time, but well, she couldn't take it. They broke up, or rather he just never spoke to her ever again. I don't know the entire story, but that is what I remember.”

Hazel: “This Phillip, does he have a surname?”

Malachi: “Yes, Phillip Ferreira, Andries Ferreira's son.”

That surname rang a faint bell in my head. I started thinking and Malachi most probably saw me pondering my mind when he decided to ease my thoughts.

Malachi: “Yes, he was – is white.”

And then it hit me. The owners of that Pick n' Pay were also Ferreira's. My mother used to work there so it could only have meant one thing. I put two and two together, and the tears started rolling uncontrollably.

Hazel: “Are you telling me that I'm related to that fat, white man who was looking at me funny that day?”

Malachi: (nodding) “Yes, he is your grandfather.”

I felt so ashamed to be me – for the first time in my life, that day. I mean, all along my actual family was right under my nose and they also didn't want anything to do with me. They afforded the world, but they just didn't want me. It must have been the mere fact that I was black. My own mother didn't

want me, and I finally found out why. My father abandoned her while she was pregnant. She had already been raising Malachi, so she didn't want to raise the Cremora baby she was carrying in her belly.

Malachi: "I'm sorry, Hazel."

Hazel: "It's fine. Thanks for telling me the truth, though."

Malachi: (nodding) "It's best you don't go around digging. If they wanted you they would have reached out a long time ago. That goes for Mama's maternal family as well. Let sleeping dogs lie, you'll meet them when it is God's plan."

I wiped my tears away, while my heart felt so crushed.

Malachi: "There's another thing."

In my mind, I thought; "what could be worse than this?"

Malachi: "I'm leaving for the U.S. - tomorrow night."

Hazel: (frowning) "Did you see the email as well?"

Malachi: "What email?"

I took out my phone and handed it to him. He read the email and I saw a glimmer of hope beaming in his eyes. I hadn't seen that in a very long time. I knew then that it was time to let my brother go, as hard as it was for me – I just had to.

Malachi: "I won't leave if you don't want me to."

Beast: "Bro, we spoke about this."

Malachi: "Right. Are you sure you're going to be alright, Hazel?"

Hazel: "I don't know, but we'll never know unless you actually go, will we?"

Beast: "I promised him that I'd take good care of you. You both have my word."

Hazel: "I get that, but how will you survive? You don't have any money."

Malachi: "I do now. Don't worry about that. I just want to get this degree over and done with so that I can come back and be there for you."

He was really sweet, honestly, but I felt as if he had done more than he needed to for me throughout the years.

Hazel: "Malachi, you've been more than just a brother to me. You've been a father and everything way above that. I can not let you derail your own future yet again. You've wasted enough time. Go out there and do what you have to do. I'll be fine; I just have to be."

My heart was aching while jumping for joy at the same time. It was as if finally, God had heard our prayers. I had no idea how or where he got the money, but I suppose it was good for me not to know all the details. My life was about to change and change is inevitable – for us all. The longer you delay and procrastinate – the harder it becomes to adjust. I politely asked him to change the topic, of which he did. We spoke about what he was going to miss apart from me of course, and I could really feel the excitement from his side. He was actually looking forward to being something and following his dream. A part of me kept thinking about my father and who he actually was. They left and promised to bring me some of my clothes. I had nothing to do since it was Saturday. Once they left I decided to google my father. I just wanted to see what he looked like and get a glimpse of his life. I was quite shocked to read up on him and see just how wealthy he really was. He didn't live in South Africa, but rather in England, although he had a few properties in South Africa. I started to feel a bit sad because feelings of resentment and feeling unwanted started creeping in, but I tried by all means to just stop thinking about it. I've always known that life had a funny way of throwing curve balls, but never did I imagine that I'd be on the receiving end of such a daunting one. A curve ball loaded with information I'd been hunting my entire life, and now that I had finally received the answers to all the questions, I started

regretting ever having the desire to know. Malachi's life was finally about to get pieced together, while mine was only about to get worse to a certain extent. I never asked him where he got the money to be able to go to the U.S., but I figured that he and Beast got lucky after a night of terror or something. It took me an entire day to get my emotions in check. After crying nearly half the day, browsing through all our pictures, video's and conversations, I finally did what Mam'Rose taught me to do a long time ago. Beast and Malachi had left after our breakfast, so I got on my knees and started having one of the most intimate and soul-enriching conversations I'd ever had with God.

Hazel: (praying) "Father God, You, Lord of Mercy

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Grace and everlasting love. You who created Heaven and Earth and filled the entire planet with promises of eternal blessings, for as long as we shall love and worship you and only You. You, Jehova Jireh, God of Love, Jehova Adonai, All my life I thought I'd been punished for my parents' sins, only to realize today that I've been nothing, but blessed. You've showered me with so much more than others could even dream of. I now know that my life has yet to begin. My brother wanted to live this dream his entire life. I thank you for finally granting him the

opportunity to do so. All I ask of you from now on is that you please protect my brother against all evil and danger so that he may come back to us in one piece. I ask of you to guide me through it all, oh, Lord, for it is not easy. Allow me to rid my heart of any negative emotions and bless me with internal peace. I ask this in Jesus' Mighty Name. Amen.”

I actually felt something brewing inside of me throughout that entire prayer. I did not have any negativity left within me on that particular day, but instead I realized that I might have lost Mam'Rose – yet Malachi got his long-awaited opportunity and that's all I could ever ask for. I decided not to think about what he had told me, but to focus on the present. I caught up on some homework before bed time. The following morning, I was awoken by a loud, persistent knock. The person sounded just way too overly excited for that time of the morning. I was a bit annoyed since I hadn't planned on going anywhere on that Sunday. Mam'Rose was most probably turning in her grave already since Sundays were church days – come rain, come sunshine. I dragged my feet in hopes that the person would eventually give up trying to get me to open, but my efforts were in vain. As I opened, I saw a brand new Malachi. He was smiling so radiantly and he even got a brand new haircut. I got

the feeling he couldn't even sleep much the previous night. Excitement of new beginnings does that to a person.

Malachi: (beaming) "Good morning, Sunshine."

Hazel: "Malachi, e sale vroeg, waitse (it's still early, you know)."

Malachi: (chuckling) "I know. Take a quick shower and get dressed. I need us to do a few things before I leave tonight."

Hazel: (frowning) "You are aware that it is only 6am, right?"

Malachi: "Yes, and we're late already. Etsa ka pele (be fast)."

Hazel: (sigh) "Alright."

Malachi: "Fifteen minutes tops."

Hazel: "Okay."

I really hoped he wasn't going to drag me to church. I wasn't in the mood. He knew I was a chronic late comer; I could never be on time, unless I was forced to – usually by him. I did as told and hated every moment. Being fast had never been my thing. I always took my time whenever I was in the shower. A lady should never rush herself, or else she might miss a spot. I got dressed in simple sneakers, a pair of jeans and a Tshirt. He never mentioned any dress code, so I figured we were not going to any formal event – despite him looking so dapper. I walked out and found him waiting impatiently for me outside.

Malachi: “Yerr (Geez), Hazel. O tla tshwara nako one day, mara (will you ever be on time for anything one day, though)?”

Hazel: “I only took half an hour. Re ya kae (where are we going)?”

Malachi: “Come.”

I followed him to the back of the house where I found my mother and Bella already waiting for us. I developed an

immediate, sour taste in my mouth since I knew that the morning would most probably end in insults. I was actually gob-smacked when I saw her smiling at Malachi. That never happened – ever. I saw a few candles, traditional beer, some impepho (incense) and a big, white cloth. I immediately realized that Malachi was having a small, traditional ceremony to appease the ancestors. He was a very spiritual person – despite his lifestyle. His gift sort of forced him to be like that, though. I knelt down next to Malachi, while Bella knelt down next to my mother. We'd never uttered a single word towards one another ever since that day when I beat her to a pulp. My mother called me “the work of the devil”, so I let them both be ever since. It was quite awkward on my end, although I couldn't figure out why both Bella and my mother were so excited. It was most probably excitement of making my life hell without Malachi's disturbance. My mother lit one of the candles and incense and started speaking.

Binah: “Ba ga Makwelta, lena di Tlou (totem), rea ikana go lena legono, re bega ngwana wa ka, Malachi Makwetla. Le mo file monyetla wa go ya skolong mafaseng a rena re sa a tsebeng. O ya America, mantsibuwa, ke kopa le seke la mo otlela dibe tsa ka, le mo feng matla, tshireletso le maikokobetso ko a yang. A bolokege a kgone go bowa a tshwere tshelete. Tsohle ke di

beya matsogong a lena, Amen. (The Makwetla family, you, the Elephants, we come before you, we speak of my son, Malachi Makwetla. You finally gave him an opportunity to go to school to countries we've never been to. He is going to America tonight, please do not punish him for my sins, but rather protect him and give him the strength and protection where he is going. May you protect him at all costs so that he can come back bearing money. We put everything in your hands, Amen).”

She took some traditional beer and spit it out. He also started speaking and did the same. Bella and I were also expected to repeat the process, and she had nothing, but good things to say about him. I was stunned. After we were done, we got up.

Malachi: “Kea leboga (Thank you), Mama.”

Binah: “Anything for you, my boy. You are still my son, regardless of our issues.”

That right there sent me straight into shock mode. She spoke as if Malachi contributed to her hating him all his life.

Malachi: (nodding) "I'll see you guys later. Hazel, a reye (let's go)."

Bella: "Can I go with you, guys?"

Since when did she ever want to tag along with us? I couldn't understand if I was actually seeing it all or if it was all just a weird dream.

Malachi: "Another time. We're going to visit Mam'Rose's grave."

She never had a relationship with her and she never bothered to forge one either.

Binah: "I was hoping to make you a nice supper before you leave so that we can all eat together, you know."

Malachi: "You can do that. We'll be back later."

Binah: "Okay, le tsamayeng pila (have a safe ride)."

I was so shocked that I just couldn't keep myself from asking.

Hazel: "Malachi, dintshang, bjanong (what's up, though)?"

Malachi: "Ka eng (What do you mean)?"

Hazel: "Don't tell me you didn't notice how happy Mama is. She's nice all of a sudden."

I didn't add Bella to the equation since her emotions always had to match my mother's.

Malachi: (smiling) "She's like that because I told her I'd rebuild her shebeen for her."

Hazel: (shocked) "Are you really going to do it, or were you just saying it to get into her good books?"

Malachi: "I'm going to do it."

Hazel: (frowning) "But why? She's never been good to you in any way."

Malachi: "How many people have never been good and loyal to God, but He still continues to forgive and bless them?"

I kept quiet.

Malachi: "The truth is that you're right, but if I choose to leave without doing it, then I'd be just as bad as she is, and that wouldn't be a true reflection of the kind of person I am and what I represent."

Hazel: "How come you don't hate her for everything she's done?"

Malachi: "Because, hate just isn't in my nature. You can love her from a distance, because honestly speaking she is a toxic person, but you hating her would only make your life even more miserable, while she doesn't even remember half the things she's said and done to you. Learn to forgive, as hard as it may be. I still need her blessings because the heart can be a powerful weapon of witchcraft. One day, you'll learn what actually caused my accident right after my matric year. You'll learn just how toxic and bitter our mother actually is, but you'll find a way to live your life by forgiving her. People like her seem like the devil's agents, but she too has got potential to change, for as long as she is still on this earth, as hard as it is to believe."

I could never understand why Malachi was always so pessimistic about everyone. It was almost as if there was absolutely no room for hatred in his heart at all. I guess I was a bit too young to understand, so I just listened. We went to Mam'Rose's grave to tell her Malachi was leaving and from there he took me out. We went on a shopping spree and it was all things galore, and I was so surprised by how much he was actually willing to spend. He sure was monied. He bought me so many clothes and a new phone and laptop. He said he knew how much I preferred to suffer in silence, so he chose to lessen

the burden by being one step ahead of me. Nonetheless, I enjoyed my day with him and even got him to pick out nice clothes for himself.

Hazel: "So, what is going to happen to your car?"

Malachi: "I'm giving it to you. Beast is going to teach you how to drive amongst other things. I want you to lean on him whenever you feel the need to talk."

I didn't quite know how I felt about that, because he had his own life and his own sisters, but I had to try.

Matthew 6:15 - "But if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."

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“Always forgive your enemies – nothing annoys them so much.”

Oscar Wilde

Hazel

After a day of fun and amusement, I could confidently say that I had the best day with my brother. We got home and I unloaded everything he bought me in my room, while my mother called us both to come and eat dinner. I wasn't too thrilled, but then I had to do it, otherwise I was going to look like I was the one with the problem. She was so nice to the both of us – it was scary. She even showered us with hugs. I think that was most probably the very first time I recalled my own mother hugging me. It felt so foreign, so forced and oh, so fake.

Binah: “Please, sit my children.”

She had gone all out and pulled out all the stops. It was rather alarming for me, that I even contemplated eating. She sat down and did the unimaginable.

Binah: "Let us pray."

My eyes nearly popped out of my head.

We all closed our eyes, while I opened mine slightly so that I could analyse the situation and see if either of them was perhaps planning my death, but to my amusement they both had their eyes closed and were wrapped in smiles. Perhaps I was really judging them for their past deeds, or perhaps they were just happy that my mom would be getting a source of income again, or maybe – just maybe they were excited that Malachi was leaving but either way they looked slightly genuine.

Binah: "Amen. A re jeng (let's eat)."

She asked him about his plans for studying abroad and where he'd be living, you know, basically acting like a concerned parent. She wasn't stupid at all, she just made some bad choices along the way. She was eloquently spoken and she was quite good with numbers. No one was allowed to balance her

books the time here she been was operating besides her. No matter how much she had to drink, she'd never miss a number. All that got me thinking; I kept trying to figure her out during dinner that evening, but I failed to come to a conclusion. She was just a complicated book I had years to uncover and understand. Dinner was over and she wished him well. I got the chance to accompany him with Beast to the airport. I'd never been to one, so it was the perfect opportunity for me. They had their usual banter along the way, and I got to appreciate Beast at that present moment more than I ever had before, because had it not been for his initiative and efforts, my brother wouldn't have been bothered to apply for University. We approached the airport and it only got real once we had to say goodbye to him.

Malachi: "Beast, I appreciate you, mfo (bro). Take good care of her and yourself."

Beast: "Don't get all sappy on me now."

The both of them laughed as they hugged. It was truly beautiful to witness. My warm tears were making their infamous appearance in my eyes, although I fought them back so hard.

Malachi: "Hazel, I'll be back before you know it."

He gave me a long, intense hug. Good bye hugs are always the saddest.

Malachi: "I love you, kiddo."

Hazel: "I love you too."

He finally let go of me and off he went. Only when he made it to the check out point, I released my tears. It was a short – yet sombre moment for me.

Beast: "Come, let's get you home. You have school tomorrow."

I cried softly in his arms until we made our way to his kombi. Beast was a crazy guy, but he was mindful of others. He did not say a word, but played me good songs instead. He played Ami Faku's uBuhle Bakho yet again, forcing my mind to reminisce

about that wonderful day when we spent the day with Mam'Rose and won the tournament. Little did I know how much meaning the song would carry further on in my life.

One month later...

It had been one long month without Malachi. I was still struggling to adjust to him being gone, although he had been settled in. He hadn't started with the semester yet, but he had already started studying. He had missed the smell of journals for so long, that he just couldn't wait any longer. I, on the other hand was in limbo. Bella moved into Malachi's fully furnished room – despite my resistance. I let her be – for my own peace sake. My mom's shebeen was finally rebuilt after she had been nagging Beast to get builders to get on with their job. Two weeks later, she was up and running. The yard was back to being too busy and the noise was too much to handle at times. I didn't miss it at all, but I learnt to live with it yet again. I could have gone to live at Mam'Rose's house, but Gontse came back a week after her burial with her entire entourage and demanded that I leave the property. I refused and woke up to swollen legs and feet the following day. My health as taking a huge knock, until I finally decided to leave the house. I couldn't even take anything from the house, since the prophet Beast

took me to told me that I'd have been cursed for the rest of my life had I done so. I realized at that given point that I was nowhere near ready to fight against witchcraft. I didn't want to worry Malachi while he was hundreds of thousands of miles away, but Beast helped me through it all. So, I was back to my miserable, old life without Malachi as my shield. I was slowly sinking into depression without noticing. My mother's niceness faded away the moment she got her shebeen up and running again. What surprised me was the fact that Bella was even helping out more regularly, almost every single day after school. She was never helpful by nature, so I was sure she had something to gain by it all. It could not have been a sudden change of heart or mere coincidence. Exams were over and it was the first week of July holidays. I enjoyed winter for the most part because I would always become flushed and turn pink in warm weather. I hated it. I hardly got cold, since I'd wear light clothing during winter. I remember I was busy writing in my journal that day, when Bella barged into my room.

Hazel: (annoyed) “Ga o ithute go kokota keng (why don't you teach yourself to knock)?”

Bella: “Mama wa go bitsa (mom is calling you). She says she needs an extra pair of hands in the shebeen.”

Hazel: (frowning) “Since when? She's been fine all along, besides I'm busy.”

Bella: “Okay, ke tla mmotsa gore gao nyake (I'll tell her you don't want to).”

I was irritated – beyond.

Hazel: “Sharp (fine). Ke etla (I'm coming).”

She gave me a smirk and walked out. As I made my way to the shebeen, I saw her kiss my mom goodbye and off she went. So, I was the sacrificial lamb that day. I had to work because Bella had other commitments. Life.

Binah: “How nice of you to finally make yourself useful. Apara (wear an) apron and get busy.”

I didn't even want to show her my annoyance because I'd never hear the end of it. I got hold of an apron and started picking up empty bottles from the tables and wiping the tables. I hated that job, because some men would look at me funny and make rude comments. Others would try to touch me and I just didn't like it at all. Slowly but surely, my mom ensured that it became my daily life whenever Bella refused or wasn't around. She started partying a lot more than usual and drinking too. It was so bad, she'd host parties in Malachi's room. Whenever I complained, my mother would call me bitter, so I stopped complaining. Even when Beast would ask, I'd never be truthful. I just didn't want to cause drama. By the third week of the holidays, I was tired and over-worked. My mother had taken complete advantage of me and made me work on a daily basis. One day, one of the big, old men from our neighbourhood and a regular at Bee's tavern was behaving rather strangely. He kept ordering alcohol non-stop and he kept insisting that I serve him. Whenever I did, he would pay massive tips – about R300. I never took the money, not that my mom ever allowed me to, but I felt as if it just made me cheap in a way. So, the man started coming every single day from thereon and it just made me so uncomfortable. That entire week, he was there, asking to be served by me and he would tip me R300 – daily. My mom was so happy and kept on saying that I was a hidden gem who'd

make her money. I hated that. I took a break and insisted on going to the toilet, but I always preferred using my own toilet in my own room.

Hazel: "Mama, ke sa ya toilet (I'm going to the toilet)."

Binah: "Bjang ko ntle (why outside)? I mean we have toilets right in here."

Hazel: "Ja, but I just want to use mine."

Binah: (annoyed) "Hazel, tlogela go iketsa betere (stop acting as if you're better than everyone). Go use our female toilets."

Hazel: "But Mama - "

Binah: "Now!"

It was a Saturday and so busy since they had all come from someone's funeral. Apparently he was a rich gangster, so it was

packed. I was so upset, but I went to the ladies toilet anyway. While in there, the music was so loud, I could barely hear anyone in the toilet. Only one of the customers was in there and she left. I got into one of the cubicles and did my business. Upon exiting, just before I washed my hands, I found the big, old man standing right in front of one of the basins. I think I went into a temporary state of shock. He didn't even look shocked or lost, he took one look at me and smiled, leaving me even more worried. My entire body started to tremble, as I got the worst fears.

Hazel: (scared) "This is the female toilet. You're not supposed to be here."

They called him Big man and only then I knew why.

Big man: (smiling) "I know, I came here for you."

Hazel: (scared) "Please leave."

He got closer to me and I think I must have become paralyzed with fear.

Big man: “Did you honestly think that I gave you those tips just for fun?”

Hazel: “I... I didn't even take them. My mom took them.”

Big man: “Well, then, I should thank her because I've been waiting for this moment for so long. I can't wait to get my tongue on your light, beautiful breasts.”

He got closer and I could smell his beer-tainted breath. He started touching me and I cried.

Hazel: “Please... let go of me.”

He kissed my neck, and started touching my thigh. I became increasingly fearful. I tried to fight back, but he pinned me against the wall. I had no idea where I got the courage from, but I screamed out so loud. He slapped me and just as I was

about to fall down on my back, he turned me around and ripped my leggings into pieces. I was crying while I could hear him unbuckle his belt. I screamed out again despite the heat I felt on my cheek. I begged God to help me, and I heard the door open. I saw my mother

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who looked instantly angry. At that point I thought she was going to blame me, but she did the unthinkable.

Binah: (angrily) “What the fuck do you think you're doing, Big man?”

Big man: “Ah, Bee, wa itse mos (you know, man). Ne ke no mo dumile fela (I was just craving her).”

The odd part was that my mother was carrying a large knife in her hand. I wasn't too bothered, but I was terrified. My entire bottom was exposed; I was violated right under my mother's nose. Another man felt that I owed him because he saw it fit enough to tip me. She came closer and wasted no time. Big man was begging, but my mother stabbed him right in the chest. She stabbed him multiple times, leaving me even more

traumatized. I think I forgot at that moment that I was half naked. I saw the blood gushing out of Big man's stomach and mouth like a bloody river. My mother had turned into an enraged beast. I'd never seen her do that to anyone before. She stabbed him until she saw the life leaving him. I was paralyzed, I couldn't move. Once she was done, she got up and took one good look at him.

Binah: "Are you okay?"

That was the very first time my mom showed genuine concern towards me. I just nodded, tearfully. She hugged me, with her bloodied hands.

Binah: "Come, let's get you cleaned up."

Hazel: "What about him?"

Binah: "Forget about him. I'll handle it."

Just like that, my mother embraced me in a way I had never been embraced by her before – with care and love. She walked out of there as if she had done it before. I had seen pure hatred from her eyes before, but that day – I saw her turn into something else – a vengeful mother would do anything to protect her child. I never thought my mother was capable of such deeds, and that showed me that what Big man did to me touched an enormously hidden nerve that was waiting to erupt. Come to think of it she never wanted men around us who would always make derogatory remarks about a certain way a child was dressed. Something big was brewing; that day I realized I didn't know my mother at all. I was so grateful for what she did for me that day; she killed a man – for me. I changed my entire view about her – despite her not changing. I felt eternally indebted to her; her act made me crave more of that care and love so much, that I endured bullshit from her. My emotions were on such a roller coaster ride, that I had no idea how I even made it out of matric. Days later, my mother was a bit nicer to me, but she still hadn't allowed me to quit working at the shebeen. Her exact words were; “quitting would mean that you gave into the monster. Face your fears, for life isn't for the faint hearted”. I had no idea why she was so tough on me, but it was most certainly not out of love. I mean, Bella was so out of control, that my mother just let her be as if she saw nothing wrong with her behaviour. Although she didn't

allow me to wait tables any more, she made me work behind the bar, and serve from there, cash up money for her and all that. I only got a break if I told her I had sports practice or a test coming up. I hardly even had time to see my friends. I felt as if she would love me the way a mother should if I gave into her abuse and bullying. I started losing a bit of concentration, I lost so much weight that my therapist was really concerned. Her words were; "Get your mother to come to a session with you, or else I am calling social workers". That was enough for my mom to agree, even though she was so negative about the whole thing. Beast was actually chuffed about my mother joining me for a therapy session, and he even offered to drive us. My mom never said no to a free ride, although what she did to Big man explained why she always walked around with a panga in her purse. She never got arrested for it – how? I had no idea. We made it to Dr. Speelman's office and she was very hyped about meeting my mother, finally.

Dr. Speelman: "Please, do take a seat, Ms. Makwetla."

Binah: (irritated) "This won't take long, will it? I have a business to run."

Dr. Speelman: "Don't worry, I promise you it won't take long, although I hope you'll have a different mindset by the end of the session."

Binah: "Hmm."

Dr. Speelman: "Ms. Makwetla - "

Binah: (interrupting) "Binah, rather call me Binah."

Dr. Speelman: "Very well then, Binah. I've had countless sessions with your daughter, but to my surprise she is not getting any better. She has told me some really deep and rather concerning things about your relationship with her. She has lost so much weight now, battles with concentration and she is showing signs of PTSD."

I looked at my mother and became instantly uncomfortable. I was not ashamed of her at all, but I was ashamed of her behaviour. She was so foul-mouthed, I knew she wouldn't waste any time showing her true self to my therapist.

Binah: “Ai, ai, ai (oh, oh, oh). Ska mpotsa dilo tseo wena (don't tell me such things, man). Ke dilo tsa makgoa tseo (those are white people's things). Unless you want to tell me that it is hereditary, since her father is white.”

Wow, at least she admitted that my father was white without cussing me out.

Dr. Speelman: “Not in this case, it isn't, Binah. Your daughter is stressed – she has been for years and I am actually surprised you didn't see it.”

Binah: “O stressa keng a le ngwana bjana (what's stressing her out when she's such a child)?”

Dr. Speelman: “Well, for one, the fact that you never told her about her father. Another reason is that you have never given yourself the time to be a mother to her. You have been and still are constantly side-lining her and practically gas lighting her.”

Binah: (shouting) “Yey, yey, yey (hey, hey, hey)! Akitsi o go boditseng o (I don't know what she told you), but nna azanka ka mo lighta nna (but I've never set her alight)!”

Dr. Speelman: “Binah, I know you're not stupid. You know very well what I am talking about and it seems to me as if you are a very good at being emotionally manipulative.”

Binah: (chuckling) “Doctor, do you have children?”

Dr. Speelman: “Well, no, but - “

Binah: “Then you have no idea what I'm going through. You see, this child right here, never told you how I saved her from a big, fat fuck that tried to rape her. He was about to do it – but not on my watch. I'll be damned if I let such a thing happen to my children! Now, isn't that what mothers do? I killed for her. If I have to, I'd do it again without a fucking heartbeat!”

She said that with so much anger and force and I saw tears threatening to fall down. I had never seen my mother get emotional – ever before.

Dr. Speelman: “I get the feeling it has happened to you before. Do you mind if we talk about that?”

Binah: (laughing) “Mind? What the fuck do you take me for?! Of course I do mind! Imagine me telling a stranger that I got raped and my son was conceived. You're not my friend, you're just someone who gets paid to listen to other people talk about their feelings. Become a real doctor, not this shit you're doing. You're forcing people to revisit pain that should rather be left in the fucking past.”

Wow, that was the very first time my mother actually admitted to being raped without being mean towards me. Okay, she was mean to me, but you know what I mean.

Dr. Speelman: “Revisiting pain is the whole idea. In order to move on, one has to do that.”

Binah: “Here's how I move on, Doctor! I fucking get over it and I try to forget about it, that's how I move on. That's how she should move on, too. She's not the first to experience such pain, and well, we can only hope that it doesn't happen again. You've already wasted so much of my time. Hazel, I can't believe you actually do this shit twice a week. Get a hobby, take some pills and just live life. I'll be in the car if you need me.”

With that said, she just walked out and left me speechless. I was so surprised that Dr. Speelman didn't lose her cool with my mother, but I guess it was part of her job not to let emotions get in the way.

Dr. Speelman: “Hazel, I am truly sorry that you have to deal with such on a daily basis. I know I am not supposed to give advice, really, but I'll give it to you today. If you keep having expectations of your mother changing, you'll become worse. You'll end up being really ill – mentally ill to the point where you'll live off these pills. Your anxiety won't get better and you will struggle to have a normal life. Start weaning yourself off her so that you can go stay far away from her after high school. Such people are dangerous, they play with your emotions.”

I should have listened, really. Sometimes, you need to get burnt quite a few times before you actually learn your lesson.

Phillipians 4:13 - “I can do all things through him who strengthens me.”

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“True forgiveness is when you can say, “Thank you for that experience.”

Oprah Winfrey

One year later...

Hazel

It had been one, tumultuous and hectic year. I had no idea how I even made it through the year. I had to study non-stop in order to stop myself from thinking about my life. I cut down my therapist sessions and she was seeing progress – a lot of it. I had gained my weight back, and my mother no longer made me work so much in the shebeen – only once a week when I didn't have a lot of work to do. Things were pretty much still the same; Bella was the favourite and I was still being treated like I was adopted or something. Speaking of Bella, she had failed her Grade 10 year, and was repeating, but still failed. Mama insisted that she go back, but she decided not to. Instead, she decided to drop out. Mama had started taking her to all kinds of Sangomas you could ever find, claiming that

Bella was bewitched by her father's wife. Honestly, I thought she was just not gifted upstairs, but I never said anything. It was our last day of exams, as well as the day of the matric dance. I had no idea why they made us write on that day, but well such is life.

Otlile: "So, my bitches, how does it feel to finally be done with these hideous uniforms?"

Kg and I laughed.

Kg: "They're not that bad, I'm actually going to miss them."

Hazel: "I for one will miss a lot about this school."

Otlile: "Well, then. Let's go so we can get ready for our evening."

My mother knew that I'd be going to Otlile's house to get ready for my matric dance. I really didn't want to go, but Beast encouraged me to go. He even bought me a dress, shoes and

everything else I needed for that evening. Otlile ensured to do my make-up and I looked completely different. I hardly straightened my hair – ever, so I looked really dashing and I loved it. While she and Kg wanted to go all out on their outfits, I decided to keep it simple. I didn't want to be the centre of attention. I absolutely hated that. I got a One shoulder cut out bandage dress that was so tight, and had a slit all the way to my thigh. I wasn't sure if I actually liked it, because it did reveal a lot of my skin. It was red in colour, so I stood out in that colour, another part I hated.

Otlile: “This is your one night to shine, Hazel. Stop over thinking and just go with it. You look absolutely beautiful.”

I loved how I looked, yet my mother kept texting me which rarely happened. She kept telling me not to go to parties. She hated parties with a passion – only when it came to me it seemed. Bella was partying up a storm almost every single day and she was fine with it. We did have an after party scheduled after the dance, and everyone had to go apparently. I didn't want to go, but I decided to live a little. We packed spare outfits for later, more casual ones, and Beast was going to be waiting for us the entire evening. He was really nice and had grown on all of us. He was such a tycoon those days; being an

owner to a few Chesa Nyama's and owning the best night club in Atteridgeville, he had become Dragon's rival.

They never got along and every time they were caught in one place together, it just didn't end well. He had become such a big shot, that he even started wearing suits more often. He looked so mature and no longer like the crazy gangster Beast everyone referred to him as. Of course, with more money comes lifestyle changes and women will also be flooding. Girls were all over him, although I knew that he was in a relationship with Sonto, who was his long-time girlfriend apparently. He hardly turned up anywhere with her, though, but everyone knew they were a couple. Despite his new lifestyle, he never failed to drive us to and from school on a daily basis – even to matches. Indeed, he kept his promise to Malachi.

Otlile and I took a few pictures with courtesy of her parents at her house; they had set up a whole photo shoot inside the yard. It looked so grand, and I felt like I was imposing at one point, although they never made me feel like I was – ever. They were so accommodating and also took a few with me. I envied that a bit; she had both parents who loved her which was such a rarity in most black families, but I just craved the feeling and reciprocation of love from one parent only, and I still didn't

receive it. Somehow, that damaged me more than I ever could have imagined. We finally let with the car Beast hired for us – a limousine and went to fetch Kg. We had never been in a limo before, so it was really nice and something quite worth the experience. Of course, Otlile kept standing on the seats while shouting with her head out the sun roof. Beast was driving us, and we even had champagne in there. Kg's parents were also nice, but they just seemed a little too “perfect”. It was as if they were hiding their true selves whenever people were around, but perhaps I was reading way too much into their situation. We didn't have dates – well, Kg and I didn't, but Otlile did.

She chose not to take him along as her date to accommodate us, but I felt she was being unfair to herself. Well, I for one had no idea how to even talk to boys, or at least I thought so. I had nothing in common with most of the boys in my grade, while Otlile was a firecracker. She could get any guy she wanted, while Kg was just Kg. Come to think of it I had never even heard her speak of boys or even entertain the idea of ever having a boyfriend. I would have thought that it was because she wanted to save herself for marriage, but something was a bit offish on her part. She just didn't talk about the opposite sex at all unless we initiated the conversation. She could speak

to them, but she never really entertained being involved. Maybe she was too afraid of them, I don't know. We finally made it to our matric dance venue; the Kyalami Estate in Midrand. It looked magical, and the fact that it was designed just like a Castle made it all even more spectacular. People were outside, a few of the parents who were cheering for us while we had a few camera men taking our pictures and recording the entire thing. I was very camera shy, unless I took pictures with those close to me, but that night I just decided that it would be a once in a lifetime thing, so I had to play my part. We looked so good and we were more inseparable than ever that night. We were together all the time, throughout the ceremony and even danced together. We were odd like that. Raymond kept trying to join us and he did smell like he had been drinking. I mean the champagne had done its trick with me, even though I had half a glass while Otlile had nearly the entire bottle. It was just supposed to be a starter, but she was quite a bit of a pro when it came to alcohol. She didn't seem too affected by it. Raymond was starting to become a nuisance when he started trying to touch us. We didn't like it, so we left earlier than all the others. Beast was outside waiting with the limo the entire time. He was taking a smoke when he saw us walking towards him.

Beast: "And then lona (you guys)?"

Otlile: "A se mpya e la ba reng ke Raymond (It's that dog called Raymond)."

Beast: (clenching jaw) "O chunneng (what did he do)?"

Otlile: "He - "

I interrupted her real quickly because I knew that Beast would not have let it go.

Hazel: (interrupting) "Nothing. He was just being the usual pig. Shall we go, please?"

Otlile gave me a look and Beast must have noticed, but I wasn't bothered. I just wanted to get away from there. He just nodded and got into his seat while we went to the back.

Beast: "Re ya va (where are we going)?"

Otlile: "To the after party, of course."

I wasn't feeling the after party scene any more, but I didn't want to be a party pooper.

Beast: "Do you all agree?"

Kg and I just nodded, while Otlile was the only one who agreed out loudly. Beast looked at me through the rearview mirror and proceeded to keep quiet. He played us some music and kept on driving. Otlile was the only one dancing; she was always the life of the party, while Kg and I were rather the opposite. We had our changing clothes in our bags in the boot and all our parents knew that we were going to have a long night, with Beast as our guardian. My mother was still not happy about it, but then, she let Bella go out all night every night, so she should have just let me be.

Beast: "Where is this party again?"

Otlile: "Oh, at Mathilda's parents' house in Montana."

Beast: "Give me the address."

Otlile: "Royal Haven."

Beast: "Okay, I'll take you to my house so you can change there."

I had no idea which house he was talking about. I mean, I had known that he was quite successful then, but I never enquired much about where he lived.

Otlile: "Your house? O re busetsa Pheli (You're taking us back to Atteridgeville)?"

Beast: (laughing) "No, I don't live in Pheli any more."

Kg: "Where do you live now?"

Beast: "You'll see."

He didn't drive for long until he entered a really posh security complex. I had no idea where we were until I saw the big sign; "Klaradyn Security Complex". Those houses were really beautiful. He drove for a while until he pulled up right outside one really nice yet simple house. It was a Tuscan style three bedroom house, with a beautiful pool and patio. Of course we were stunned that a "gangster" from Pheli had turned out so well. I mean he had done really well for himself. He loved fancy clothes and his style had changed a lot over the years, but never did we imagine that he would have moved to such a gorgeous and quiet neighbourhood. I mean, I've heard of the saying "you can take the ghetto out of the man, but you can't take the ghetto out of him" before, and he always struck me as those types.

Beast: "I'll pour myself a drink while you guys go and change."

Hazel: "We don't mind, but which rooms can we go into? We don't want to invade your privacy and Sonto might not like us being here."

I thought his face would light up like I'd always seen in the movies when he heard her name, but he was so cold.

Beast: "She's not here. Besides, this is not her house. You can use either of the two bedrooms down the passage."

I just left it at that while the three of us went to one of the bedrooms.

Kg: (surprised) "Tjo lena (wow, guys). Do you see this house, though? I mean just wow."

Otlile: "I don't mean to be negative or anything, but how does Beast afford all this?"

Hazel: "Otlile, you know it is rude to dig into people's pockets. Besides, he has a business."

Otilie: "I'm just wondering. Don't tell me you don't wonder as well."

I was actually itching to know, but I wasn't one of those people to actually ask. It just wasn't right.

Hazel: "Let's get dressed so we can leave. He's already taking time out of his schedule to drive us around and wait for us."

Otilie: "Come on, Hazel. I mean this guy has way too much time on his hands for someone who can afford such a house. I mean how much do these pozzies go for? Maybe 1 million a house if not more. I'm just saying; maybe the rumours are true. Maybe he is – you know, a gangster."

I actually felt a little offended by her attitude. I mean, Beast was so nice to us when he didn't even have reason to be. She sounded a bit judgmental.

Hazel: (frowning) "And? What if he is?"

Otile: "I don't care, I mean he isn't my boyfriend."

Kg could see I was getting fairly irritated.

Kg: "Let's not discuss someone's living right in his house, please. We didn't come here for that. Come on, he is waiting on us."

We quickly changed into our casual clothes, but Otile just had to dress up in a short dress and heels. I had had enough of dresses my entire life, so I just didn't want to stress myself again like that. We finally made it – half an hour later. I was worried we'd find Beast tired or sleepy, but he was relaxed and even watching tv.

Hazel: "Oh
you must be tired."

Beast: "Not at all. I'm used to the night life. Shall we?"

We walked out and headed back to the limo. It actually turned out that Mathilda didn't live that far from Beast. I had no idea Beast could afford such a lavish lifestyle, but it really suited him to be honest. A part of me really wanted to know where Sonto was, and I had no idea why. I wasn't a nosy person, but that night I became one – internally. He drove us and just before he got to her house he asked us what we wanted to drink. Kg and I were surprised. We didn't take alcohol.

Otlile: “Nna ke nwa Savanna (I drink Savanna).”

Beast: “What about you two?”

Hazel: “Uh, we have never really had any alcohol.”

Beast: “Okay, this is your first night of freedom, so you will want to experiment. I don't want you to take any drink you are offered by anyone – except the drinks I'm about to buy you.”

Kg and I were shocked.

Hazel: "I don't follow."

Beast: "I'd rather buy you alcohol than have some fucks date rape you. So, since well you two are alcohol virgins, I'll buy you red square. Take it easy. If you feel like you are getting drunk, take the energizer or drink water. Strictly take drinks from your cooler box, got it?"

Kg and I nodded.

Otile: "Chrystal. Wena Beast wang chaza (you really fascinate me, Beast). Other idiots wouldn't even do so much as buy us alcohol. O (You are a) star!"

I was a bit irritated because that is not what she was on about a few moments before then. She was about to call him a thug and all sorts of common names in all kinds of books. Beast stopped at a bottle store and left us in the car.

Beast: "Ka boa (I'll be back). Stay here."

Otlile: "Hazel, is there something I have done wrong?"

Hazel: "No, why?"

Otlile: "Because I can read your face and your attitude says it all."

Hazel: "I'm just surprised; a few moments ago you were all about how Beast is a criminal and now you are singing his praises just because he is about to buy us some alcohol."

Otlile: (surprised) "Hao (goodness), I'm sorry. I didn't mean to offend you, but my question is, why are you taking it so personally?"

Hazel: "I don't know what you mean? Beast is my brother's friend. He is like a brother to me."

Otlile: "Yes, like a brother not a brother. If I didn't know better, I'd say you have the hots for him."

I started blushing out of shock immediately. My face gave me away, but I just couldn't believe that she actually thought that of me.

Kg: "Come on, Otlile, Beast is ancient."

Otlile: "He's only 7 years older. Besides, my dad is 15 years older than my mom. I'm just saying."

I just kept quiet and let her be with her stupid theories. I had never had a crush on any one, so why on earth would she have thought that of me? Beast bought us the drinks he spoke of and put them in a cooler bag in the boot. Off we went and the moment we approached Mathilda's house, and the house was surrounded with all kinds of disco lights right from the outside and it was beaming with noise. I had no idea why her parents allowed such because it seemed a bit too busy for my liking. Luckily, it wasn't packed as not everyone liked her. She had toned it down a lot when we got to matric, but still, she had so many enemies and some would have rather remained on that list. She was actually so happy to see us and she

hugged the three of us. It was amazing how we just buried the hatched like that a year prior.

Mathilda: (excitedly) “Oh, I'm so happy that you guys could make it! Is your driver staying?”

Hazel: “Oh, uh - “

Beast: (interrupting) “No, I'll be nearby, in the parking lot, rather. They'll let me know once they're done.”

Mathilda: “Are you sure? I mean we do have adults around.”

Beast: “Some other time. Girls, remember what I said.”

Otilie: “Right. I'll get the cooler.”

She managed to carry it all on her own without any effort, while Mathilda introduced us to a few people. My mood was ruined

when we saw Raymond amongst the crowd. He seemed to have been drunk already.

Raymond: (smiling) "I see the Tripod made it."

Kg: (annoyed) "Mathilda, I know this is your party and all, but can't you put us a bit further away from him?"

Mathilda: "I'd love to, but all the other spots are taken. Come, you guys can chill with us. He won't be a bother."

I didn't like the idea of even being close to Raymond whatsoever, but I decided not to be a party pooper. We let her be and sat down. We had a lot of drinks offered, but we politely declined as instructed by Beast. We had some finger bites which were divine and everything at our disposal. I didn't see her parents in sight, although a few adults were walking around every now and then, most probably to ensure that we didn't get up to no good. I enjoyed the drink, although it was a bit too sweet, while Kg was already on her second one. By then, she was dancing which left both Otilie and I shocked as well as the rest of the crew. Kg was never one to just blossom

within the crowd like that. She even took off her glasses, and started dancing in a way I had never seen her before. I decided to stop drinking alcohol just so I could look after my friends. Otilie was a pro, but one just never knew. She had already had about three Savanna's in two hours and she was her usual bubbly self, just 100 times louder, funnier and funkier. Slowly but surely Raymond was making his way next to us. I didn't like him, something about him just turned me off and his rudeness didn't make anything better at all. I ignored his efforts to try to get me to talk to him and dance with him. There was a point where he literally shoved a cocktail in my hands, but I declined firmly. I could see the disappointment and then I remembered Beast's words. Perhaps he was on a mission to drug me. I had heard about those situations from people and we had seen a lot on tv. Parties are usually a breeding ground for rape and sexual assault. I made the unfortunate mistake of focusing on my social media to avoid Raymond, when I couldn't see where Kg and Otilie went. I assumed they must have gone to the bathroom or something, but after fifteen minutes I started to worry. I asked Mathilda where they were, but even she was too drunk to respond. I decided to leave the cooler bag where I was seated and start searching for them. I walked around the big mansion, but I was starting to get agitated. I didn't want to call Beast, because I knew that he would have a fit. I started knocking on random

doors all over the house, and most rooms were filled with couples and people who were trying to lose their virginity. None of them had Kg nor Otlile. I had both their phones, so it was pointless calling them. Upon approaching one of the bathrooms upstairs, I entered and found no one. It was really big, as it had both a bath tub and a shower. As I was about to leave the bathroom, I heard the door close behind me and someone turn the key. My stomach turned when I saw the person in front of me.

Raymond: "We're finally alone."

That devious, possessed look in his eyes brought back memories I tried so hard to bury. I could see Big man in him, although he wasn't as big.

Hazel: (panicking) "What are you doing here, Raymond? Why did you lock the door?"

Raymond: (evil smile) "You really think you're so smart, don't you? You have been ignoring my attempts from last year – despite me actually doing you a favour."

Hazel: (frightened) “What the fuck are you talking about?”

Raymond: “You think you are the perfect girl that no one can get, right? Well, I am done being nice. It is time for me to show you that I mean business. Since you won't give it up freely, I have to take it by force.”

He unbuckled his pants and exposed himself, leaving me so traumatized. I remembered that day, I was very scared and I froze, but I figured that the house was so loud and he had locked the door, although the key was still inside. He was stumbling, which meant he was too drunk and if I had frozen he would have most definitely finished what Big man couldn't. I couldn't be a victim – not when I was a pure. I refused.

Hazel: (scared) “If you don't step back, Raymond, I'm going to take a video of you and go live on my Instagram. Don't you fucking dare take another step.”

He thought I was bluffing, so he walked towards me. I took out my phone and went live immediately. He grabbed me so firmly,

that I tried to fight back. I could feel his rock hard penis against my body. It felt so disgusting, like a weapon that was about to be used to disembowel me. I screamed and fought back, but he ripped my shirt apart. I was wearing a jean and the way he was stumbling gave me an advantage. I waited for him to miss a step while we were tussling; he was quite tall, so he tripped me and I fell. He fell right on top of me. He started kissing me and licking my neck. My phone fell right onto the floor and it wasn't in my hands any more. I tried fighting back until I managed to kick him in the groin with my knee. I had never done self-defence before, but I managed to cripple him for a while.

Raymond: (groaning) “Ah, fuck! You fucking bitch!”

I got up without even thinking twice. I didn't even try to grab my phone which was right next to his face. He was about to get up and crawl right towards me, but I managed to unlock the door and run as fast as I could down those stairs. I nearly missed a few steps, but being sporty gave me an advantage. Only when I got to the ground floor, I started hyperventilating in shock. I continued to storm into every room possible down stairs, until I found Otlile on top of some random guy. I didn't know what I looked like, but Otlile's facial expression said it all.

Otlile: (shocked) “Who the fuck did that to you?!”

I was trembling in fear. All I wanted to do was just get out of there. I tried speaking, but tears came out instead. With every word I tried muttering, I started trembling even worse.

Otlile: (angrily) “Let's go get the fucker. I have a knife in my bag.”

Hazel: (shaking head) “There... There's... There's no time for that... Let's... find... Kg...”

Otlile: “Okay.”

I could feel her warm hand against my stone cold hand. She held me firmly and literally kicked down every single door down stairs. All the while I kept trying to see beyond my blinding tears if Raymond was perhaps following us. When we finally landed on door 5, we found Kg kissing one of our female

classmates. I didn't have any more room for shock, and Otlile was so angry that she also didn't have the time.

Otlile: "We need to go."

She looked at me and then at Otlile and said nothing further. Her clothes were off and it looked as if she was about to go down the girl, but she quickly got into her clothes and we were about to walk out.

Otlile: "Wait. You, give me your cardigan."

The girl didn't even protest. Otlile put it on me and buttoned me up. I didn't even realize that my shirt was completely gone. As we were about to walk out, in walked Beast. He looked frantic, but as soon as he saw us, his fear turned into rage.

Beast: (angrily) "What the fuck happened to you, Hazel? Are you guys okay?!"

Otile and Kg nodded ashamedly, while I couldn't speak.

Beast: (shouting) "Who did this to you?!"

I had no idea what they were asking because I couldn't see myself in the mirror.

Hazel: (tearfully) "Can we please just go?"

Beast: (angrily) "Let's go to the car."

I thought he was about to let it go, but no, he kept on looking at me while I just sobbed as soon as I got into the car. My mother's fear came into reality. Only then I understood why she didn't want me to go to that stupid party in the first place. I didn't understand why that had to happen to me all the time.

Beast: (angrily) "I won't ask you again. Who did that to you, Hazel?"

Hazel: (softly) "Di... Did what?"

Otlile took out her phone and switched on her camera. I was so shocked to see my face. I was half swollen on my left hand side, while my nose was slightly bleeding. My neck was red and filled with scratch marks. I hated the way I looked right there and then. I refused to speak and Beast drove off in high speed. I thought he gave up, but instead he dropped us off, took a huge gulp of his whiskey from the kitchen and left.

Beast: "Stay here, lock the doors. I'll be back soon."

He left the three of us just like that. I could tell how guilty Otlile and Kg felt, but in all honesty, it wasn't their fault. It could have happened to anyone.

Kg: (crying) "I'm so sorry for leaving you all alone."

Otlile: (teary) "It really wasn't my intention. Who did this? Did he rape you?"

Hazel: (shaking head) "N... No, he... he wanted to. The look in his eyes... he just turned into a monster."

Kg: (crying) "Who is it?"

Hazel: "Raymond. I'm so worried Beast might kill him."

Otilie: "I wish he actually does."

Luke 1:37 - "For nothing will be impossible with God."

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“In three words I can sum up everything I’ve learned about life: It goes on.” — Robert Frost

Hazel

After the entire ordeal, I was a mess to be honest. Only when I went to the bathroom and actually stared at myself in the mirror, was when I finally saw what Raymond had done to me. I still couldn't understand why it was so hard for me to speak up in certain situations, then I recalled one of the intense situations I had with Dr. Speelman. She did say that trauma responses differ from person to person and that I had the inability to speak or react whenever I was caught up in a traumatic situation. The reactions differ from exhaustion, confusion, sadness, anxiety, agitation, numbness, dissociation, confusion, physical arousal, and blunted affect. Most responses are normal in that they affect most survivors and are socially acceptable, psychologically effective, and self-limited. It was still very hard for me to find myself and behave like the person I wanted to become. Therapy is a tough journey and for me, instead of it helping me – I was slowly derailing my progress by

my inability to see the kind of wrong people I was surrounded by.

I cried silently as I inspected all my bruises. My face looked so horrible. Everything happened so fast when Raymond attacked me and I just didn't realize just how bad he had beaten me. The more I moved and touched certain places of my body, the achier it became. I slowly took off my clothes and got into the shower. I knew that from that night on, I'd never be the same again. I finished taking a shower and the pain seemed to have subsided once I let the warm water run over my body, but the moment I walked out of the shower, I was overcome with so much pain. I couldn't see my back, but I could tell I was probably more bruised than I initially thought. I went into one of the bedrooms where I found Otilie and Kg sleeping. They were quite drunk, and they were most probably waiting for me to finish taking a shower. I quickly got dressed and went to the kitchen. I started ravaging the cupboards hoping to find some pain medication. It wasn't long until I heard a key turning in the key hole. Even though I knew that no one else had the keys to the house except Beast, but I was still frightened. Thankfully, I saw him walking through the door. I wanted to check the time but only then I remembered that my phone fell in the bathroom during the entire scene. Beast looked entirely

different – he looked almost as if he had transformed into someone I didn't know. His shirt was a bit torn, while he had some red stain on his shirt. I grew increasingly weary, yet he was just calm.

Hazel: (worried) “Beast, o tswa kae (where were you)?”

Beast: “I went to sort out Raymond.”

Hazel: (scared) “What do you mean?”

Beast: “Exactly what you're thinking right now. Pain killers are on the top shelf next to the fridge. I'm going to take a shower.”

He left me standing there in deep-rooted shock, while I was trying to comprehend what I had just heard. He looked me dead in the eye and didn't even deny anything. Beast could not have been a killer, but then, would it have been so bad if he had killed Raymond – for me? I mean, my mother killed a man – for me as well. I started thinking that I was crazy or a curse to have had that sort of effect on people. The mind can be both a

dangerous weapon and the most fragile one. It only takes one incident, just one, to change your entire perception about life forever. One particular situation can alter your entire personality and way of life – possibly forever. I found the pill container and I took two of them. He had an entire stash of medicine in there, but I didn't even want to look through them at all. I decided to sit on the couch a little bit and switch on the tv. I could have tried going to bed, but I wasn't sleepy at all. Within a few minutes, Beast came back holding a garbage bag that looked filled. He put it aside the bin in the kitchen. He was topless, dressed in a pair of sweat pants only. I had never seen him topless before – let alone any other man. It was quite a confusing yet endearing sight.

Beast: “I thought you'd be asleep by now.”

Hazel: “I can't sleep.”

Beast: “I see.”

He came and sat right next to me and wrapped one arm around me. He made me lay my head on his warm chest.

Beast: “You really want to know where I was?”

Hazel: “Yes...”

Beast: “I went back to that house to find Raymond. I found him – eventually. His friends tried to defend him, so I beat them all up.”

Hazel: “Is that all you did?”

Beast: “Of course not. I took the fucker with me. I put him in the boot and took him to the nearest open field I could find. I fucked him up so badly, he will never ever mess with you nor another woman ever again.”

The finality in his statement.

Hazel: “What do you mean?”

Beast: "I mean he can't bother you ever again because he's dead."

I felt my heart drop right in the pit of my stomach for a second. I wasn't sad, rather, but I was shocked that Beast would do that for me. I didn't want him to ruin his life and go to prison for me.

Hazel: "Beast, you can't ruin your life for me like that."

Beast: "Hazel, no one – I mean no one fucks with the people I love and lives to tell the tale. It is high time you also learnt to grow a thick skin. I applaud you for running away from the guy, but it could have been worse. I don't ever want to think what can happen next time you find yourself in such a situation."

Hazel: "Okay."

Beast: "Get some sleep. We'll talk some more tomorrow."

The entire time we had changed positions and we were lying alongside one another in a spooning position. His arms were around me while I was trying to fall asleep by focusing on the tv. The entire time I kept thinking; “what if they come for him?”, “what if the police arrest him?”, “What did he do to the body?” I didn't want to ask him, not that time. Slowly, but surely I fell asleep. Beast was quietly breathing in my ear while I dozed off.

Beast

I can't believe how careless I had been by letting Hazel and her friends go to that party while I sat in the parking lot. It could have been worse. I honestly wanted them to enjoy their last day of high school, but instead I threw them into the lion's den. I knew that it could have happened to anyone, but I didn't anticipate that the same situation would happen to Hazel again. When I saw her bruised face as she approached me that evening; all I saw was darkness. I couldn't even think straight and my worst fear had been planted in my mind. I thought she had been raped, but luckily he didn't get that far. I knew that he had damaged her, though. He had planted such negativity in her mind, that it would take a life time for her to heal. With her mother and sister being assholes, she had to deal with another

sick fuck who tried to rape her. When she couldn't speak and tell me who had done that to her, I just lost it. I got into my car and drove off in high speed. The moment I went back to that house – I didn't hesitate. I stormed in and asked where he was. The asshole was with his friends and they were trying to sober him up. He wasn't completely sloshed, but I could tell that he was rather drunk. I wasted no time and grabbed him. I threw as many punches at him as I could. When his friends tried to stop me by defending him, I beat them up too – all 5 of them. I think they all left that house with some part of their body broken. I dragged Raymond out of there and put him in the boot of the limousine. I even forgot that time that I had hired the car. I drove off with him kicking and screaming in the boot, until we got to an open veld. I had promised my mother, God and myself that I'd never go back to the life I lived back in the day ever again. I promised Malachi that I'd protect his sister, and I failed – twice. I threw Raymond out of the car onto the ground. I could tell he was afraid as soon as he saw that it was actually me. I looked at him; he was tall – very tall and thin, but he had more power than Hazel. What sick and twisted person was he that he could take advantage of a tiny girl like Hazel? The more I looked him in the eye, the more I replayed the entire scene in my mind, although I wasn't there. I became increasingly angry; my eyes became bloodshot and I started hyperventilating. I was consumed with thoughts to hurt him –

severely. I wanted to make the world a better place by eliminating boys like him. Only cowards rape women.

Raymond: (pleading) “Please, man. I don't know who you are or what I did to you, but please – let me go.”

Beast: “Hazel most probably told you that when you wanted to rape her, but did you listen?”

Raymond: (frightened) “Please – I had no idea she was your girl
- “

Beast: “And that makes what you did any better?! You think you're smart, don't you? You go around raping girls with your tiny dick – then you don't deserve it.”

He was begging, pleading for me to have mercy, but that was not one of my mantras in life. I gave him one big punch across the face and one in the stomach. I stripped him naked and took out a knife from the car. I cut his dick off – slowly. His blood splashed all over me, but I didn't care. His deafening screams

didn't have enough impact for me to feel sorry for him. I then cut off his balls – slowly and forcefully fed them to him. He was screaming and then he started screaming less. I could tell his body was going into severe shock, so I slit his throat and he was gone. At that point I didn't care whether I got arrested or not. I did it for Hazel; to stop her from hurting. I threw him alongside the road somewhere and his parents would have had to find his useless body on the sidewalk. I had no guilt within me. I set the limo on fire. Replacing it was not an issue. I called an Uber right away and that is how I was dropped off at my house.

While sleeping with Hazel on the couch, I realized just how much I loved her, but it would have been such bad timing. I knew that Sonto was going to be pissed if she knew just how much Hazel meant to me, but I was done fighting the feelings. Hazel was a beautiful girl – both inside and out. She was someone I knew that I could build a life with and all I wanted was for her to heal and realize just how much she meant to those that loved her. I looked at the bruises all over her body and I became increasingly mad all over again. I couldn't even tell Malachi about what happened, because he would have probably come back on the first flight to South Africa. That night, I vowed to protect her and help her become

a stronger person. I prayed that she would love me the way I loved her, eventually. I had no problem waiting for her.

Hazel

I must have been out of it, but I was woken up by a cold splash of water right on top of me. When I opened my eyes

I realized that I must have fallen asleep in Beast's arms. As soon as I opened my eyes and my brain had registered what was happening, I nearly died. I got up as quickly as I possibly could, while Beast was too calm.

Sonto: (livid) "What the fuck is going on here?!"

Beast: (calmly) "Sonto, wa rasa (you're noisy)."

So many things were going through my mind. I looked at Beast, and I was actually shocked that he seemed so calm by it all. I was trembling; I thought I was going to die, to be honest. She was a big woman and by the look in her eye, she was going to murder me for that man. I was so conflicted. I was about to

shit my pants in fear, meanwhile I was soaking wet and humiliated.

Sonto: (angrily) “Uthini (what are you saying)?!”

Beast: “I said, you're making noise. Why didn't you knock first? Or better yet was it necessary for you to be so dramatic?!”

Sonto: (livid) “Beast, ungijwaela amasimba (you're full of shit), you know?! I walk in here to find you lying on the couch with another woman! A girl even?!”

Beast: “And? Is that reason enough to throw cold water on me? On us?!”

Sonto: (shocked) “Wow, Bethuel. Do you even care about me?”

Beast: “I did.”

Wow, that hurt me and he wasn't even talking to me at that point. I felt the tension and one could cut right through it with a sharp knife. I saw the tears emerge from Sonto's eyes, and I had no idea why Beast did what he did at that point. I mean, we weren't even a couple or anything like that. He was my brother's friend, for goodness sake!

Hazel: (shaky) "I... We... We're not a couple or anything like that, Sonto, I - "

She looked at me with such hatred and disgust. If she could have, she would have spit right in my face.

Sonto: "Did I ask you anything, white bitch?!"

Wow, that was so cold. I felt it, I truly did. I had no idea why, but I felt so attacked. She hardly even knew me yet she just decided to insult me for something I didn't even do. Sure, we were perhaps cuddling, but she should have known better than to insult an 18 year old and accuse her of stealing her man. I had always been quiet – I never spoke up whenever someone did me wrong. I always waited for the fuse to blow up to

retaliate. That was my weakness, amongst others. I just felt something brew in me – a new form of anger I had never experienced before.

Hazel: (angrily) “Excuse me? Sonto, you don't even know me. I am way too young to even do what you think Beast and I have been doing. You walk in here and call me a white bitch to top it all off? How would you feel if I just called you a fat bitch out of nowhere?!”

She got so angry, that she tried to slap me, but Beast grabbed her arm so firmly and nearly twisted it. He was bewildered.

Sonto: (screaming) “Aaah! Beast, you're hurting me!”

Beast: (angrily) “Don't you ever fucking try that ever again – do you hear me?!”

Sonto: “Ye... yes. Let go of me. Please.”

Beast: “You and I are done. It's over, Sonto.”

Sonto: (shocked) "So, you're dumping me for this... this thing?!"

Beast: "No, I'm dumping you because of your attitude. It's tiring."

Sonto: "Oh, I see. You're in love with her, aren't you?"

I saw something on Beast's face. His hardened face changed into softness as soon as she asked him that question. I had no idea, but if I didn't know better, I'd say she was right.

Sonto: "I knew it. Wow, I must be the dumbest bitch on earth. I should have seen the signs earlier on. Well, then, Beast. She's just a kid. Let's hope you can treat her better than you have been treating me. I mean, she most probably got her period just yesterday. Good luck with him, honey. You're going to need it."

She didn't seem to have been wishing us good luck, she was being sarcastic. I mean, why did I even hope for her

luck? Beast and I weren't even a couple. I didn't have boys anywhere on my mind. As soon as Sonto left, he became calm again and went back to his calm self.

Beast: "Go take a shower, I'll make you girls some breakfast."

I was hoping he would have said something about what had just happened. I mean, did he really just dump Sonto for me? Was he really in love with me? Could I have missed the signs? What had I gotten myself into?

After my long, intense shower, I had to wake Kg and Otlile and they too took a shower. I kept wondering what was going on in Beast's mind, but he was acting like nothing had happened. My friends were too hungover to hear the argument, and on the other hand, I was worried about Sonto. She wasn't from Pheli, but she had friends there and she might have just decided to look for an excuse to visit Beast's club to see me or something. I was just starting to over think of a situation that hadn't even existed yet. The day seemed like any other normal day and Beast took us home at about 2pm.

Beast: "Hey, I'll see you later."

Hazel: "Okay, sharp."

I was not even worried much about it until I realized that I didn't have a phone any more right after he left. Man, that was the iPhone my brother bought me as a present before he left for the U.S. I was heartbroken. Luckily, I had saved all my pictures and videos on the cloud, but still, you know. I loved that phone. Just before I was about to enter my room, Bella opened her door as soon as she heard me unlock mine. It was as if she was really waiting for me.

Bella: "Hmm, wa be o boile wena (you finally came back), Mrs. talk of the town."

Hazel: (frowning) "What are you talking about?"

Bella: (chuckling) "Did you even check your phone? Or ga o na le ka data (or you don't even have data)?"

Hazel: (frowning) “What are you on about, Bella? I lost my phone.”

She took out hers and showed me the video I took of Raymond while he was coming at me. I checked the name of the person who posted it was someone from school. Mathilda was actually one of the very few people who were defending me. Others were saying that I deserved it; I mean who the fuck says that to another woman? I was deeply annoyed as to why Bella would even find amusement in such a thing.

Bella: “It must be a family thing, right? I mean you nearly got raped – twice. Be careful, third time has always been a charm.”

I was so frustrated by her cockiness.

Hazel: “Well, I am guessing whoring must be a family thing from your father's side as well, right?”

The smug on her face immediately disappeared. I got into my room and closed it right before she tried insulting me all over

again. Life was just on my case way too much. I felt so attacked every chance it got. I just never got a breather. I felt warm tears threatening my eyes, but I refused to cry. While I was lying on my bed, I heard a stern knock. I got so annoyed. It must have probably been Bella, I thought to myself. Only to find that it was my mother.

Hazel: "Oh, Mama."

Binah: "Hmm, how was the party? I heard that it happened again."

Hazel: (nodding) "Yes."

Binah: "Did I not tell you that parties are a bad thing? Did I not tell you that?"

Hazel: "But, Mama, it wasn't my fault."

Binah: “Hmm, keep telling yourself that. You shouldn't have gone to that party. Now you'll learn to keep to yourself before they rape you the next time.”

Just like that, she left. The caring, warrior I knew months before was no longer gone. She had disappeared right in front of my face. I was slowly beginning to face the truth; my mother may have loved me, but she would have never been able to love me the way I needed to be loved. It was never going to be the relationship I had hoped for. I was slowly starting to accept that it was what it was.

Luke 1:37 - “For nothing will be impossible with God.”

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“Life is a succession of lessons which must be lived to be understood.” — Helen Keller

Hazel

A few weeks later...

It had been a rather interesting few weeks, and I had had a rather dry festive season. Bella was always out partying, while my other was just my mother. Oddly, Bella would run the shebeen on weekends, when she wasn't out and of course, Christmas was just a normal day. She had always hated Christmas. She never wanted us to celebrate it, not to mention New Year's Day. It was Malachi's birthday as well, so that also added to her demise. By then, I was getting prepared to go to University, as I had been accepted at three institutions already; University of Pretoria, University of Witwatersrand and of course one of my favourites – University of Stellenbosch. I was really excited; all that was needed was for me to decide where to go. It was exactly the 7th of January, and I was expecting my results. I had begged everyone not to sms or call me to tell me

what my results were, and that I wanted to be the first one to see my results on a Newspaper.

Beast had bought me a new phone, a replacement rather, and the latest version of an iPhone. I had no idea why, but he begged me to take it. I mean, I was going to ask Malachi to buy me a simple phone. He had been so busy so he hadn't had much time to come visit ever since he started studying. His semesters were a little different to ours, but I was happy that he was indeed happy and most of all; content. I had been sleepless ever since the night before, but I was avoiding everyone on WhatsApp. I tried by all means to sleep, but all I managed to do was toss and turn and watch some tick tock videos and browse through the latest celebrity stories on Instagram. It took me a while to get back on social media after that incident, but after an intense therapy session with Dr. Speelman, I realized it wasn't my fault. She did warn me though, that I needed to consider taking anti-anxiety medication to keep me calm, as I was starting to show symptoms thereof. It was getting bad, so I had no idea if I was ready to depend on pills to have a normal life, but it was inevitable. I kept delaying it until it blew up in my face. I heard a rather stern and repetitive knock on my door. I looked at the time and it was exactly 4am. I hesitated to open, I mean I had

concluded within my mind that the only person who had the audacity to walk into our yard at that time of the morning was most probably a thug. I decided to ignore, until the knock became even more persistent, until I heard a familiar voice.

Beast: "Hazel, bula man (open up, man). I don't want your mom to hear you."

He sounded so excited.

Hazel: "Beast, have you seen the time?"

Beast: "Of course, I did. I haven't slept a wink since midnight. I have a surprise for you. Open up."

Hazel: "No, if you have my results, then I don't want to hear them."

Beast: "Okay, then. I will shout out to the entire world from right out here."

Hazel: "You wouldn't dare."

Beast: (clearing throat) "Exam number 862574..."

I rushed to open the door for him and dragged him inside before my mother or even Bella became suspicious. I didn't want them to get their own ideas about Beast and I.

Hazel: (worried) "Are you out of your mind?"

Beast: (chuckling) "Come on. This is a very big moment. Here, take a look."

Hazel: (shaking head) "I'm afraid. I mean, what if I did really horribly?"

Beast: "You and horrible don't go along in the same sentence."

Hazel: "Please, read them out for me."

Beast: (nodding excitedly) "Okay."

He read out my exam number once more, which actually shook me. I had never given him my exam number, so how on earth did he know? I bet Malachi told him or something. Those two were sneaky as fuck.

Beast: "You got distinctions in the following subjects; English Home Language, Afrikaans First Additional Language, Life Orientation, Mathematics, Physics, Accounting, Life Sciences."

With every subject he mentioned, the more my heart started beating right out of my chest. I was in so much disbelief, that I became temporarily paralysed at that particular moment. I think I needed a few seconds to absorb everything I was hearing.

Beast: (excited) "Did you hear that?! You got distinctions in all your seven subjects, baby!"

My heart was jumping for joy, but I couldn't respond immediately. My mind temporarily blocked him calling me "baby". I felt warm tears make their way down my cheeks slowly, while the shock within me was slowly disappearing.

Hazel: (shakily) "Are... are you sure?"

Beast: "Of course, I'm sure! Congratulations, baby!"

He said it again. That was when I realized what he meant. I mean many people say those words out of happiness and excitement, right? He spun me around and kissed my forehead. I was too excited to think of all the logistics that were happening. Beast was so happy, I had never seen him that happy before. He then stopped spinning me around and gave me one, long and warm hug. I inhaled his scent for the very first time in my life. We had hugged before, but at that moment it all felt so different; so foreign. Weird things were occurring in my body, I was consumed with feelings I had never felt for the opposite sex. No wonder they had always said that intimacy makes people vulnerable; you literally strip yourself naked for the other person; you bare your soul for them to see

and once they get even the smallest glimpse of your soul, you are not a secret any more. We broke the hug and looked each other right in the eyes. I felt my heart beat both fast and slow simultaneously. I never knew that could happen. My eyes were filled with odd, glistening tears I couldn't even explain. The look in Beast's eyes were that of a man I had never seen before; it was a different form of beast standing right in front of me.

Beast: (smiling) "I'm so proud of you. Wait here. I'm going to get the champagne and cake to celebrate."

Hazel: (frowning) "Wait a minute, you bought champagne and cake at this time of the night?"

Beast: "Of course not. I bought them yesterday. I wanted to surprise you. Ka boa (I'll be back)."

I didn't want people to actually start noticing Beast walking in and out of my room, I mean it was starting to get a bit light outside.

Hazel: "On second thoughts, let me rather go sit in the car with you. I don't want people to start telling my mom things."

Beast: (nodding) "You're right. I didn't think of that. I'm sorry."

Hazel: "It's okay. Come, let's go."

I locked the door behind me and walked out of the gate with him. He opened the car door for me as always. He always did that for us whenever he fetched us from school. He was rather chivalrous, of which I couldn't understand why he treated Sonto the way he did that night, but then, I guess it was their drama – not mine. We got into his Mercedes Benz GLC Coupe. I mean he had come quite a long way; from a VW Microbus, to a Merc. He wasted no time and got the champagne out and two glasses. He popped it and filled both our glasses.

Beast: (smiling) "A toast."

Hazel: "To what?"

Beast: "To newer and greater beginnings. May you reach your dreams, Haze. You deserve every moment of what's coming."

I smiled as we drank up.

Hazel: "I don't think we should be seen out here. My mom and other people might get the wrong idea."

Beast: "Okay, do you want to go back to your room?"

A big part of me really didn't want to go back there; I was too excited to even want to go back.

Hazel: (shaking head) "No."

Beast: "Okay, then. It's almost 5am, where do you want to go?"

Hazel: "Anywhere but here."

Beast: "Okay, we can go to my house. I'll bring you back later, just before 8am. If that's okay with you."

Hazel: "But, I'm still in my pajamas."

Beast: "I'll buy you another outfit. If you go back to your room now, your mom and sister, might get suspicious."

Hazel: "Okay."

I let him drive off although I felt a little guilty, I had no idea why even. I just felt as if I was doing something wrong, but then, I appreciated Beast. He always took the time to check up on me, and all I did mattered to him. My happiness and dreams mattered to him, and that felt like he was doing quite more than what a brotherly figure was doing. I was conflicted, but I decided not to entertain all the what if's I had in my mind. While driving off, he played some music, and indeed the first song on the list was Ami Faku's Ubuhle Bakho. I had no

idea why he just loved playing that song, but it slowly started being a song of severe significance to me. I never bothered asking Beast about Sonto ever since that day she nearly beat me up, and quite frankly I had never seen her around Atteridgeville ever since. I was never one to go out in any case, so perhaps she was around, I just never noticed. We finally made it to his place at about 5:15. He was a fast driver, although his love for speed was supposed to put me on edge, I enjoyed the comfort of his Mercedes. I took a good look at him for a good few minutes; and I was actually beaming with pride. He had come such a long way, he had always been there for my brother and now he was a familiar face and supportive figure in my life. He kept me going even when I felt like dying. I felt a little blessed to have him in my life. I found myself smiling, unwittingly.

Beast: (frowning) "And then?"

Hazel: (blushing) "Oh, nothing."

Beast: "Please don't tell me you have a crush on me."

I felt so embarrassed that I blushed. I knew then that my face had turned red.

Beast: (chuckling) “Ka dlala (I'm joking).”

Beast always had a habit of brushing such things off. Whenever we found ourselves in a situation where we had to sort of proclaim our feelings for one another or something, he would just brush it off and pretend it never happened. The guy would legit not even touch the topic – no matter what. We finally walked into his house and I just wanted to go through all the cupboards, bedroom doors – anything I could lay my hands on to see if there was indeed a woman living with him or something. I felt as if I needed to know. I was consumed with those thoughts and feelings, I had no idea why. Could it have been that I had spent so much time with Beast that I felt entitled to be his girlfriend or something like that?

Beast: “Please, take a seat. I'll make you something to eat.”

I felt so weird being in my pajamas when it was already morning.

Hazel: (nervously) "Can I take a shower?"

Beast: "Of course, but you don't have toiletries. I can give you new ones, if you don't mind."

Hazel: (nodding) "Sure."

I was about to go into the guest bathroom, that I used when my friends and I slept there previously, but he just dropped a surprising bomb on me.

Beast: "Please, use the bathroom in my bedroom."

Hazel: (surprised) "Uhm... why?"

Beast: "Come on, Hazel. This is basically your home too. You're not a guest in your own home."

I felt appreciated, but also uneasy. I didn't want to intrude.

Hazel: "Are you sure I'm not intruding?"

Beast: "Not at all. Come on, I'll get you something to wear in the mean time. You surely can't walk around in your pajamas and gown until you go home."

I just nodded and followed him. Goodness, his scent just evoked something within me. I became temporarily numb. I had no idea what was happening with me. Perhaps I was maturing into someone or something new, something foreign. We walked into his bedroom, for the very first time and I was in awe at just how perfectly neat it was. He was such an ODD suferer, like my brother. No wonder they got along so well. I could smell the cleanliness of that room just as I walked into the door. The entire bedroom looked so beautiful, one would never believe it was a male's bedroom. It had white and black colours, and the bedding was completely white, with a touch of black. It was just so sophisticated and gorgeous. I was in total awe, that I had forgotten he was right there.

Beast: “This is my humble abode, my bedroom, my sanctuary, where I go to escape everything. It might not be your style, but I like it.”

Hazel: “Don't be silly, I completely love it. Don't get me wrong, but I never thought of you as someone so particular and articulate with his things.”

Beast: (chuckling) “There's so much you don't know about me, but given the chance, I'd like you to get to know me.”

He stared at me deep in the eyes again just like before, and then broke the contact. It left me so bloody confused, I just had no idea what he was playing at or if I was indeed imagining it all. He went towards his closet and opened one side, all his towels were neatly packed as well as bathe sponges and toiletries. He took out one shower sponge, a bottle of shower gel and towel – all brand new.

Beast: “Here

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will this be okay, or o hloka waslap (or you need a wash cloth)?"

Hazel: (laughing) "Don't be silly man. I'll be okay."

Beast: "Okay, I'll look for something for you to wear, while you take a shower."

His bathroom didn't have a door, I mean it was an en-suite after all. I wasn't sure how comfortable I was with all that, but I went ahead with it anyways. I took off my clothes and got into the shower. It was so big – the biggest one I had ever stepped into. I never thought people actually built showers that big. It was just so odd. It had so many pipes and buttons, and I felt too embarrassed to even ask Beast how to turn the taps on, so I eventually figured it out myself. After a few minutes, I was done. I felt refreshed and renewed, the entire time I kept thinking of my future and what it held. All I wanted was to just make it in life, although a very small part of me still wanted my mother's validation. I guess it is something we all have within our nature. It is never easy to let go of family – the family that birthed you. I got out with a towel wrapped around me, and I found Beast in the bedroom.

Beast: “I got you one of my shirts. I thought of giving you my sweat pants, but you'd swim in them, really. My shirt will look like a dress on you.”

I chuckled and he walked out, leaving me to carry on with my duties. His shirt smelled like him, it was just such a unique smell, you know. He had packed everything so neatly for me on the bed, so after I put on some lotion and got dressed, I took the brand new toothbrush and toothpaste and went back to the bathroom. I was a little stunned and rather irritated to find something I didn't expect to find in his house – a woman's panty. It was not too big, so it couldn't have been Sonto's undies, but something within me just dampened my mood a little bit. I wasn't happy and I had no idea why. Beast and I were not a couple, we were not even a potential couple, but it just upset me. I brushed my teeth with a heavy heart, and packed everything away neatly before I went out. I felt a little silly, but then, I just couldn't help it. I found he had already neatly placed our breakfast with some mimosa's on breakfast trays on the kitchen table. I walked towards him and he noticed the change in my mood.

Beast: (frowning) “What is wrong?”

Hazel: (shrugging) "Nothing."

Beast: "Come on, Hazel. We are celebrating here, and now you look like you have just seen death itself."

Hazel: (sigh) "It is just that... I saw a woman's underwear in your bathroom."

He took a moment to look at me and then he laughed.

Beast: (laughing) "So? It got you mad?"

Hazel: "No..."

Beast: "Bathong (goodness) Hazel. Are you jealous?"

Hazel: "Don't be ridiculous."

Beast: "I mean, I didn't think you actually cared about who I date, you know? If you must know, it was just a fling. Nothing serious, she must have left her underwear in my bathroom in case I brought a woman home."

That still didn't put my mind at ease.

Hazel: "Oh..."

Beast: "And if you must know, I didn't sleep with her – unless, you there is something you want to tell me."

Hazel: "No, no, there isn't."

Beast: "Well, okay then. I am glad we have hashed things out. I don't want you to feel like you can't tell or ask me anything, okay?"

Hazel: (nodding) "Okay."

Beast: "Let's make a toast; to new and wonderful beginnings."

Hazel: (laughing) "We've been toasting, Beast."

Beast: "This is a huge step towards your future, we cannot toast enough."

While we were toasting, my brother called me via video call. I answered almost immediately.

Malachi: "You're a hard woman to find, Hazel Makwetla."

Hazel: (chuckling) "Askies (sorry), brother. It's been a hectic time."

Malachi: "I am guessing congratulations are in order. You did so well. I am so proud of you, baby sis. I want you to keep going and make yourself proud one day. You deserve everything good coming your way."

Hazel: "Thank you, abuti (brother)."

Malachi: (frowning) "Where are you?"

Before I could answer, Beast jumped right in.

Beast: "She's right here with me, Malachi."

Malachi: (frowning) "I hope you didn't take my sister on a night out rendezvous at your house, Bethuel."

Beast laughed, while my brother smiled. I couldn't understand their nonchalant behaviour. I honestly thought my brother would be angry seeing me at Beast's house at 6 o'clock in the morning, but he was chilled about it.

Beast: "You know that is not my style – especially with those that I love."

Hazel: (surprised) "Wait, you're not angry that I am here?"

Malachi: (frowning) “Why would I be, Hazel? You're old enough to make your own decisions. If I keep you on a leash, what good would that do to you? You're still going to date and get hurt, have fun and hurt some boys. It is what it is.”

Hazel: “So, you wouldn't have a problem if I dated Beast?”

Malachi: “Do you want to?”

I couldn't believe my own mouth actually asked that question. Both of them looked at me in suspense, waiting for an answer. Beast looked as if he was hopeful, while Malachi was just.... Malachi.

Hazel: “Hayi (no), man. What's with the 20 questions?”

Malachi: “We were just having a conversation.”

Hazel: “Hayi (no), let's change the topic. Besides, my eggs are getting cold.”

Malachi: “Okay, then. Check your phone in a few minutes, I have sent you a nice gift. Spoil yourself. You deserve it.”

Hazel: “Thank you, brother. See you soon.”

Malachi: “Sure, give Beast the phone. We'll talk soon.”

I nodded and said my goodbyes, as I gave Beast the phone. He didn't even hesitate, he got right up and left with my phone to speak to my brother in private. I was already used to their private conversations. I mean, I was his friend's sister, so that didn't mean I had to know everything they were talking about, but from that day on, whatever they were speaking of in private, made me wonder. I was burning to know each time they did that. We all know what the Bible says about curiosity; Proverbs 25:2 – 3 says; “It is the glory of God to conceal things, but the glory of kings is to search things out. As the heavens for height, and the earth for depth, so the heart of kings is unsearchable.”

Beast

Ever since I dumped Sonto, I didn't even feel bad about it. The more time I got to spend with Hazel alone, the more I just fell in love with her. I respected her so much not to act on those feelings, although it was very hard to do. I didn't want her to get the wrong impression of me, or to think that I was falling for her out of pity or some sort of rebound. I had always felt like that about her, it is just that when Malachi left, I started to see her more of a romantic interest; as someone I wanted to spend the rest of my life with. Yes, a lot of people would judge me, but I wasn't an ordinary man. I didn't want to prey on an 18 year old, I wanted to shower her with all the love in the world. I wanted to show her that I was capable of loving someone til death. I didn't want her to fall for some sick fuck boy as her first boyfriend. I could see a spark in her eyes, whenever we locked eyes, but then again, I just didn't want her to feel as if I was taking advantage of her. She was still transitioning into a woman, especially mentally and I just didn't want to hinder her progress. She had endured so much with Raymond and her mother, that I just wanted her to realize my love when she was mature enough to know what it even was. I couldn't help it, so I spoke to Malachi about it the moment I

started having those feelings. I was afraid that he would have thought I was preying on his sister, but surprisingly, he was quite the opposite. So, I took the phone from Hazel to go and speak to him privately.

Malachi: "So, any news?"

Beast: "By news you mean Hazel and I? Nah, nothing."

Malachi: "You do know that she is still immature, right?"

Beast: "Of course, I do, but honestly, I just want her to realize how much I love her."

Malachi: (nodding) "She will see it – not now, but eventually. You guys still have a long way to go. Many hurdles will hinder your relationship's progress, but eventually, with diligence and perseverance, you will win her over. Beast, the ancestors chose her for you and vice versa, but that doesn't mean you guys will end up together. It is your duty – the both of you to work on it. Just hang in there and keep praying."

Beast: (nodding) “I'm so glad that you are so supportive of this. I was shaking so much when I had to tell you how I feel about her.”

Malachi: “I saw it long before you felt it. Remember, I am a prophet. The two of you can break generational curses – only if you preserve. My sister has been through quite a lot, but nothing will prepare her for what is to come. You are the only one who can mend her pain – no matter what. No matter what happens, don't give up on her.”

I wasn't sure how to even react to his last statement. It felt as if he saw something really hectic, but he just didn't want to be direct with me. I knew that I had gotten his blessing to be with Hazel and that the ancestors did approve of me. I mean, literally the night before her results came out, Mam'Rose visited me. She told me that Hazel was indeed my one, but I needed to be patient with her. I was prepared to do all of that, because she just had what no other woman could give me.

Beast: “Cool, man. I really appreciate everything you do, but you have got to stop sending her money. I meant what I said, you know. I will take care of her.”

Malachi: “What kind of a man would I be if I didn't send her money? Besides, you haven't married her yet. You can tell me to stop once you have married her.”

Beast: (excitedly) “Does that mean you do give me your blessing?”

Malachi: “Ai (Oh), man, Bethuel. We'll talk soon. Class is awaiting me. Bye.”

Beast: (chuckling) “Bye.”

I was so excited, as if she had already accepted my proposal, but I was willing to wait. I walked back and she was halfway done with her breakfast.

Hazel: "Sorry I didn't wait for you. I just had no idea you were such a good cook."

Beast: (smiling) "It's alright, I don't mind."

We ate together and had a little more mimosa's. I didn't want her to get drunk and question her inhibitions, so we sat and watched tv. Slowly but surely she drifted off in my arms, while I was brushing her back and beautiful curly hair, softly. I just enjoyed the subtle moments with her. Hazel was one of a kind. Yes, she had her demons like all of us, but she had a purity that no one else had. That is what I loved about her. All I knew was that I had the blessings of all my ancestors and God and that I had an entirely new life awaiting for me with my Hazel.

Acts 1:7 - "He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. "

“We become what we think about” – Earl Nightingale

Hazel

I must have dozed off right in Beast's arms, and we woke up at about 10am. I started freaking out, although he reassured me that I would not be in trouble. He took me to the mall and bought me a new outfit – despite my brother sending me R5000. He insisted that it was all about me and that he didn't want me to spend my own money. It just wasn't right. So, I opted for a simple jean and Tshirt and sandals, otherwise my mother would have noticed that something just wasn't right. He took me straight to school, and I told Kg and Otlile that I would meet them there. We received our results and I was so thrilled. I just couldn't believe how beautifully I had passed. As always, Beast was right there, waiting for me in his car. The three of us were so excited; it was almost unbelievable. We were all looking forward to the future and finally reaching our goals; I wanted to be a Psychiatrist, while Otlile wanted to go study for a degree in Bachelor of Science, Kg was more than happy to do Teaching. She had always wanted the simple life, by being a Life Sciences and Physics teacher, eventually hoping

to become a Professor in either or both of the subjects. We were young and happy, so happy that we had decided to apply at the same Universities, so that we'd always be together. They both had such supportive parents, while I on the other hand had another story to tell. While we were taking pictures with our Matric certificates in our hands, I had to take a few pictures of Otlile with her parents, along with Kg and hers. I was the only one without my parent there. It was bitter-sweet, I knew that Malachi wanted to be there, but I really hoped that my mother was there too, even if she wasn't going to be there with a pure heart. Beast sent me a text message.

Beast: “Hey, do you mind if I take the three of you out to celebrate?”

I had asked them, but their parents wanted to celebrate the moment with them. Of course, they offered me an invitation of which I politely declined within reason. I didn't want to impose, I mean I actually felt as if they all pitied me to a certain degree. I just had to accept that my family was unconventional and they just didn't care about me. We said our goodbyes, while I slowly walked to the car. It started to feel so surreal, I knew that my mom would never be happy for me – no matter how hard I tried, but I just couldn't comprehend.

Beast: (frowning) “You look rather sad for someone who has just received distinctions in all her subjects.”

Hazel: (sigh) “It's just that... both my friends have their families with them while I have no one.”

I think that statement sort of took him aback.

Beast: (frowning) “I'm family too, aren't I? I'm your family, Hazel. Family isn't just blood, you know. In fact, blood can hurt you way more than water. I know how this feels, believe me, but you have your entire life to be someone total opposite to your mother. You're one of a kind, and the colour of your skin or your appearance should never determine the kind of person you are. My prayer for you is that you get to realize just how beautiful you are – both inside and outside. I wish you could dig deep within your heart and search for the real you – the inner you and just set your soul free. You deserve happiness, and no one other than yourself can give that to you.”

He was so right, yet it just felt so hard for me to believe it. Beast was such an incredible guy. He had literally been there

for me – every step of the way. I had no one, but he stepped up without fail, without expectation.

Hazel: (teary) “Thank you so much, Beast. For the first time in my life, I realized what an important figure you have been in my life – more especially since my brother has been gone. I wouldn't have gotten here without you, your encouraging words and just your presence. I really appreciate you.”

Beast: (smiling) “This is the part where you say; “I love you, Bethuel”.

I laughed while blushing.

Beast: “I'm kidding. Let's go.”

I honestly didn't want to go home at all.

Hazel: “Re ya kae (Where are we going)?”

Beast: "Somewhere happy."

I nodded while he drove off and played music. He enjoyed singing along with me, and if I didn't really like a song much, he'd skip until I sang along to a song. I really enjoyed the car rides with him. We could literally say nothing to one another, but have the time of our lives. I didn't even realize where we were going, until we landed right in Menlyn Maine.

Hazel: (frowning) "Re ya kae now (Where are we going now)?"

Beast: (smiling) "You like trampolines and jumping castles?"

Hazel: (frowning) "Not really, I mean, as a child I never got to enjoy those much. Why?"

Beast: "Well, today is all about releasing the inner you; the inner child, the inner soul – just go with it."

He opened my door. He hated it whenever I opened the car door for myself. I had gotten seemingly used to it, and I must

say, it felt so nice. While we walked out, he took my hand in his and I felt electrifying sensations rush throughout my body like lighting. It felt good, yet scary at the same time. We went to Bounce, and as much as I really didn't want to be there, he made me feel comfortable.

Beast: "Hazel, you are about to go to Varsity, meet and make new friends. Surely, you don't want to be so uptight when you have the entire world ahead of you. I never got to experience being an actual Varsity student, although I had the entire varsity life experience. I just want you to enjoy yourself without holding back. I don't mean go rogue, but I mean let loose a little."

I wasn't quite sure what he meant, but I went with it. I nodded while we got took off our shoes and put socks on. Only Beast walks around with an extra pair of socks in his car. We got onto the trampolines and started jumping. A few minutes in, it felt rather uncomfortable, but then anything foreign to the mind and body feels unsettling at first, but soon afterwards, I started to enjoy myself. I had completely forgotten about all my life's troubles. Beast was most probably the biggest guy there, yet he was jumping up and down those trampolines like he was a little boy. He was having the time of his life, without a car in the

world and without even worrying who could have seen us. That day, I wasn't hanging out with Beast, one of the most feared guys in Atteridgeville, but I was hanging out with the guy I knew – Bethuel, the soft, funny, gentle giant that I had always known. After nearly two hours of jumping up and down, he didn't let me rest. I loved food, to be honest – good food. I didn't know much about alcohol, since I was just a beginner, but he was more than ready to educate me on that. We made a stop at Old Town Italy, and apparently we needed to make a reservation first, but after he gave the guy at the door a few hundred bucks, we were in. He introduced me to Italian dishes I had only heard of on tv. It was just so amazing and tantalizing to the tongue and refreshing on the palate. I enjoyed every single taste of every meal, and the wine was just something out of this world. He even taught me how to hold my glass and instructed me not to drink too much. He didn't want me to get drunk.

Hazel: “Yoh (wow), this wine is doing the things, man. I had no idea there were such nice wines in this world. My mom only drinks bo di 4th Street and Robertson's.”

Beast couldn't contain himself. He burst into laughter.

Beast: (laughing) "That is what most people drink, but that is not pure wine, Haze. If you'd like I can take you wine tasting."

Hazel: "When?"

Beast: "Pick a date."

Hazel: "Don't you have work?"

Beast: "I'm the boss, I don't have to show up."

Hazel: "Oh, alright."

Otlile always said that alcohol gave people so much confidence, and I believed it that day. Normally, I'd always blush whenever Beast said something nerve-wracking or gave me a compliment, but after one and a half glasses of Pinotage, I was ready to ask him anything I wanted to.

Hazel: "Won't your new girlfriend be angry at you?"

Beast: (laughing) "I see the wine is really doing the things, isn't it?"

Hazel: "You're not answering my question."

Beast: "If you must know, I don't have a girlfriend, Hazel. I told you, it was just a girl I started flirting with and she wasn't very nice to me at first. As soon as she saw the car, she changed tune. I just needed company. I have no wife, no children. I get lonely at times, so I took her home with me, but I couldn't even bear getting naked with her. So, she must have left that piece of underwear there just to spite you."

Hazel: (surprised) "Me?"

Beast: "Yes, you are the first and only woman I've brought to my place since Sonto."

I loved how he called me a woman instead of a girl. He had so much respect for the opposite sex.

Hazel: (smiling) "But that doesn't mean anything, does it?"

Beast: "Do you want it to mean anything?"

Hazel: "I don't know."

Wait a minute, did I just say that to Beast? I mean he had concomitantly asked me if I actually wanted a relationship with him. Funny enough, when sober, I could never get his codes, but that day, I understood his entire language.

Beast: (smiling) "Let's talk about this when you're sober. Come, the day is still long. We haven't done anything yet."

Hazel: "Where are we going? I mean, my legs are starting to feel wobbly."

Beast: "I told you that you shouldn't drink too much. Come, you'll get a bottle of water on the way."

Hazel: "Can't we take this wine as skhafthinin nyana (a doggy bag)? I mean it is absolutely delicious."

Beast: (laughing) "I'll buy you some, come."

We left the wine, much to my dismay. I felt as if we were wasting good quality alcohol. I mean, I of all people was raving about anything and everything. Normally, I was a very quiet person, but that day, I was just a chatterbox, while Beast was laughing at everything I said. He looked at me so intrigued. I just kept on talking until we got into Times Square Casino.

Hazel: (shocked) "Beast, I haven't been in a casino before. I mean, come on."

Beast: "Relax, I come here all the time. Let's go."

By then he opened my car door for me as always and we walked out hand in hand. I felt so warm – so flushed, to be precise. I felt as if I was starting to sweat.

Hazel: (whispering) “Bethuel, I feel so hot.”

Beast: (smiling) “Ke wine (it's the wine), baby. Let's go in so I can get you a bottle of water.”

My heart jumped for joy when he called me “baby”. I had no idea why, but it seemed as if I was ignoring all the signs my body and my heart were sending to me. We managed to walk through. I was panicking, I felt so guilty because I was only 18, while he just laughed at me the entire time. I mean, the nerves showed on my face and I could see just how pink I had gotten. Luckily, right after getting off the escalators, we saw tons of atm's and I saw a rest room sign.

Hazel: “I need the bathroom.”

Beast: “I'll be right out here. Go on ahead.”

I rushed to the bathroom, as I stopped and looked at myself in the mirror, my eyes were slightly red and my face was completely flushed. I splashed some water on my face, and went to relieve myself quickly. While I got out, I found Beast putting some money into his pockets.

Beast: "Are you ready to go?"

Hazel: (nodding) "Yes, but I have no idea what to do."

Beast: "That's what I am here for, baby."

He said it again, for the second time. My heart just kept jumping for joy the more he said it. It started feeling less foreign whenever he kept calling me baby. It actually felt normal to me as time went on. An hour later, I had played a few slot machines, roulette and black jack. I had no idea I had so much luck, when I won about R6000. He was cheering me on the entire time, and whenever I wasn't playing, I'd give him some random numbers to play. We occasionally stopped to eat and drink whatever I wanted to. I was craving anything and

everything from smoke candy to popcorn. I even tasted a few cocktails, until I cashed out my money. He won a good R10 000 as well, and he called me his lucky charm. That time we only placed bets worth R1500. I felt so good and I actually felt as if we had done something really good with my time for a change. It was about 2pm, but to me, it felt like I had been out for ages. Instead of taking me home, Beast took me shopping. I insisted on spending my money – the money I won at the casino, of which he stopped protesting because I just wouldn't hear of it. He took me to a few shops that I had no idea even existed. I preferred Cotton on and Mr. Price, to say the least. We finally left the mall and headed to his house around 4pm. I kept staring at my phone subconsciously hoping that my mother would have sent me a message or something, but I got nothing.

Beast: “Are you expecting a phone call?”

Hazel: “I wish. Anyway, are we going to your place?”

Beast: “Yes, I was hoping you'd leave the clothes at my place so that I can drop you off at home. I'll bring them back around tomorrow.”

I was a bit disappointed. I really didn't want to go back home – not yet.

Hazel: (disappointed) “Oh...”

Beast: “You don't want to go home?”

I shook my head.

Beast: “Well, then, what do you want to do?”

Hazel: “I just don't want to be alone today.”

Beast: (nodding) “Okay, you could have told me so that we buy you some sleepwear.”

I chuckled as we bought some food and wine from Woolworths, along with a few beers at the nearest bottle store and proceeded to his place. I had a really great time and I didn't want to sleep just yet. He asked me to go to his bedroom to

freshen up and when I went to look for the panty I had seen earlier on, it was gone. He must have removed it, though. Good riddance to whomever I didn't even know. I took my clothes off and got into the shower. I had learnt how to master it and I went out – completely naked, because I had forgotten to take a towel from his closet. I contemplated putting on my clothes, but then who wants to get into a jean only to take it off a few seconds later? So, I took the risk – I rushed out of the bathroom stark naked, and headed to his closet. As I was about to open the closet door, I noticed him lying right on the bed, overcome with shock. I was flabbergasted and covered my breasts and a part of my vagina almost immediately. He got up and looked away.

Beast: “I'm so sorry, I was waiting for you. I was afraid you might slip or something in the shower. I'll see you in the lounge just now.”

Hazel: “Oh... Okay.”

Beast: “By the way, I got you some sleepwear. It is in this plastic bag.”

He didn't even want to face me, instead he just put the plastic bag on the bed and walked out facing down. I felt so weird, I mean, no man had seen me completely naked before. Beast handled it like a man – a real, respectful man. He didn't even look at me lustfully, but he chose to walk out and not comment on my appearance. Those were the qualities that made me like him even more.

Isaiah 13:12 - "I will make people more rare than fine gold, and mankind than the gold of Ophir."

50

“Women are meant to be loved, not to be understood.” – Oscar Wilde

Hazel

They say life works in mysterious ways, and that day I actually believed that statement. For as long as I could remember, I had been so good at formulating speeches with such topics, I had always managed to navigate the severity of people's lives and grasp the attention of my listeners, but on that day, I never thought I'd ever start looking at Beast in a different way. I never actually thought I'd look at him with the eyes of a significant other, instead of that of a sister. I felt so many magnified waves of electricity rushing through my body. Every time he stared and smiled at me, something within my gut turned, but in a rather exciting way. Every time he touched me, shock waves sped through my body and weakened my legs. I asked myself countless times if that was for sure love. Surely it was a new kind of feeling I had never experienced before. 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 says; “Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at

wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”

Surely whenever I thought of everything Beast had done for me, he was patient and he was indeed kind, yes, he was never boastful of everything he had done for me, he was never irritable – at least towards me nor was he resentful, he never rejoiced in any of my wrongdoings and yet he always rejoiced in the truth. He never failed to tell me the truth at all times, he had so much faith in me, he endured everything I had endured and he took away some of my pain. Never did he ask for anything in return, but instead, he was always supportive and patient. I stood right in the middle of his bedroom, stark naked, trying to comprehend what had just happened. Beast just saw me naked, and I didn't think of him as my brother's friend. I thought he would react like those guys on tv, but instead, he was respectful enough not to stare or salivate. Beast respected me more than any other man I'd ever met, apart from my brother. That to me, just signalled something I had failed to see for a while – Beast was in love with me, and I was falling for him too – immensely. I got dressed in the nightwear he had gotten me. I was still shocked at myself for actually sleeping out for the very first time in my life – apart from the night of the matric dance. I walked out and found him already waiting for me in

the lounge, with our food set right on the coffee table, and of course, he had a few drinks set before us. He looked like he was patiently waiting for me to come out of the bedroom, and as soon as he saw me, he stood up. That was so respectful of him.

Beast: (smiling) "I went and bought us some food from Burger King and a few drinks. I was hoping we could just have a lazy dinner tonight and watch some Netflix. If that's okay with you."

Hazel: (blushing) "Of course. You know I never say no to food."

Beast: (chuckling) "Before you sit down, I'd like you to call your mom, just so she doesn't have to worry about you or shout at you."

I knew she wasn't bothered about where I was, but then, it was only right to call her just to let her know that I was not coming back home. I felt a little out of place with the silky texture of the pajamas, since the outfit exposed my skin, thighs and a small part of my breasts. I didn't really have much breasts, I mean I was a B-cup.

Hazel: (nodding) "Okay."

He handed me my phone and stood right next to me, smiling. His presence felt so odd since my feelings towards him had completely changed. I no longer looked at him as a platonic friend. His alluring scent was so overpowering, I felt myself stuttering while talking on the phone. The phone rang a few times, and as I was about to hang up, she finally answered.

Binah: "Ja (yes)?"

Hazel: (nervously) "He.. Hello, Mama. Ke nna (It's me), Hazel."

Binah: "Ja (yes), I can see that. What do you want?"

Hazel: "I... I'm spending the night at a friend's house, if that's okay with you."

Hazel: "Hazel, you're old now. Akere o feditse Matric (you're now done with school, aren't you)? So, ke nako ya gore le wena o jewe (it is time for you to also be fucked), I can't stop that. Just make sure that you become something useful in life so that you can take care of us."

That really hurt me, from deep within. I could feel my insides turn and my brain remind me why I even bothered to call her.

Binah: "I know you're not with your friends, let's just hope that you are not getting fucked by that good for nothing gangster you're always lurking around with. You my first daughter to hold a matric certificate. Don't let history repeat itself. I don't mind you going out and staying out, so you don't have to inform me every time, just don't bring me gangster babies to feed, please."

She hung up without saying a word further. I was filled with rage and embarrassment on Beast's behalf, but instead of being angry, he was really relaxed about it all. He smiled and gently held my hands.

Beast: (smiling) “Hazel, you are growing now. Soon, you will have to put on your big girl panties and realise that this world is not for the faint-hearted. Not everyone will be nice to you, but that doesn't mean that whenever that happens, you have to take it to heart and cry. Many people will note that as a weakness and use it against you every chance they get.”

Hazel: (shakily) “Why are you so calm?”

Beast: “Because, baby, I've been through so much in life, that your mother's mere words don't offend me. I've been through worse, I've been told worse, so that is just her own reflex mechanism, you know. Don't worry about her.”

I nodded and forced the tears back as I tried to recover from him calling me Baby. From Hazel to Baby, what a smooth transition.

Beast: “Come, let's eat. This is your day.”

I agreed and sat down right next to him. He was the talkative one for a change. I mean I was very talkative whenever I was around Beast, and not so much around other people. He just brought out the best in me and it felt so good. We watched a few movies and series, while indulging in some popcorn and wine. I was still trying to figure out what kind of alcohol I enjoyed. I loved every moment of that evening.

I must have dozed off while we were watching tv because I found myself lying right next to Beast in his bed, in the early hours of the morning. I didn't recall how I even got there, but I found myself wrapped right in his arms. It felt so good, and we were still dressed, which was a good sign. I trusted Beast, I knew he wouldn't have taken advantage of me like that. I turned around and found him smiling at me.

Beast: (smiling) "Good morning, gorgeous."

I felt flushed, I mean, did I really have to speak to a man so early in the morning without brushing my teeth? I'd never even slept next to a man before in my life.

Hazel: "Hey."

Beast: (frowning) "Is something wrong?"

Hazel: "No, it's just that, we haven't brushed our teeth, Beast."

Beast: (laughing) "I love you even with your morning breath, baby."

My stomach felt so tingly. I blushed immediately and felt my parched face.

Beast: "Did I say something wrong?"

Hazel: (shaking head) "No, it's just that..."

Beast: "Hazel, I have kept this to myself for so long. I have been hoping that you'd see it for yourself, but I think now you finally realize it. I love you, I mean, I've always loved you, you know, but now, I love you enough to see you as someone I can build a

life with one day. I want to show you the world, give you the world, I want to love you so much, that you can actually blossom into the beautiful flower God has intended you to be. Please, don't get me wrong, I didn't take advantage of you or look at you in a sexual manner. I just want to love you
I want to take things slow with you and I am willing to wait for you. All I want from you is a chance to prove myself.”

That was indeed a mouthful. Beast was never a man of many words like that.

Hazel: (blushing) “I know, the truth is... I think... I think, I feel the same way.”

I think he had been dying to hear those words for so long, because he became so flabbergasted, that he actually leaned back to take a good look at me.

Beast: (surprised) “You're not just saying that because you don't want to hurt my feelings, right?”

Hazel: (shaking head) “No, I mean, whenever I am close to you, I feel like I'm about to die and live at the same time, if that even makes any sense. I have no experience dating, but I am willing to try it with you.”

Beast: (excitedly) “Mfazi wami (my wife), you have just made me the happiest man in the entire world! God knows how much it has been killing me not being able to tell you this. I promise you, Hazel, I won't disappoint you. I want you to know that relationships come with a lot of drama, heartache at times and I will unintentionally hurt you sometimes, but my love for you will never fade. I promise you that I'll do my best to show you how much you mean to me.”

I was so happy, I mean, my heart was literally jumping for joy. I had no idea that a person could experience such a level of happiness. It almost felt like my life was slowly getting pieced together and that I was finally going to become the person I intended to be. Beast promised to take it slow with me, and he emphasized it that just because we were then officially an item, it didn't mean that I had to sacrifice my dreams because of him. I still needed to go to school and choose where I wanted to study. He made it clear that he would support me every step of the way, and for me, that was all I could ever ask for from a

man who professed his love for me. I was on cloud nine, and I couldn't even wait to tell my friends. All I wanted was to share my news with them, but I didn't want to tell them while I was with Beast. After our beautiful conversation that morning, and surprisingly no hangover, I got out of bed and went to take a shower first. I had heard people say that when you're happy, everything you do seems effortless. I was singing and smiling all to myself while the warm water was dripping all over my body. I couldn't believe that I was actually in a relationship – with Beast to add to that. I knew that many people were going to be jealous, and that some were not going to approve, but it was my life and I needed to live it according to my needs and expectations. After I was done, I got out and yes, I had forgotten the towel yet again. Ag, I really hated that part about myself.

Hazel: (shouting) “Eish (oh), Beast. I forgot to take a towel from the closet.”

Beast: (excitedly) “No problem, baby. I'll leave it on the bed for you. I have to make us breakfast in any case.”

Hazel: "Bathong (Goodness), Beast. You shouldn't break your back making me food all the time, you know."

Beast: "You'll soon learn, baby, that when you are in love, you do things because you want to. I'll see you soon."

I heard him walk out and close the door. He was so thoughtful. I wiped myself dry and got into one of the new outfits I had bought the previous day. Things felt so great, it was almost as if deep down I was waiting for something bad to happen. I mean, the way my life was never a smooth ride for long, I was genuinely expecting a wrong turn. My hair was so weird, it didn't have the normal black person's texture. I could leave it wet and it would dry on its own and return to its normal, bouncy curly texture. Whenever wet, it wouldn't shrink like a normal afro, it would just seem flat and the curls would just be a bit longer. Other than that, I looked like a semi-white, girl. I didn't like referring to myself like that anymore. People everywhere were already used to bullying me and teasing me, but in actual fact, I wasn't ugly or anything, I just didn't look like the typical black. So many people in the township were products of interracial relationships, yet they chose to pick on me. It was time for me to change that. I was going to Varsity soon, and I needed to grow a thick skin if I

wanted to treat people with mental issues. I found Beast cooking up a storm yet again.

Hazel: "Aowa (no), man, Beast. You can't keep feeding me like this all the time. I swear, I'll end up gaining weight."

Beast: (smiling) "That wouldn't be a bad thing, you know."

I found myself being triggered, my smile slowly faded and I thought of Sonto. I mean, was he saying that because he wanted me to become bigger because he liked big girls?

Beast: "Did I say something wrong, babe?"

Hazel: (shaking head) "No."

Beast: "Don't do that."

Hazel: "Do what?"

Beast: “Number one rule in this relationship: we never lie to one another – no matter how small the issue might seem. Always be open and honest with me, Hazel.”

Hazel: (nodding) “Okay, I am sorry, it's silly. I mean, I just thought that you know, maybe you said that because you want me to be bigger since, you know, Sonto was...”

Beast: (frowning) “You actually think I'd ever compare you to Sonto?”

I nodded in shame. I could see the disappointment in his eyes. He was actually disappointed in the fact that I actually thought of something like that.

Beast: “Baby, why would I ever do that to you? That would not be right and besides, it would do you a huge injustice. Look, Sonto is my past, and yes, we were together at one stage, but that is life. I don't want you to ever think of her or compare yourself to her. You are such a beautiful soul, you are too pure to even do that to yourself, okay?”

Hazel: (smiling) "Okay."

Beast: "Good, now, let's eat so that we can enjoy the rest of our day together."

It was a huge relief to even think that he was not even planning on comparing me to Sonto. I mean, it felt so stupid of me to even think of such, but I guess I was still growing. Only time would tell if we were going to be good for one another or not. Time passed, Beast and I got to spend the rest of the day together, until I had to go home. Sure, it was very nice staying at his place with him, but I didn't have to move in after one day of dating. He was sad to see me leave, but he totally understood. I didn't take all of my new clothes with me, I mean, my mother would have become suspicious. As he dropped me off at the gate, something seemed completely off. The tavern wasn't as busy as it normally would have been on a Saturday evening. I figured that perhaps business was slow that day.

Beast: (smiling) "See you soon, Baby."

Hazel: (smiling) "Bye."

He kissed my hand gently and let it go. I walked out and greeted him goodbye again as he drove off. While I walked into the yard, it was so hard for me to contain my happiness. I was smiling from the inside out. While approaching my room, I could hear loud noises and shouting from Bella's room.

Binah: (shouting) "O nagana gore o mang wena (who do you think you are), Bella?! I gave you a good life! I raised you better than Malachi and Hazel – fuck! I gave you love when I didn't even give them and this is what you do to me?!"

Bella: (sobbing) "Mama, come on. I said I'm sorry."

Binah: "I am the one who's sorry. I honestly should have aborted you when your dumbfuck father didn't want to leave that bitch of a wife of his!"

She opened the door violently, and found me standing right outside.

Binah: (angrily) “Oh, look. The prodigal daughter is back from her night of whoring.”

She smelled like she had swallowed an entire distillery.

Binah: “Hmm, I see he bought you new clothes even.”

I looked at her in shock.

Binah: “Don't look at me like that. Your stupid sister is pregnant. She is a drop out and pregnant. To top it all off, she stole all my stock taking money and now, we have no one to feed us. I am guessing you'll be taking over that role, just like I did, baby girl. From now on, you'll have to be our breadwinner.”

She left me speechless as she walked away from me. I looked inside Bella's room and her softened, teary face turned into bewildered anger and hatred when she saw me. How cruel could my mother have been? Was that all I was to her? She just always knew how to ruin a good thing for someone else.

Galatians 5:26 - “Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.”

51

“I envy people that know love. That have someone who takes them as they are.”

— Jess C Scott, *The Devilin Fey*

Hazel

Words couldn't even comprehend how I was feeling at that point. I mean, I was preparing myself for a brand new venture in my life, and then that happened. I looked at Bella and she approached me as if she wasn't even in the wrong. It was the very first time I had heard my mother reprimand her – ever, so I guess that was also something that didn't sit well with her. She probably thought she was starting to favour me, which I knew would have never happened.

Hazel: “What was that all about?”

Bella: (clicking tongue) “Mxm, Don't act like you care, Hazel. We all know you think you're better than us now that you are going

to Varsity. I mean, yes, I never got to finish school, but you know my situation. Ba nloyile (I've been bewitched).”

Wow, she was still stuck on that idea that she was bewitched and that was the reason why she just never finished school. I swear, sometimes I thought she was perhaps dropped as a baby or something. Her reasoning capacity was that of a 5 year old at times.

Hazel: (sigh) “Forget I even asked.”

I walked towards my room and she started spewing insults at me.

Bella: “Mama wasn't kidding, you know. You will have to take care of us now. I mean, she has no job, and I don't work either, so you are our only hope now that Malachi is overseas living his best life.”

That girl was something else.

Hazel: "You must be out of your sick mind, Bella. Did I say you must get pregnant? Did I say you must drop out of school? Heh banna (goodness)! Go get a job just like everyone else. I cannot fend for you."

Bella: "Shame, you think Beast loves you. Well, he just wants to taste you because you're one of the few virgins around. Everyone is forever talking about that white, little pussy in between your thighs. After he is done with you, you'll be nothing but used meat."

I ignored her flat and shut the door right in her face. I heard her clicking her tongue and cursing as she walked away. I was so tired of those two talking to me like I didn't have feelings. What she said did play with my mind, a little bit. I mean, they managed to damper my mood just like that. I took out my phone and saw Beast was online and he started typing first. I was boiling from within, and as always, tears were starting to flow down my face.

Beast: "Hey, beautiful. I'm home. Is everything okay? Did she scream at you?"

Hazel: “Not even, she started swearing at me because Bella is pregnant. I mean, who does that? Now she says I have to be the breadwinner because she stole all the money for the stock. The things that Bella said to me, Beast.”

I sent so many crying emoji's and he video called me immediately afterwards.

Beast: “Baby, what did I tell you this morning?”

Hazel: (sniffing) “I don't know, you told me so many things, Beast.”

Beast: “Yes, but I told you that a lot of people will be mean to you and then what?”

Hazel: “You said... you said that I didn't have to cry or be upset whenever they did so.”

Beast: “Exactly. Now, tell me what exactly upset you so much.”

Hazel: "Bella told me that you are just using me to get to my pants and that you'll leave me right after sleeping with me."

Beast: "Did you hear me say anything about wanting to sleep with you yet?"

Hazel: (shaking head) "No."

Beast: "Now, do you see how she was just trying to torment you? Broken people tend to want to break whole people, Hazel. You of all people should know that about your mom and sister. They are so broken, that you becoming just like them would make them whole, if that makes sense. You are still young, you will learn as you go along that you need to toughen up. I don't say that because I am fed up of your crying, no, I can never be. I am saying that to prepare you for the world out there. Learn to brush people off whenever they criticize you. You are too beautiful to become miserable."

His words meant so much to me, that I just began smiling again. Slowly, but surely, the tears started fading away and my cries had turned into jolly tears.

Beast: "Next time they tell you such, I want you to ignore them and meditate. Do what Mam'Rose taught you. You are a star, you can do it."

Hazel: "Thank you, Beast."

Beast: "Good, now let's get back to talking about whatever it is you want us to talk about."

Hazel: (chuckling) "I don't know, what did you have in mind?"

Beast: "Well, I was thinking I could take you for a drive tomorrow after church, so that you can go and view the Universities you have chosen."

Hazel: "Beast

ke Sontaga kaosane (it will be Sunday tomorrow).”

Beast: (laughing) “I have connections, babe. You can then decide afterwards, which one would be suitable for you.”

Hazel: “If you were me, which one would you choose?”

Beast: “I'd choose whichever one my heart desires. I'd make sure I put myself first so that I don't wake up with regrets one day.”

He was right. Once again, he was ready to pull up for me.

Hazel: “Thank you, Beast. It really means a lot to me.”

Beast: “You are welcome. Let me get to some business, we'll chat a bit later, okay?”

Hazel: “Okay.”

He blew me a kiss, while I blew one back and we hung up. I was still smiling and reeling from our conversation, when I saw him post a screenshot of me blowing him the kiss on his status with the caption; “Mfazi wam” (my wife). I had to take a screenshot of it immediately and send it to Otlile and Kg. They both wasted no time, when Otlile video called me and Kg, so the three of us could have a conversation together.

Otlile: “Bitch, you didn't, give it up, did you?!”

Kg: “Come on, of course she didn't, man. O bjang na (what's wrong with you)?”

Otlile: “Just a question.”

Hazel: (chuckling) “No, man. I didn't. In fact, we didn't even kiss.”

Otlile: (gasp) “So, you two are an item now?”

Kg: "Seems like it."

Hazel: (nodding) "Yes, we spoke about it at length this morning. I mean, to be honest, I didn't think I felt the same way either, until I noticed the signs."

Kg: "I don't mean to damper the mood, but are you ready, though? I mean, we're going to University in a few weeks and we will be exploring things."

Otile: "Orgies, same-sex relationships, the works."

Kg: "I wasn't talking about that, man."

Otile: "Of course, not. I mean, you of all people have received one too many orgasms with a girl already. We want to experience that too."

Hazel: "Speak for yourself."

Kg: (clicking tongue) “What I mean is, are you guys ready for a relationship? He's 7 years older than you, but that is not the point. He is more experienced, so will he wait for you? Like really wait for you?”

Hazel: “Yes, he said that and I believe him. He wants to see me happy and I believe that.”

Kg: “Well, as long as you are happy, we're happy, friend.”

Otlile: “Ag, enough about relationships, tell me which University you guys have decided to go to?”

Hazel: “Speaking of Varsities, Beast is taking me out on a drive to the three Universities tomorrow right after church, so that I can decide which one I want to go to out of the three.”

They were both so shocked.

Otlile: “I mean, can he afford that? Isn't Stellenbosch in like, Cape Town?”

I hadn't even thought about that.

Hazel: "I don't know, but I am guessing he can. We shall wait and see."

Kg: "Otlile, wa phapa (you're so forward), man. Take good videos and pictures for us as well so that we can decided, but my heart is so set on Stellenbosch. I want to be far away from Pheli."

Otlile: "For once, I agree with Kg. I want to be on the beach, drinking sex on the beach."

The three of us laughed as we kept reminiscing about our high school days and what we were going to miss and whom. I was most definitely sure that Raymond wasn't one of them. My conscience wasn't even heavy because Beast confessed to killing him. All I knew was that better days were lying ahead and I surely couldn't wait.

James 3:16 - "For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice.

“Love is that condition in which the happiness of another person is essential to your own.” —Robert A. Heinlein

Hazel

The following day came, and it was a rather bitter-sweet moment for me. I had a very pleasant dream about Mam'Rose. It had been so long since she had visited me. I woke up smiling, but my heart was heavy, because I was reminded of just how much I missed her. That time, her daughter, Gontse, tarnished her entire memory by taking her house and turning it into something Mam'Rose would have never done herself. I consoled myself with the thought that she was always with me. She told me how proud she was of me and just how much it meant to her that I was finally following my dreams. After I got dressed and ready for church, I was just about to leave, when I received a call from Beast.

Hazel: (smiling) “Hey.”

Beast: “I hope I'm not late.”

Hazel: (frowning) "Late for what?"

Beast: "For church. You actually didn't think I'd let you go without me, did you?"

I blushed by myself, thinking just how much of an effort Beast was making. It was actually all effortless, he wasn't even trying too hard. He honestly just wanted to be close to me.

Hazel: "Okay, I'll be right there."

I quickly rushed out and locked the door. It was really as if Bella was waiting for to hear me turn the key into the keyhole, because the moment she heard me she rushed outside.

Bella: "O ya kae (Where are you going)?"

Bella's sudden interest in my life was starting to slightly annoy me.

Hazel: (frowning) “Since when do you care where I go?”

Bella: “Okay, sharp (fine). Ngishiyele ya borotho (leave me with some money for bread).”

The nerve in her statement. She didn't even say please.

Hazel: (raised eyebrow) “Heh (huh)?”

Bella: “Please. Mama won't let me into the house and I'm starving.”

I was so irritated and I didn't want to give her a dime, but honestly, if I hadn't it would have weighed on my conscience all day, so I dug into my purse reluctantly and gave her a R20 note. She looked at me as if I had insulted her.

Bella: (annoyed) “Bathong (goodness), Hazel. E nyane bjana (such a little amount)?”

I was really pissed at that point, that I just walked away from her. Instead of her actually saying thank you, she was cursing me while I walked out.

Bella: (shouting) “O nale tshete, mos (you have money, don't you)?! Bjanong why tshwanetse o nkgantsetse (So why do you have to act like you're better than me)?!”

She clicked her tongue and banged her door on her way back into her room. I walked out of the gate rather irritated.

Beast: (frowning) “Who did that to you so early in the morning?”

Hazel: (annoyed) “Ga se (It's) Bella. She asked me for money for bread, and when I handed her a R20 note, she had the nerve to say it was not enough and started swearing at me as usual. Yesses (goodness), ka itshola (I regret).”

Beast: "Come on, we're on our way to church. Don't let her get to you like that. She's not worse your energy."

He was right, as usual. I hated the fact that I always let Bella and my mother get on my nerves like that. I really had a lot to learn. I thought that it was going to be just the two of us, but Beast had other plans. I saw him take a detour on our way ahead.

Hazel: (frowning) "Where are we going?"

Beast: "Oh, I'm on my way to pick up my mother. She's also going to church. I should have asked. You don't mind, do you?"

I was a bit nervous to be honest, and to be quite frank, I couldn't feel uneasy about it. It was his mother and his car, he had every right to take her to church. I wasn't his wife and nor did that even give me the right to say no to him fetching his mother.

Hazel: (shaking head) “Of course not. Why would it be a problem?”

Beast: “Well, to be honest, she saw my status and asked me about you. So, I told her that you are now my woman, and that we're going to church today. So, she most probably wants to use this as an opportunity to get to know you.”

That right there, made my heart beat ridiculously fast. I was quite surprised when he told me that she wanted to go to church, when I was a regular church goer and I hardly ever saw her at church. She was one of those loud township women that everyone was afraid of.

Hazel: (nervously) “It's okay, really.”

Beast: “You have nothing to be afraid of. You have me.”

He gently kissed my hand and I tried to relax, but the moment he stopped right at his mom's gate, my heart started palpitating once again.

Beast: "I'll be right back."

He kissed my forehead and I just sat there and waited. I was shivering so much, that I tried shaking it off with breathing techniques. I closed my eyes for a while and a few minutes later, I heard her loud voice.

Ma'Sibiya: (loudly) "Nawe Bethuel (Oh, you). Couldn't you have at least come earlier? Now everyone will be looking at me in that church, asking themselves why I am even coming today of all days."

Beast: "Mama, I've been telling you not to stress yourself about those women. They don't feed you."

Ma'Sibiya: "You're right. I only need to worry about my one and only son."

Beast chuckled while he opened the door for his mom, and she stopped to look at him for a while.

Ma'Sibiya: “Haibo (goodness), Bethuel. Manje sengihlala emuva (So, I'm supposed to sit at the back now)?”

Oh, my goodness. I knew right there that I had my hands full with that woman. It had barely been a few days and she was already trying to show me that Beast was her territory.

Hazel: (nervously) “Askies (sorry), Ma. I'll sit in the back.”

Ma'Sibiya: “Hmm.”

Beast: “No, Hazel. You don't have to do that. Ma, this car is more than comfortable. Since when do you complain about sitting in the back? Come on, please. Don't embarrass me in front of my future wife.”

She frowned at that last statement as she got into the back of the car. I could see from the rearview mirror the way she was stealing glances at me. She was really unhappy about Bethuel's treatment towards me.

Beast: (excitedly) “Ma, as I have told you, this is my future wife. Hazel, meet my mom.”

I felt so embarrassed, I mean did he honestly expect me to stretch out my hand from the front seat?

Hazel: “Sawubona (hello), Ma. It is a pleasure to meet you formally.”

Ma'Sibiya: “Hmm, future wife, you say. Does her mother know about all this? I mean she doesn't even know who her father is, Bethuel. He could be white or whatever race. Have you thought about the repercussions that would have on the ancestors? On your children if you are even going to have any? I mean, God forbid.”

My heart was instantly crushed. The respect I had for that woman, slowly started fading away. I couldn't believe that she couldn't even wait for us to be alone for her to express her sentiments. She just had to go right at it. Beast was instantly angered. His smile faded immediately.

Beast: (firmly) “Ma, uyazi ngiyakuhlonipa (you know I respect you), but I will not have you speak to Hazel like that. You have no right to do so.”

Ma'Sibiya: (shocked) “Bethuel, ukhuluma nami kanjalo (you are speaking to me like that)?!”

Beast: “Yes, I am. If you have a problem with that then perhaps you shouldn't join us for this trip to church. I don't want Hazel to be around any negativity. If you are not going to give yourself a chance to like her, then you and I are most definitely going to have a problem. As much as I love you, I won't hesitate to cut you out of my life for her. She has been through enough already, she doesn't need you judging her for what she has never even done.”

The shock on his mother's face was so hard to comprehend. I was actually shocked myself. I mean, I never thought that Beast would ever defend me like that in front of his mother.

Ma'Sibiya: (softly) “Hmm-hmm. Okay then. We can go.”

Beast was very firm, he even gave her a death stare through the rear view mirror. I was absolutely humbled. He kissed the back of my hand and off we went. I felt so awkward throughout the entire drive, but Beast was not bothered. He kept making conversation with me, completely disregarding his mother's presence. It was literally a ten minute drive to church, but it felt like eternity. I could feel her eyes stinging me from the back seat. My soul literally felt her stare of repulsion throughout the entire drive. When we finally arrived at church, my Beast couldn't wait to open the car door for me. Initially, I wanted to open the door myself, but Beast stopped me right there and then. I quickly glanced through the rear view mirror and I saw the devil's reflection. Her face gave me the chills. From there on, I felt so uneasy, but I hid my emotions. I was really good at that, unfortunately. As soon as he opened the car door for me, he kissed the back of my hand softly and went to open the car door for his mom as well. She walked out looking like she had swallowed more than a few sharp nails. He locked the door and walked hand in hand with me, while his mother was walking right behind us. I knew he didn't want to entertain her. The church was packed as always, but I saw one rather unfamiliar face that stopped me before I walked in. Moses, Bella's deceased father's wife, Sylvia was right outside, talking to a few well-known ladies who belonged to

our church. I was a bit taken aback because I hadn't seen her in a very long while. I tried ignoring her by looking the other way, but it seems as if she wanted to see me.

Sylvia: (shouting) "Oh, hey, Hazel!"

Beast turned around and immediately gave her a stern look, while holding my hand tightly.

Hazel: (frowning) "Hello, Ma."

Sylvia: "Where's your mother? Is she not coming?"

Hazel: "No."

Sylvia: "Oh, she must still be the heathen she has always been then."

The other ladies laughed out loud. I got the feeling she wanted to deliberately humiliate me in the midst of a crowd. Beast got intensely agitated rather quickly

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and even more when his mother was laughing right with them.

Beast: "Hazel, let's go."

Sylvia: "Ao (oh), la jola na (you two are an item)?"

I guess Beast couldn't control himself any more.

Beast: (annoyed) "Sylvia, or whomever you are, I don't think my life nor Hazel's life has anything to do with you. Look, you are way too old to be doing the shit you're doing right now. You are still trying to prove a point to people who speak trash about you, worst part, you are trying to use Hazel as your collateral damage. Your weak, useless husband cheated on you and had a child with Hazel's mother. You have no bone to pick with her. Now, if you haven't heard about me before – now is the time to ask around. Back the fuck off."

With that said, everyone else became mute instantly and stopped laughing. Beast had that dangerous allure about hi. It was really insane. I couldn't believe it. I sort of loved it, because that meant no one would ever mess with me ever again, once they knew I was Beast's girlfriend. We walked in while his mother came rushing right after him as we were looking for a place to sit.

Ma'Sibiya: (angrily) “Bethuel, you were really rude to Sylvia. I suggest you go and apologize right this instant!”

Beast: “Ma weh, please don't force me to disrespect you, because you know I hate that. She's not my friend. I'll tell you again, I'll pick Hazel over anyone who tries to humiliate her like that ever again. Now, if you don't mind, we came here to hear the word of God.”

She was stunned. She looked at him and then looked at me, but I looked away. She was annoyed at him and walked away to sit right with Sylvia and her friends. Beast was all over me, and that made the rest of the congregation stare at us even more. He wasn't bothered at all, but instead, he seemed to

have enjoyed making them stare. He'd occasionally kiss the back of my hand, kiss my forehead and whisper in my ear every now and then. He'd giggle and laugh in a way I'd never seem him do before. It was insane just how much attention people were paying to us. We were a bit early, but I got the feeling everyone who walked in right after us were told that Beast and I were an item. The pastor and his entourage finally came out and service was about to start. We stood up and started singing to the hymn. I was surprised Bethuel knew every single word. I couldn't help but look at him in awe.

Beast: "I was raised in this church, you know. I was one of the alter boys."

I just smiled and we sat down to listen to the pastor, finally.

Pastor: "Amen, Bazalwane (congregation)."

Congregation: "Amen."

Pastor: "This is the day the Lord has made, therefore we shall give thanks."

Congregation: "Amen."

Pastor: "Today is a really special day, do you want to know why?"

Congregation: "Yes."

Pastor: "Because today has never existed. Each day you live through, is a very unique day. It has its own date, and that is what I'd like all of you to get into your heads. Each day is unique, meaning you have got to let go of yesterday's problems, and solve the ones you acquire today. You see, God has promised us a life time of blessings, but that didn't mean there wouldn't be any sorrow in this life. John 6:35 says; "Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst." God loved and still does love us so much, that He continues to bless us immensely; firstly by ensuring that you wake up today. You are all here because of nothing but His

grace. Ephesians 2:8 says; “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.” He has given us so many promises, as said in Jeremiah 29:11; “For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.” We all have a purpose, we all have a destiny to fulfil, but now I ask you this; what is the point of all that if your heart isn't pure?”

Everyone was enjoying his sermon so much, until that last sentence. We all held our breaths because we knew that no one could say anything any better but Pastor. He was always straight to the point, and he never bothered what people said about him.

Pastor: “I know, so many of you never miss a day of church, some even attend every mass and every prayer evening, but yet you fail to practise the word of God in your own homes, hearts and most importantly – on your tongues.”

We knew something was coming.

Pastor: "Proverbs 16:28 says; "A dishonest man spreads strife, and a whisperer separates close friends." Proverbs Proverbs 20:19 says; "Whoever goes about slandering reveals secrets; therefore do not associate with a simple babbling." And Ephesians 4:29 says; "Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear." Now, I ask of you my brethren, now that you all are so familiar with the word of God, some of you if not most, were born right into the church, yet you still continue to live in the Devil's shadow? Why do you go around speaking like that about others, when your own houses are not built of glass? You continue to shame your children and your fellow community. I know, if this sermon touches a nerve – you are guilty of it. Do not gossip; stop spreading rife lies about other people, learn to forgive for God has said that "But if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses", in Matthew 6:15. Each day is a new one, which means that Yesterday's problems matter less for we all have to look forward to today. Life is too short; love like you've never loved, apologize to those you have wronged and ask God to open up room for forgiveness to those who have wronged you. None of you can look me right in the eye today and tell me that you are perfect. Yes, you have lied, some have cheated their way through life, some of you have stolen – more than

material things, but that is what makes us all human. Today is a brand new day, which means there is a window of opportunity for greater things. Allow God's promises to manifest through you, so that you can live to tell the tale. Allow yourself to be a good person, so that you can spread the light of God to others. Love your children enough to let them leave, for they are not your property, but they belong to God. I say unto you again, learn to be a good person. Amen.”

I heard lesser “Amen's” once he was done with the sermon, but he didn't seem to care. I could tell that the gossip mongers were really touched. I was honestly touched, and it felt as if he was speaking about my own life. The church sang beautifully and after the entire sermon, it was finally time for us to leave. Beast didn't want to waste any more time by conversing with fake church-goer's, so he asked his mom to hop into the car immediately afterwards, much to her dismay.

Ma'Sibiya: “I'm not leaving now. I still have to catch up with some old friends.”

Beast: “Well, if that's the case, then I'll have to leave you. You can ask for a lift.”

Ma'Sibiya: (angrily) “Kodwa (But), Bethuel. You heart the pastor.”

Beast: “I heard him very well, especially the part where he said, “Love your children enough to let them go.”

I could see she was very displeased. She grinned and gave me a death stare.

Beast: “Don't look at her like that. I'm leaving. I'll see you some other time.”

He left her standing there just like that. I felt a little bad about it all. I felt as if I was already driving a wedge in between them. Surely, they were always close.

Hazel: “Beast, can I ask you something?”

Beast: “Anything, baby.”

Hazel: “Are you now angry at your mother because of me?”

Beast: “No, I'm angry at her because of her attitude towards you. No one should make you feel like you don't belong, Hazel. Not even my own mother. Besides, you don't know her like I do, believe me. So, none of this is because of your presence. I meant every word I said when I told you that I want you to be my wife one day. I'll protect you from everything and every one – even if it means from my own mother.”

That was the very first day I learnt that love is truly a beautiful thing. That very day, I got to know what Love actually is.

Genesis 2:24 - “Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.”

“Happiness is not something ready made. It comes from your own actions.”-Dalai Lama

Hazel

Beast drove me to Pretoria, and we started at the University of Pretoria. I was a bit hungry, but the journey made it worth it. We started off at the Main Campus in Hatfield, and I was surprised how he had actually gotten someone to open up for us on a Sunday Afternoon, but as he said, he did indeed have quite a few contacts. The Security knew him the moment he rolled down his car window, and as we drove in, we were met by a lady dressed in a formal suit, standing right next to a small table with a few pamphlets, some finger food and juice in champagne glasses. I bet there was a bit of alcohol in there, but I appreciated the little bit of food I saw there. As usual, Beast opened the door for me and walked hand-in-hand with me.

Woman: (smiling) “Good day, it is such a pleasure to finally have you visit our campus. My name is Puleng and welcome to the University of Pretoria. I'll be your tour guide for the day.”

Beast greeted her and so did I. She offered us some of the food, of which I was more than happy to indulge in. I hadn't had breakfast that day, so one could imagine how my stomach felt at that point. Indeed, I was right, the juice had a hint of champagne in it. I had never seen people go on a tour guide at Varsity with mimosa's in their hands, but I wasn't complaining at all. I got to see all the lecture halls, specifically those where Psychology classes were held. I even got to see the residence area there and it looked absolutely stunning.

Beast: "What do you think about the res?"

Hazel: "I like it, I really do."

Beast: "So, you won't mind your friends seeing your old boyfriend coming to visit you here?"

Hazel: (laughing) "I did not think about that."

Puleng: “We do have a few flats nearby, which are absolutely good for students, and very safe too.”

Beast: “Well, Puleng, thank you so much for taking the time to show us around, but we still have two more places to go to.”

I thought that I'd be tired by the time we got to Stellenbosch. I had no idea how we were going to even get there in any case, so I just went with the flow. We thanked Puleng once again and we drove off. By the time we got to Johannesburg, I was starving. We were met with yet another lady, who showed us around. I had no idea why, but I loved Wits way more than UP and I just couldn't stop glaring. The campus was huge, and the flats nearby were such a breeze. Busses were around to take us to and from campus, but we had one more stop to make. By then it was about 6pm, so I just had to ask.

Hazel: (frowning) “Beast, how on earth are we even going to get to Cape Town? I mean, it is 6pm already.”

Beast: “Ever heard of a plane, baby?”

I was stunned.

Hazel: (surprised) "You mean we're flying there? I mean, how did you even book tickets without my ID?"

Beast: "I'm a man of many talents. So? Are you up for it?"

Hazel: "I don't know, isn't it scary?"

Beast: "Only one way to find out."

Hazel: "Okay, I'd love to do that, but for now, can we please just eat?"

Beast: (chuckling) "Okay, come on."

We went to a restaurant nearby called Olives and Plates, and that was the very first exquisite restaurant I had ever been to. Everything looked so classy, that I felt a little too under dressed for the occasion.

Hazel: (frowning) “Beast, bathong (goodness), this place seems a little too posh. If I wasn't this hungry, I wouldn't be here.”

Beast: (laughing) “Hazel, you're beautiful. Even if you were dressed in a garbage bag, you'd still look amazing.”

I blushed and we ate a full three course meal. I was so hungry, and the food had arrived just in time. After we were done, we drove straight to the airport. I had no clothes with me, so I had no idea when we'd be back home. He processed our tickets and we were ready to go. Once in the plane, I felt a little anxious, as it was my first time. Right after take off, he held my hand and ensured that I'd be calm. He spoke to me throughout the entire flight, until I most probably dozed off. I woke up when he slightly tapped my shoulder. It had only been a three hour flight, but it felt a little weird being up in the air. I was just glad I slept throughout. Once we landed, we were met with an Uber driver, he must have hired the driver right before our flight. We got into the car and it was about 9pm.

Hazel: “Where are we even going at this time of the night, Beast?”

Beast: "We're going on an adventure."

Hazel: (frowning) "I thought we were going to view a few campuses."

Beast: "What kind of future husband would I be if I didn't take you on a tour in Cape Town? Come on, live a little."

Hazel: (smiling) "Okay."

I loved how he always made reference to the future. He seemed to have such hope and faith in our relationship, and to be honest, I had grown so attached to him, that I was actually starting to see a future with him too. Mrs. Hazel Sibiyá didn't sound too bad. The Uber didn't drive very long from the airport, and he dropped us off at the Batavia Boutique Hotel, which was about 790m away from Stellenbosch University. The view of the hotel was just absolutely amazing. In just a day, Beast managed to help me explore so many things I never thought I'd ever do at that age. It seemed as if he had made a booking a while before we had arrived. We were met by a young, beautiful

woman. She looked a bit young, most probably about two if not four years older than I was.

Woman: (smiling) “Good evening and welcome to the Batavia Boutique Hotel. My name is Prudence, and I'll book you in.”

Beast: “Good evening, sir. I'm Bethuel Sibiya, I made a reservation for two, for one of your Presidential suites.”

She looked a bit stunned, to see that it was someone like Beast booking a room like that. She was even more stunned to see me with him. She completely disregarded my appearance. I guessed it must have been quite expensive.

Prudence: (chuckling) “Oh, it was you who made the booking?”

Beast: (annoyed) “Is there a problem?”

Prudence: “Oh, no, no problem at all.”

Beast: "Then, what are you waiting for? May we have our keys, please?"

Prudence: "I'd just like to confirm if you have indeed made payment for the reservation, if you don't mind."

She gave him a fake smile, and I could tell he was rather displeased.

Beast: (firmly) "Bring me your manager, please."

She must have realized that his patience had run out by then, and she started to sweat.

Prudence: (panicking) "Oh, I didn't mean it like that, Mr. Sibiya, what I meant was - "

Beast: "If you don't bring us your manager right now, I'll write the worst review about you and this place, and I'll make a scene you'll never forget!"

Beast was highly irritated and his eyes were bloodshot. He looked like he was ready to tell that girl where to get off and so much more.

She hastily moved away from us to go and call the supposed Manager, who seemed displeased at her attitude to put it lightly. The Manager was a very tall, middle-aged white man, named Francois, who seemed to know Beast quite well.

Francois: (surprised) “Mr. Sibiya! You finally made it. I am pleased to see that the both of you had a good flight.”

Beast: (faint smile) “Hi, Francois. It's good to see you again.”

Wait, so Beast had been there before?

Francois: “What seems to be the problem?”

Beast looked at Prudence firmly before he started speaking. I knew that he was most probably going to get the girl fired. Yes, she most probably deserved a warning or two, but losing her job over her stupidity was not good in my eyes.

Beast: “Well, this girl, Prudence over here, has been rather unaccommodating - “

Hazel: (interrupting) “Forgive me for stepping in, Mr. Francois. But, Prudence had some trouble giving us our access card to our room. I think the system was a bit of a bother for her.”

Beast gave me a displeasing look, but I ignored that.

Francois: (shocked) “How when you've been working with us for over a year now, Prudence? I hope what you're saying is true, Mrs. Sibiya.”

Okay, so I was being referred to as his wife. I didn't want to correct the Manager, because Beast would have thought of it as

me rejecting the idea or something like that. Prudence was shaking in her boots by then.

Hazel: “Yes, it is absolutely true, Mr. Francois. If you could be so kind to assist us. We have had quite a long day.”

Francois: “Certainly. Let me see what the problem is.”

Francois stepped in and took a look at the computer, within seconds, he turned to Prudence.

Francois: (firmly) “I see you were going through payment verification of Mr. Sibiya, even though he paid two nights ago, Prudence. You know very well that he is one of our most esteem clients. He has been here before. Surely you should know the procedure for such clients by now.”

Prudence: (nervously) “I... I apologize, Mr. Francois. I just wanted to make sure.”

Francois: "Please enlighten me on that since Mr. Sibiya is one of our shareholders."

Prudence had nothing but overwhelming shock written all over her face, while I was just as astonished. Beast was a shareholder of that hotel? He never ceased to amaze me.

Francois: "I'll deal with you later. Mr. and Mrs. Sibiya, here are your access cards. You will go up to room 504. I'll be sure to let room service that you have arrived."

Beast: "Thank you, Francois. I'll see you soon."

Francois nodded while Beast gently pulled me away as we made our way to the lift. I glimpsed behind me and saw Prudence being firmly reprimanded. She was rude, to be honest, but at times one shouldn't just jump to punish a person for being plainly stupid. Well, at least that is how I saw it. Beast and I got into the lift without him saying a word to me. I could tell he was irritated, perhaps at me as well. We got to the fifth floor, and it smelled beautifully clean. He opened the door to our room and it looked absolutely flawless.

Beast: "Why did you do that?"

Hazel: "Do what?"

Beast: "Why didn't you let me deal with her?"

Hazel: "Because, she most probably needs this job more than anything

Beast."

Beast: "She should have thought about that before she started bullshitting me. I told you, that good heart of yours will get you killed one day. Get comfortable, I'll go get us something from the bar."

I just nodded as he left. Wow, he was really irritated. Perhaps I shouldn't have done what I did, but man, that room was just breath taking. The sheets were really clean and the atmosphere was absolutely alluring. I made sure to take a few pictures, and I decided to video call my friends.

Otile: "Finally, you decided to call."

Kg: "Yeah, we've been waiting. So, where are you now?"

Hazel: "You two won't believe this. I'm in Cape Town, at the Batavia Hotel here in Stellenbosch."

Otile: (shocked) "Heh?! So, Beast o romantic, mos (Beast is a romantic, isn't he)?"

Kg: "Show us around the room."

I swapped cameras and showed them around our beautiful room. I had no idea that morning that a few hours later, I'd end up in Cape Town.

Kg: "Oh, my goodness. Please, take a video or a few pictures of Stellenbosh University for us. I have a feeling that will be our new home for the next few years."

Otlile: "I second that."

Hazel: "I'll do so."

Otlile: "So, are you going to give it up tonight?"

Kg: "Bathong (goodness), Otlile!"

Otlile: "I'm just asking."

Hazel: "Ai (oh), guys. Let me go before he comes back. I'll see you. Bye."

They greeted me goodbye while I stood by the window and stared at the view outside. It was absolutely beautiful, so serene. Minutes later, he walked back in. He looked a lot less calmer than he was before he left. He came back holding a few paper bags, he put them on the bed, and went back outside and brought back a trolley full of food.

Beast: "I thought you'd be hungry."

Hazel: "Thank you. I thought you said we were going on an adventure."

Beast: (chuckling) "We were, but Prudence pissed me off."

Hazel: "Where did you get all these?"

Beast: "I asked Francois to order them for us when I made the booking. It's our clothes for the next few days."

Did he just say days?

Hazel: (frowning) "Days?"

Beast: "Yes, days. You're not starting Varsity until the end of January. I wanted to surprise you with a week in Cape Town, but if you don't like it, I totally understand."

Beast, though.

Hazel: "My goodness, Beast. Why wouldn't I like it? I absolutely love how thoughtful you are, it's just that, we didn't prepare for it."

Beast: "Allow me to spoil you. Life is not always about being prepared. Sometimes, you have got to take it head on and just go with the flow. So, are you game?"

Hazel: (smiling) "Of course I am."

Beast: "Come here."

He opened his arms as I rushed into them. I assumed he wanted to give me a hug, but he kissed me slowly, and passionately. I wasn't even sure what to do since it had been

the very first time I had kissed any man in my life. I was so nervous, he could feel me tense up.

Beast: “Relax, follow my lead. I just want to kiss you. I'm not going to do anything else to you, okay?”

I nodded shyly and slowly closed my eyes. I mean, that is what I had always seen people do while kissing on tv. I was so inexperienced, it was not even funny. After a few minutes, I had gotten into the rhythm of French kissing. I wasn't even sure if I was doing it right, but his warm, caressing movements indicated that I was on the right track. My body was slowly failing me. All sorts of signals were being sent from my brain to my heart, stomach and my vagina. I had never felt any feeling down there, until I started seeing Beast as a potential life partner. I was slowly feeling flushed, so I pulled away from the kiss, to catch my breath.

Hazel: (breathing heavily) “Yoh (Oh), Beast. Kopa re eme nyana (let's wait a minute).”

He gave me a naughty smile and for some reason I looked down to his pants, and saw his penis poking up, leaving me so embarrassed. I looked away immediately.

Beast: "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to make you feel uncomfortable. It just happens whenever a man kisses someone he loves."

I blushed.

Beast: "Come, let's eat."

We had some dinner just before it was time to get cleaned up. I had completely forgotten about my mother and sister. Perhaps I was enjoying myself way too much.

Hazel: "Can I go take a shower?"

Beast: "Of course, baby. You don't have to ask."

I nodded and went to the bathroom. Luckily there were robes set out for us with fresh towels, slippers and all toiletries, but Beast bought us our own. He was particular like that. I took a long shower and when I went back to the bedroom, he was lying on the bed, watching tv.

Beast: (smiling) “Here are your toiletries. Let me go shower. I'll see you later, Ma (Mrs) Sibiya.”

I smiled as he gently kissed me on the lip and walked into the bathroom. Beast was just something else. While I was about to lotion my body, a call came through. I looked at the caller ID and it was Bella. I was bored immediately, so I decided not to answer it, but she kept calling. I checked my phone and she had called 15 times since I was in the shower. She never called me. I thought something was wrong, so I answered it – only to live to regret it.

Hazel: “Hello.”

Bella: “Took you long enough to answer. I've been calling.”

Hazel: “Bella, o batla eng (what do you want)?”

Bella: “Wa mo utlwa (do you hear her), Mama? She's having so much fun with her gangster boyfriend, that she doesn't even deem us as important.”

The level of manipulation was on another level.

Hazel: (sigh) “What do you want, Bella?”

I was put on loud speaker, because I could hear the both of them, clearly.

Binah: “Hey wena (you), Hazel. Since o utlwile lerete wa ntetbala, neh (ever since you have tasted dick, you have forgotten who I am, hey)?”

I was slowly regretting answering the call.

Binah: “Hey, wena (you)! People all over Pheli know about you and Bethuel! Akere wena o clever (you are clever, aren't you)?! Ne o nagana gore (did you honestly think that) I wouldn't find out?! Now Ma'Sibiya is going around telling people how you're just white trash that is not good enough for her son. I never should have let you be so free. You're turning me into a laughing stock.”

Hazel: “Mama, I have to go.”

Binah: “Ema pele, ga ka fetsa ka wena (Wait a minute, I'm not done with you)! You just left here for church and you haven't gotten back. You didn't call us or text us. At least have the decency to tell us where you are.”

Since when did they even care?

Hazel: “I'm around.”

Binah: “Oho, I see. You don't want to tell us, go lokile (it's fine). Re bolawa ke tlala entse o le teng (we're starving while you're

around). Send us some money so that we can at least buy some food. Bella and her unborn baby are starving.”

Wow, I should have seen that coming.

Hazel: “Okay, I'll send.”

Binah: “Sharp (Okay).”

She hung up just like that. I felt so conflicted afterwards. I took a moment to go through my emotions. My mother was so toxic, and she wasn't about to stop. How dare she just insult me like that and still have the audacity to ask me for money as if I were responsible for her and Bella? It just didn't feel right at all. I was about to cry, but I kept it together. I knew Beast wasn't going to be happy seeing me cry after having such a lovely day together. While I was going through my emotions, Bella sent me a please call me written “please call send money”. The nerve. I just quickly logged into my banking app and transferred an amount of R500. Soon afterwards, I received a text message through WhatsApp from her. “What do you think we're going to eat with R500?!” She even added some angry emojis, until I

decided to switch off my phone. I quickly wiped away my tears and got dressed in the nightwear Beast got me. He got out topless, with only a towel wrapped around his waist. I quickly turned around and faced the window, as I didn't want to see my semi-swollen face.

Beast: "Is everything okay?"

Hazel: "Yes, I'm fine. I think I'm just tired."

Beast: "Hmm."

I could hear him lotioning his body and putting on some shorts. He never slept fully clothed for as long as I could remember. He got into bed and held me from behind. He kissed my neck softly.

Beast: "Don't let your mother and sister guilt-trip you like that. One day, you will learn to stand up for yourself against them. You're a great person, with such great potential, Hazel

Makwetla. Sometimes you just never give yourself credit. Let's pray and sleep.”

I felt tears slowly flow down my cheeks. I just couldn't face him looking like that, even though he didn't mind seeing me like that.

Hazel: “I can't let you see me like this.”

Beast: “Okay, I'll pray for us and then we can sleep, okay?”

I just nodded, while trying to compose myself from crying out loud.

Beast: (praying) “Our Father, who art in heaven, Lord, we humble ourselves before you. We thank you for this wonderfully blessed day, we thank you for your Grace, oh, Lord. We thank you that we have finally made our way into each other's arms. Lord, you are amazing, I ask of you to please heal my Hazel. She has been bruised and battered for so long, she really needs a break. Heal her heart, heal her soul, so that she

can accept my unconditional love for her. We ask for your divine intervention and protection and we ask that you bless our holiday here in Cape Town. Thank you so much for allowing us this chance, that many don't get in this life time. In Jesus' Mighty name. Amen.”

After his prayer, I calmed down, while he just held me tightly without saying a word. Slowly, I drifted off to sleep. Love is truly a beautiful thing. It comes in all shapes and sizes, but real love won't need to tell you, you will see it make its grand entrance into your life. Once you do find it, hold on to it and never let it go, for life is truly short.

1 Corinthians: 4 – 8 - “Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away.”

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“Move out of your comfort zone . You can only grow if you are willing to feel awkward and uncomfortable when you try something new.” - Brian Tracy

Hazel

After a rather unpleasant end to our evening, I had a very odd dream. I woke up still feeling confused by it all. I found Beast was out of bed, so I figured he had gone to get food since he didn't want room service to come up for some reason, but just after a few minutes, he walked in, draped in sweat, dressed in his sweat pants and a vest.

Beast: (smiling) “Hey, baby. I made sure to go jogging early so that I could be here when you wake up.”

Hazel: “Bathong (goodness), Beast. You don't have to do all that for me, you know.”

Beast: "I don't have to, but I want to. It's a funny thing called love."

I chuckled while he leaned in to kiss me. I backed away.

Hazel: "Morning breath, man, Beast."

Beast: (chuckling) "I don't care. I love you with all of you."

He kissed me irregardless, and he always said that he loved me yet I hadn't said that to him.

Hazel: "You always say you love me, but I haven't said it to you yet."

Beast: "That's love, baby. You don't have to do something because I am doing it. When you're ready, you'll feel it and say it back."

Hazel: "Okay."

Beast: "Ulele njani (how did you sleep)?"

Hazel: (sigh) "Okay, but I had a very awkward dream."

Beast: (frowning) "Tell me about it."

Hazel: "Well, I dreamt that Malachi was right beside me, but I couldn't see him. Like, all I saw was his shadow, but I could hear him, though. A woman who looked just like my mother, a very beautiful woman was standing right before me alongside a man I have never met before, and my mother, my sister, your mother and a lot of people I couldn't even see were trying to attack me, but they couldn't get through to me because of this woman who was somehow protecting me against them. I couldn't see you, you were very far away from me. You were just staring at me, not saying a thing. It was as if you wanted to speak, but you couldn't."

He was silent for a while, but he finally spoke.

Beast: "What do you think of the dream? What do you think it means?"

Hazel: "I don't know, but I think that the woman is my grandmother, my mother's late mother."

Beast: "I think that she is your guardian angel, she right along with your grandfather, the man standing right beside her."

Hazel: (frowning) "Grandfather? My mom never spoke about her father."

Beast: "She most probably doesn't want to, but I think you just have to pray about it. Nothing will happen to you, for as long as I am right by your side."

Little did I know how powerful his words were. "For as long as I am right by your side". Beast and I became inseparable, and everyone knows what happens to inseparable people once they part.

Hazel: "You're right. I will do that."

Beast: "Go take a shower, while I wait for you."

Hazel: (frowning) "But you are draped in sweat, man. O tlo tlatso dikobo ditshila (you'll make the sheets dirty)."

Beast: "That's why we have room service. They take out the sheets daily. Go, I'll take one after you're done."

He was so sweet. I finally agreed and went to take a shower, after I was done, he got ready as well. I browsed through the paper bags, and the man had bought me a stunning golfer dress from Polo, a pair of sneakers, sunglasses and a handbag – all from Polo, and some make up. I wasn't a make-up lady, but I assumed he thought I was into that. I checked the price tag on the items, and I nearly shit myself. How on earth did someone manage to walk into a store and buy a few items that cost about R5000?! I mean just the other day he had bought me clothes. That was a bit too much. He walked out of the shower, while I was still seething with shock.

Beast: (frowning) “Y0u're still not dressed? Aowa (come on), Baby.”

Hazel: “Beast, you bought me an entire outfit that costs R5000?”

Beast: “It was short notice, I was actually supposed to spend more.”

Hazel: (shocked) “Are you insane, Bethuel?! Why would you think I'd want to wear clothes that are so expensive?”

Beast: “Baby, o wara fela (you love worrying). Enjoy this, because I am here to spoil you. Allow me to spoil you while I still can. Come on, we still have to eat breakfast. We have a whole day ahead of us.”

He just kissed me and winked at me as if nothing was wrong. I was so bothered by his ability to spend so much money. I got dressed although I didn't want to wear the outfit, but once I looked at myself in the mirror, I was in awe.

Beast: (smiling) “Di dese, wa di bona (the clothes look amazing, don't they)?”

Hazel: “Yes, they actually do.”

Beast: “You don't do them any justice. You look great.”

Hazel: “Thank you, but I am not a make-up girl. I have no idea how to put on make-up.”

Beast: “I just bought you those things in case you'd want to wear them one of these days. You don't need make-up today, we'll be in the sun most of the time, hence I got you those sunglasses. Come, let's go. We're going to be late.”

I was under the impression that we were in Stellenbosch to see the University, but it turns out I was on my very first baecation. Beast had pulled out all the stops, that day, we had breakfast downstairs at the hotel, and off we went. I thought we were going straight to the University and then we'd be heading back

home, but he took me there and we had our very own private tour. I fell absolutely in love with it the moment we drove in. It was so big and majestic, and their lecture halls were so big. The res was also great, but that wasn't an option for me. My friends and I wanted to be close to school, but also closer to one another, and I also had to have Beast in mind for visits and all that. I couldn't possibly imagine him sleeping right next to me in a small bed like that. I made sure to video call my friends while I was there and they absolutely loved it. It was official, we fell in love with Stellenbosch University and that was where we were going to spend the next few years of our lives. Beast looked quite pleased that I chose Stellenbosch instead of Pretoria or Johannesburg.

Hazel: "Why do I get the feeling you wanted me to choose this place?"

Beast: "Because, you'll be able to focus more while away from the insanity your mother contributes in your life."

Hazel: "What about you?"

Beast: “What about me?”

Hazel: “Will you survive not seeing me often?”

Beast: (chuckling) Baby, I've survived a lot more. Besides, I flew you here, I can most definitely do that if I want to see you. Now, let's go to our next stop.”

I was really happy that Beast took my future so seriously. He didn't want me to sideline my dreams at all. He said that my success was his success and it meant the world to him that I wanted to be something in life. We first went wine tasting at one of the beautiful vineyards in the city. I had never done that before, but the experience was so classy and just enriching. I actually learnt so much. Beast told me not to swallow anything – no matter how good the wine tasted, otherwise I'd have walked out with a massive headache afterwards. After the tasting, we had to honour lunch right on the vineyard, which was part of the tasting. I felt a little tipsy, but thank goodness I never swallowed any of the wines I had tasted. Beast and I took a seat at our own table, and we started browsing through the drinks menu. Food was already chosen and set for us, all we had to do was choose which wines we wanted to have.

Beast: "So, which one do you want to drink?"

Hazel: "I enjoyed the taste of them all, but the Merlot is just absolutely amazing. Can I go for that? I mean they do say that wine goes with certain foods, right?"

Beast: (laughing) "Yes, they do, but then, there's no remedy or rules for this life. You can have whatever you want with any food you want."

He was right. I settled for the Merlot, while he went for a Chardonnay. I loved how I was learning so much with Beast around me. We had fun while at it, too. While we were having our drinks and starters, I was surprised to see a woman I had never met before come up to me. A white, middle-aged woman, who looked at me like she had seen a ghost.

Woman: (surprised) "Hi, I'm so sorry for interrupting your lunch, but I just had to come by and see you."

Her accent was so Afrikaans, I could hear how she emphasized every letter in her words, more especially the “r” sound. Beast tensed up immediately and his smile faded away. She looked at me in awe, I was completely clueless.

Hazel: (confused) “Uhh, okay. I'm sorry, but do I know you?”

Woman: (teary) “No, but, I think I know you. I've been looking all over for - “

Before she could even finish her sentence, a very familiar man dressed in a very expensive suit came up and grabbed her away really quickly.

Andries: (shouting) “Anna, nee man (no, man)! Forgive my wife, you two, she is just confused.”

Anna: (angrily) “I'm not confused! I just wanted to come and see my - “

Andries: (interrupting angrily) “Sy's niks van ons af nie (She's nothing of ours)! Kom, laat ons gaan (Come, let's go)!”

The poor woman seemed very reluctant to leave. She kept glancing back at us, but he roughly pulled her away and instead of them finishing off their lunch, they left. Only after I realized the stern, hateful tone of that man, even when he looked me right in the eye – I realized whom he actually was. My appetite disappeared instantly, and I just became saddened.

Beast: “Are you okay?”

Hazel: (shaking head) “Is it too early to leave?”

Beast: “Not at all. Come, let's go.”

I tried so hard to not to cry, but the moment I saw that man shouting at that woman right outside the car, she burst into tears the moment she saw me. He roughly threw her in the car and gave me one of his hateful stares. The familiar salty tears made their way down my cheeks while Beast held me tightly.

We got into our Uber without him saying anything to me. He just let me cry it out, silently. I thought we were heading back to the hotel, but we made our way to the beach. We took a long, silent walk on the beach, while listening to the beautiful, echoing sound of the waves, and the talking birds. I watched the scorching sun hovering over us, while the clouds were gracing us with their ambience. After about an hour of walking, Beast drew me towards the water.

Beast: “I think I should be completely transparent and honest with you. I told you that my father died a long time ago, but he didn't. He is still alive and well – much to my dismay.”

I let him continue talking, while I listened attentively.

Beast: (sigh) “My father left my mother to go be a father to someone else's children. Can you believe it? I'm his only son, yet he chose to be an active father to his girlfriend's son. He had and still doesn't have any children with her, yet he left us like we were just used rags. He was a real, hard core gangster back in the day, and after many successful heists, they finally caught him and he has been in prison ever since. We don't talk about him much

because he is just a non-factor in our lives. I vowed the day he left us, when I was 13, that I'd never turn out like him. I vowed to ensure that my mother and sisters never lacked anything.”

He was trying so hard not to break down while talking about that subject, but I could see just how much pain he had been harbouring deep within his heart.

Beast: “After he went to prison, I was arrested one time, right at the prison he's still serving at. Imagine that – I was 19 at the time and I hadn't seen him since I was thirteen, and the first words that he said to me was; “welcome home, son. I'll be sure to take really good care of you”. Can you believe that? How fucked up is that? I decided right there and then that I'd never end up in prison again – at least I'd try to stay out of trouble.”

I felt his pain as he squeezed my hand tightly.

Beast: “I understand your pain – believe me I do. You most probably think I have a heart made of stone whenever I tell you to learn to cut ties with those who hurt you, no matter who they are, but the truth is, I am a very emotional person. It took

me a great deal of healing to be who I am today. Your father never wanted you – or so that is what we know. Judging by today, perhaps the circumstances are different, but then, if he really wanted you, he'd be here today. So, I am saying that you don't have to worry about a thing, Hazel. I got your back – no matter what. Rejection is painful, but that doesn't mean we have to dwell on the past and on those who don't want us. Not everyone in life will love you back, and that is genuinely okay. The key to healing is to accept and surround yourself with those who do love you. I knew my father and he left me, but perhaps you can take comfort in the fact that you never knew yours, so you never got to see if he was a good or a bad person. Let it go and just be the best version of yourself. At least do it for me.”

Hazel: (nodding tearfully) “I'll try, Beast, I'll try. How come you are so patient with me?”

Beast: “It is a funny thing called love, baby. One day, when you really activate your feelings for love for me, you'll understand right where I'm coming from.”

He hugged me and kissed my forehead, while we were listening to the magical sound of the waves. Some say that the ocean is

alive, of which I can believe. We made our way to one of the restaurants near the beach, Grand Africa Collection Beach Cafe. Once again, Beast took me to a sophisticated place. All I ever knew was Spur, Panarottis, and a few of our local restaurants. He just took everything up a notch. I honestly prayed from deep within that he was the one for me, because I just didn't imagine myself with anyone else but him. I loved just how he understood me. Food was my forte, and luckily he enjoyed good food as well. He was a neat freak and a health nut, hence he was big enough to be called beast. The more time I got to spend with him, the more I got to see us having a family of our own with children calling us their parents. We had the best meal I'd ever tasted in Cape Town and the cocktails were really great. By 5pm, after a few cocktails, I was really tipsy, but luckily not drunk. I was talking so much, while Beast was just laughing.

Hazel: “Tjo, waitse keng (wow, you know what)? Ke monate, shem (I'm nice and tipsy, shame). Life e monate, mara, akere, baby (Life is truly good, isn't it, baby)?”

Beast: (laughing) “Ao (Oh)? I should get you cocktails more often. Se ungibiza ngo baby namhlanje (you're calling me baby today)?”

Hazel: "Come on, you did say you were taking me on an adventure. I am loving it so far. So? Where to next?"

Beast: "That depends, are you ready to go out tonight?"

Hazel: "Ready? I am more than ready."

Beaset: "Okay then, masihambe (let's go)."

We didn't even go back to the hotel to change, I mean, we literally had only those outfits that we wore. I thought the Uber was going to go straight to the club, but instead, Beast asked him to wait outside of the mall for us. We strolled hand in hand until we got to one of the Gucci stores nearby.

Hazel: "Baby, I've never been to Gucci before."

Beast: (chuckling) "Today is your lucky day, baby. Pick an outfit."

Hazel: "What about the price range?"

Beast: "Unlimited."

I felt so good, I mean normally, I'd be reluctant, but that day, I didn't worry about a thing. I opted for one of the printed jersey dresses that caught my eye, while he also went for an entire outfit. I decided not to change my shoes, I stuck with my comfortable Polo sneakers. We left afterwards, and off we went with the driver dropping us off at Shimmy Beach Club.

Hazel: "Yoh (oh), Baby, I've never been to a club before."

Beast: "Luckily, I know a few people here. Besides, you're legal now. Don't worry. I'll be right by your side."

I nodded as we went in. We left the afternoon's outfits in the Uber. It seemed as if Beast had booked him for us for the entire week, because we were only driven around by him. It was most probably best that way, I didn't mind at all. The bouncers

looked really huge and scary, and the queue was quite long outside. I thought we were going to wait, but Beast walked right up to them, with me along his side.

Bouncer1: (smiling) "Beast, my man! Long time, no see!"

They gave him one of those man hugs.

Beast: "Yeah, JD. Too long, how are things?"

Bouncer 2: "Ag, you know how it is. We pushing this side. You still in Pretoria?"

Beast: "Yeah, call me if you ever want some change."

Bouncer 1: "On it."

Beast: "I'm here with my woman. Take good care of us."

Bouncer 2: “No problem. Go on in, I'll get you one of the VIP sections.”

He nodded as we went in. I was in awe. The club looked so big and sophisticated and not very crowded, unlike a lot of our clubs back in the township. I don't even know why I thought that, since I had zero experience of clubbing. Beast was greeting people left right and center, and he never let go of my hand while he was hugging a few people. A few women wanted to hug him, but he politely greeted them by the hand. He introduced me as Ma'Sibiya. I loved that. The lights were making me a bit dizzy, but after a few minutes, my eyes had already adjusted. We were led by one of the managers there, to one of the VIP sections. It was so posh and stylish, filled with white couches. The music was so loud, so whenever Beast and I wanted to talk to one another, we had to speak into each other's ears.

Beast: “Uyophuzani (what do you want to drink), Ma'Sibiya?”

Hazel: “How about a cider? I liked Savanna the last time I tried it.”

Beast: "You can have whatever you want. I'm here."

I nodded while he gently kissed me. Our drinks had arrived and it was only the two of us in our area, until one of his old acquaintances asked to join us. He too had come with his wife. They were in their late 20's, though, so we had a lot in common. The music was buzzing and when I got up to dance, Beast stood up to dance with me. He made sure that I never felt out of place, and surprisingly he could dance too.

Hazel: "I didn't know you could dance."

Beast: (smiling) "There's a lot you don't know about me, Baby wami (my baby). This week is only the beginning of a beautiful love story."

Indeed it was the beginning. We danced throughout the night, but at about 11pm, I couldn't take it any more. I think I had had quite a lot to drink. Beast had cognac, but he was up and running and he could walk straight. I on the other hand, was another story. Once we were in the car, I started craving food.

Hazel: "Beast, baby, ke tswwhere ke tlala (I'm hungry)."

Beast: "I'll ask the Driver to pass by McDonald's."

Indeed, the driver did as asked. I ordered a McFeast, Extra Large Meal and started eating in the car on our way back to the hotel. I had heard Otlile say that once a person is drunk, they crave a lot of food. That was my very first drunken experience and I got to have it with my first boyfriend right by my side. He didn't order anything, but he occasionally took a bite of my chips every now and then. He knew just how much I loved food, and thankfully, I wasn't one to gain any weight. I was just a little petite, with nothing more oversized than the other. Everything of mine was pretty much the same size. We made it to our hotel, and I had gobbled up my entire burger. All I recall was Beast kissing off the remaining sauces off my mouth, and I could barely walk once we were out of the car. He laughed at me the entire way, while I was just talking a whole lot of nonsense. I couldn't care less who was watching us at the hotel, but luckily everyone minded their own business. Once we got to the room, I just took off my dress and bra, and walked to the bathroom in my panties only. My mind wandered off completely, as I completely forgot that Beast had never seen me naked.

Hazel: “Yoh (Wow)! Ke tshwere ke moroto (I need to pee)!”

I could hear Beast chuckling throughout the entire ordeal. I remember going to the bathroom to pee and I headed back to the bedroom as is, with nothing on. I don't even recall taking my panties completely off in the bathroom. I just threw myself on the bed, while beast had already gotten into his sweat pants and he was half naked. He looked at me and smiled.

Hazel: (frowning) “What is it? Is something wrong?”

Beast: (Chuckling) “How I wish you could be so open and free when you're sober.”

Hazel: “Ag, I don't know what you're talking about.”

I was facing him, with no fear, no favour.

Beast: “You do realize you're naked, right?”

Hazel: (shocked) “Bathong (goodness), Bethuel! Why didn't you tell me? Yoh, bathong (oh, my goodness)!”

I tried hiding myself with the sheets, while he was just laughing at me.

Beast: “Let's take a selfie together. One day when we're old, I'll remind you of this day.”

He took a picture, while I was so red in the face, filled with embarrassment.

Hazel: “Ke nako ya go robala bjanong (it is time to sleep right now).”

Beast: “Take that pain killer before you sleep. It will alleviate any hangover symptoms that creep up on you tomorrow morning.”

He had even laid out the pill and a glass of water for me. He was very sweet like that. I took it and kissed him goodnight. He wrapped his arm around me and I slowly dozed off. They say that opposites attract, but at times, it is always best to date your type. You both get to do what you both like. I used to think that Beast and I were total opposites, until I got to know him – the real him; not the Beast he was whenever he was with Malachi or his family, but the Beast that I knew. The beast he was for Hazel; the caring and sensitive Beast; the loving and fun Beast. I absolutely adored that side of him.

1 Corinthians 13:13 - “So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.”

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“Life only changes when you decide to change. It may not be comfortable or easy, but it sure is worth it.” - Unknown

Hazel

One week later...

I honestly had the greatest time with Beast that entire week. That first evening we went clubbing together, I didn't feel like complete shit the morning after, I just had a slight headache and I was craving food more than anything. We had so many activities lined up each day, I actually felt bad that he wasn't busy with work, but he reassured me that everything was taken care of. We were sleeping next to one another, but not once did Beast even try to have sex with me. We had been dating for nearly two weeks, and we were officially an item. He had updated his entire social media accounts, he had a different picture of us on each of his profiles, and he had updated his relationship status to In a relationship with me on Facebook. By then, he had created albums of our entire week on Instagram. I was all over his social media, and of course, most people didn't like the idea, but they knew better than to start beef with

Beast. Anyone who came up with a trash comment was blocked. I on the other hand, didn't open any comments on any posts. I posted him often, but I didn't want any negative comments. We went horse riding, mountain climbing, river rafting, we even went bungee jumping and we rode in a hot air balloon for the first time in my life. I had always been afraid of heights, but having him there with me made everything so much easier. Beast was literally pulling out all the stops and I was so glad to have him as my boyfriend. He ignored calls from his mother the entire week, while I ignored calls and texts, more especially insults from Bella and my mother the entire week. I had even blocked them for sanity in order to use my phone, since they were bombarding me with messages every chance they got. It was finally time to leave Cape Town and of course, by then time we left, Prudence had humbled herself completely. We weren't bothered though, I was just glad that I got to spend so much time with him. By the time we went back to the plane for our return flight, I was still anxious, so Beast suggested that I have a cocktail before hand. I didn't mind, and I was a lot better afterwards. Our flight was smooth sailing and I managed to sleep, although it wasn't that long. Once we landed, we headed straight home. His car was still safely parked at the airport by the time we went back to Johannesburg. I was still reeling from my holiday with him, when I went back home. I didn't want to go back to that miserable place I called a home,

but I had to. We got to the gate, and Beast was trying to convince me to leave with him. I mean, it was as if he sensed that my home was a horrible place for me.

Beast: "Are you sure you don't want to come live with me until you leave for Stellenbosch?"

Hazel: "Yes, I'm sure. I can't do that to you."

Beast: "I don't mind, but if you ever change your mind. You know where to find me."

Hazel: (nodding) "I really appreciate that, baby."

Yes, I had managed to call him baby even while sober. He kissed me goodbye and I walked out with my bags filled with new clothes he had bought me. I didn't feel any sense of guilt any more, since I knew that he loved me and it was okay for a boyfriend to buy gifts for their girlfriend, as long as it wasn't for a trade. The moment I walked into the yard, something just felt so off. The moment I stepped right before my door, I saw

something odd. My butler gate was slightly opened, it looked as if someone had cut through the gate. I reacted quickly and opened my door, only to find that the handle had also been vandalized. I was met with so much shock and horror, my entire room was wiped out. I had no more furniture – not one single thing I had left a week before was left in there. I was boiling with rage yet again, and just as I was about to confront my mother, Bella was right outside. She looked so guilty, it was insane.

Bella: “Are you looking for something?”

Hazel: “You obviously had something to do with this. Where the fuck is my furniture?!”

Bella: “Waitse wena (you know), you think that just because your dad is white that you're better than us. Well, you're not. Look around you, boo, you're not. You truly expected us to starve while you were eating prawns in Cape Town? I bet that now that Beast got a taste of your white pussy, he wants nothing to do with you now.”

I was filled with so much rage, that I just snapped. I completely lost it. I punched Bella so hard, she fell onto the ground. I think she was immediately reminded of that day when I beat her to a pulp. I got on top of her and I just kept on punching. She kept on calling my mother, but I wasn't bothered. I just kept on punching until I heard my mother yell at me, but I didn't stop. My mother pulled me right by my hair and started beating me with a broom stick. It was so bad that they were both ganging up on me at that point, while insulting me. I tried defending myself, but they overpowered me so badly, that I began seeing blood. I realized that if I hadn't found a way to escape all of that, I'd have not made it out of there breathing. People were shouting and begging my mother to let me go, but she kept shouting back at them telling them how much of a whore I was, that time Bella was the one who was pregnant and most probably didn't even know who the father was. I saw a window of opportunity, and I grabbed it. I ran out of that gate as fast as I could, while she was yelling at me.

Bina: “O se hlole o boa mo

sfebe ke wena (don't bother coming back here, you bitch)!”

I just ran until I reached Otlile's house. She was the one who lived nearer to me. I just ran through the yard and into the house, without even knocking. I hadn't realized just how badly they had beaten me. My shirt was filled with blood splatters, while I felt a little dazed. She was so shocked to see me in that state, while her parents were so livid, they were about to call the police.

Otlile: (shocked) "Friend! What happened to you? Are you okay? Who did this to you?!"

Hazel: (hyperventilating) "It... It was... my mother and Bella."

Otlile's Mom: "Let me get you some water."

Otlile: "Why the fuck would she do such to you?"

Hazel: "They... They took all my furniture and sold it, Otlile. Can you believe it? I got so mad that I beat Bella up after she was justifying why she even did that. My mother backed her up and they ended up beating me up in the process."

Otlile's mother brought me some water, while her father was fed up.

Otlile's Father: "How much longer will you bear it out until she kills you? That woman does not deserve to be a mother. I'm calling the police."

I wasn't even sure if I wanted her to get a prison sentence, but I was so tired of the abuse, she most probably deserved it.

Hazel: (teary) "Can... Can I use your phone to call Beast?"

Otlile: "Of course."

I realized that my phone stayed behind at home. I didn't even recall where it was. The very phone Beast had bought me was now gone. I called Beast and he answered immediately.

Beast: "Baby wami (my baby)."

There is always something about the person you love whenever you are in an intensely aggravating situation. The entire time I had collected myself, but as soon as he answered, I cried.

Hazel: (crying) "Ba... Beast..."

Beast: "What is it? What happened?"

Hazel: "I... I'm at..."

I could barely even speak when Otlile took the phone from me and started telling him what happened.

Otlile: "Hi, Beast, it's Otlile."

Beast: "Sure, is everything okay? Why is Hazel crying? Where are you guys?"

Otlile: "She's hurt and bleeding and crying here. Her mom and sister beat her up and - "

She didn't get to finish her sentence when he answered really quickly.

Beast: "Is she at your house?"

Otlile: "Yes."

Beast: "Keep her calm, I'm on my way."

He hung up without a word further. I felt so humiliated, so abused. I had no idea why I never considered Malachi's suggestion when he asked me to come and join him in the US. I felt as if every single time I took two steps forward, I had taken one step back. Something had to be done about those two. For the longest time, I had been trapped in my mother's claws, and now my sister was in on it too. It took Beast less than 10 minutes to get to Otlile's house. He stormed in and greeted her

parents real quickly. He knelt down right before me, and I could see the rage filling his eyes as he analysed my bruises.

Beast: (firmly) "How are you feeling? Where does it hurt?"

Hazel: (crying) "I... It's... Everywhere."

Beast: (firmly) "Let's go. Thank you for taking care of her. I'll make sure she gets medical assistance."

Otlile: "Please do call me once everything is done, will you?"

Beast: "I will."

Otlile's Father: "The cops are on their way."

Beast: "Please direct them straight to the house. We're stopping by there first."

He held me by the hand and ensured that I didn't fall. I was really glad to have him by my side, but also so humiliated at the fact that he always sees me in uncomfortable situations. That couldn't be normal. He gently let me into the car and drove off in high speed. I could see the rage seeping through his veins. He was beyond livid, and I had no idea what he was thinking of doing next. He stopped the car right outside the gate, and only then I started being worried. He killed Raymond – for me. Who knew what he was capable of doing to Bella and my mother?

Hazel: (scared) “B... Beast... Let them be... Please.”

Beast: “Don't worry, I am not going to hurt them. Stay in the car. I'll be right back.”

I didn't even have the energy to go out in any case. My entire body was on fire. Luckily, the bleeding through my nose and a small cut on my head stopped. Beast went out and my mother was right outside. I opened the windows to be able to hear them. My mother was instantly enraged when she saw him.

Bina: “O nyaka eng mo wena, Satan (what are you doing here, Satan)?!”

Beast: (angrily) “I came to tell you that you'll live to regret what you did to Hazel today. I swear to you, I won't let you go down that easily. You think you own her like that? You think you can survive everything else and you're such a bad bitch, huh? Well, let's see just how well you'll survive prison.”

Bina: (shouting) “Ntswele ka motse (leave my yard)!”

I saw her trying to beat him with a broom stick, but he firmly held her hand. The police came soon afterwards and found them outside. Bella came out screaming and started telling the police that Beast was trying to hit my mother. Really?

Policeman: “Good day, we've been called here regarding a complaint. Ma'am, you have assaulted your child as we were told.”

Bina: “I did no such thing!”

Policeman1: “Well, according to our information both you and your daughter are the culprits, and we have quite a few community members who witnessed the entire thing.”

Bina: (shocked) “Nna (Me)?! I didn't do anything.”

Beast: “Officer, please, take her with you. Take them both with you. I have the victim in the car and we'll follow you to the station.”

Policeman1: “Alright then.”

I saw both Bella and my bother being taken into question. The policemen were reading them their rights while they were screaming and insulting them both with their private parts even. After we went to the station I made my statement, I was being completely honest with Beast right by my side. I had officially lay a charge against my mother and sister, and they were held into custody. They had to wait for the following morning for a bail hearing. Afterwards, Beast took me to the nearest doctor, since it was still late afternoon and most

doctors were open. Luckily, I didn't suffer a concussion, although I was beaten pretty badly. I was given an injection for the pain and a few pain killers. My body felt like it was on fire. Both Kg and Otlile kept calling every now and then to check up on me, but all I wanted to do was sleep. Beast took me straight to his house and he barely said a word. I could see just how angry he was – at them for doing that to me.

Beast: “Let me run you a bath.”

I nodded while he went into his bathroom and ran me a bath. At that point, there was no reason for me to even hide my body from him. He had seen me naked a few times, although we hadn't done anything sexual. I could barely get myself out of the clothes, so I needed his assistance. He carefully undressed me until I was completely naked. With every bruise he saw, he became extremely emotional. He finally couldn't contain himself as he just let the tears run down his face, slowly and silently. He got me into the water and carefully bathed me. Every time I winced, it was as if I was awakening something from deep within him. He got me out of the water and lotioned me, without saying a word. There onwards, he got me dressed into my pajamas.

Hazel: "I'm sorry."

Beast: "You did absolutely nothing wrong. Why on earth would you be sorry?"

Hazel: "Because... I always bring nothing but drama into your life. You can never have a break or any peace."

Beast: "Have I ever complained to you about all of that?"

Hazel: (shaking head) "No."

Beast: "Then don't you dare ever say that to me again. Hazel, I meant what I said; I love you and if loving you comes with baggage, then so be it. We all have it. I just can't stand to see someone beating you like you are some kind of slave and them going on to live a good life. Bina has to be stopped – she just has to be. From that day onwards, every single tragic event that happened in my mother's life, was a result of her hurting me. I finally got to understand that my grandparents were on my

side. They were literally fighting their own daughter for me and they did not stop at anything. Life is something else, we are all at war on a daily basis – more especially with things and people we can't see. We are at a constant spiritual warfare and the only way to stop it all, is through prayer and faith.

Galatians 5:22 - “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness.”

“You get what you give.” – Jennifer Lopez

Hazel

It had been one rather horrifying week on my end. I had been having sleepless nights, until I had to get on Anti-depressants yet again. I didn't want to dwell on the past, but the mind is the most powerful muscle in the body – it just never rests. I had ample time to recover, with Beast by my side and Dr. Speelman as well. She had gotten me in touch with one of her former colleagues who was then a Psychologist at University of Stellenbosch. Apparently I needed to attend therapy until I was deemed fit enough to carry on with fewer sessions. It didn't sound like she was planning on getting me out of therapy ever in my life. My mom and Bella had been denied bail, and things were moving so fast, all thanks to Beast and Malachi's intervention from the U.S. They managed to pull a few strings, by not letting anyone on the case rest, and they got 6 months in Prison. It wasn't much, but well, it was a sentence and a criminal record to their name. I was happy, mostly because I wouldn't need to see them for a long while. I'd have been far gone, in Stellenbosch, getting my life together, so I was too

excited about that. Malachi was very upset when he heard about the assault, and luckily he was about to go on recess, so he was going to come to South Africa the following week. I, on the other hand was preparing myself to go to Varsity for orientation week. We had to get there days earlier, so that we could get our registration and orientation out the way. I was starting to panic, because I had no idea how I'd pay for my fees. On our way to the airport, Beast noticed my anxiety shooting up the roof again. It was only him and I, as Otlile and Kg's parents also wanted to fly with them to ensure that they'd be safe in Stellies.

Beast: "O nwele di pilis tsa gao (have you taken your pills yet)?"

Hazel: "Oh, yes, of course. You always make sure I don't miss a dose, right?"

Beast: "It's for your own good. No one treats you like you're crazy, baby. Anxiety is no shame."

Hazel: (sigh) "Yeah, I know. That's not my worry right now."

Beast: "What is it?"

Hazel: "I'm worried about how I'm going to pay for my fees."

Beast: "Hazel, I told you I got you covered. You don't have to worry about that now. Bursaries take time to respond, and until then, I'll have you covered if that's what you're worried about."

Hazel: "You're already doing so much, Beast. I mean you and Malachi are just supporting me all over."

Beast: "That's why we're here, so you won't have to worry about a thing."

Hazel: "I appreciate you, you know that? I mean, sure, I never really get to say it because half the time we're dealing with my problems, but I appreciate you more than you'll ever know, Beast. I mean it."

He kissed my hand and smiled.

Beast: “Yes, I know that. I appreciate you more than you’ll ever know, as well.”

We parked the car and took out our luggage. He wanted to fly me to Stellies to ensure that I was safe and he was flying back to Pretoria that evening. I had no idea how I was going to cope without Beast by my side like that. I mean, I had already grown so attached to him, that he was basically my crutch. Dr. Speelman did say that it was important for me to establish new relationships and have boundaries. That way, I would be able to manage even if the person I loved the most were to leave me. We got into the plane, and as usual, my nerves were just all over the place. Beast calmed me down by talking to me and ensuring that I never looked out the window. I always felt as if I was losing out on the journey because I just couldn’t stomach looking out the plane window. All I ever panicked about was my safety. After the flight, we landed and an Uber took us to the flat that Beast was renting out for my friends and I. I didn’t want to stay at res, and that way, Kg and Otlile’s parents would relax knowing that we were all living together and we were safe. It was a beautiful three bedroom flat. It almost resembled a commune, and I loved how spacious it was. I was

surprised to see it fully furnished, as I was under the impression that we had to go shopping for furniture.

Hazel: (frowning) “Does the flat come with furniture?”

Beast: (smiling) “No, I bought it for you guys, well – Malachi and I did. He didn’t want to seem like he doesn’t do anything for you, so he offered to buy some of the furniture in this place.”

No way. Was that guy serious?

Hazel: (shocked) “Are you serious?”

Beast: “Yes, I am. Did you honestly think I’d let umkami (my wife) stay in a flat without a proper bed to sleep on? You will be studying most of the time, so you need your beauty sleep and you all got a study area in your bedrooms.”

I felt so humbled that I started tearing up.

Beast: "You promised me you wouldn't cry."

I stepped on his feet and wrapped my arms around his neck. He wasn't very tall, but I was quite short compared to him.

Hazel: (teary) "I know, but I can't help it. You bring out the best in me and it makes me cry."

I leaned in and kissed him. I had become a bit of an expert in a short period of time. Yes, he'd occasionally grab my bum while kissing me, but we still hadn't slept together. He had seen me naked a few times, but he had never acted on it, although I could see it was quite hard on him. He insisted that we wait, so I had no pressure on my side. I mean, it did seem a bit unrealistic to make a man wait that long, but they always say that if he loves you, he will wait for you, right?

Beast: "All I want is the best for you."

Hazel: "I know that. What if I just can't cope?"

Beast: "Then you call me. I'm just a phone call away."

Hazel: "I love you, Beast."

I only realized after I had said those words. I couldn't believe that I actually said it. He smiled broadly while his eyes became shiny.

Beast: "I told you that your heart would send you the message when you're ready. I love you too Ma'Sibiya."

It always felt a little too awkward having him call me that when everyone called his mother that. Ever since she found out about Beast and I, she would make random calls to Beast asking him why he never visited, that time he ensured to see her once a week. She became extra clingy and that just didn't sit well with me. I had seen his sisters while passing, but I hadn't officially met them yet. I only knew that one of them was a darling, while the other two were just a real mess. They hated me just from hearing that I was the new woman in Beast's life. Beast took me out for lunch, while we were waiting on

Otlile and Kg to arrive. They took a few hours to get there, but they eventually made it. Their parents were more than satisfied with the place and didn't complain one bit. They said their goodbyes

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while Beast said his. I was sad to see him leave, but he reassured me that it was my time to experience life on my own for a little while.

Otlile: "Oh, thank goodness they're gone."

Kg: "I have to agree with you on that one today, Otlile. I mean, my mom and dad were literally smothering me with do's and don't's."

Otlile: "I know, right? It's just crazy."

I looked at them while they were complaining about their overbearing parents, while I just envied them. I mean, all I ever wanted was a mother who cared.

Hazel: "They're just looking out for you two, that's all."

Kg: "Anyway, did Beast buy all these things? I mean we don't even have to spend our allowance on buying any cutlery, dude."

Hazel: "Well, actually both he and Malachi did all that."

Otlile: (chuckling) "Of course your boyfriend will say that. I mean, he knows how much you love complaining."

Hazel: "Come on, I don't complain."

Kg: "If you say so. Anyway, what are we eating tonight? I'm starving."

Otlile: "Aren't we drinking a little something to celebrate?"

Hazel: “We have school tomorrow, and besides, it’s a Sunday. It’s far too late to be going out.”

Otlile: “It’s only 8pm.”

Kg: “What Hazel means is that we don’t know Stellenbosch very well, Otlile. I mean, we all know what happens to young girls at night. It is not the safest country, you know.”

I think Kg was trying to make me feel at ease, but she could see that I hadn’t gotten over my fear yet. My anxiety was slowly controlling my life.

Otlile: “Alright then. You guys order some pizza for us, I brought a bottle of champagne, because I knew that you two are such party poopers. I’ll be right back.”

She rushed to her bedroom, while Kg saw it as an opportunity to get real for a few seconds.

Kg: “How has it been going? Is everything okay?”

Hazel: “Baby steps, friend, baby steps.”

Kg: “Well, no matter what happens, always know that you can always talk to me if you ever need to, okay?”

Hazel: “I really appreciate that, babe. I truly do.”

Otlile: “Okay, bitches! Out with the glasses, here is some bubbly! I do hope that you did order us some food.”

Kg: “We totally forgot about that. I’ll do it now.”

Kg ordered us some food over Uber eats, while we enjoyed a glass of Otlile’s sour yet expensive champagne. Apparently she stole it from her parents’ cabinet. I had no idea why she felt the need to revolt at all times, as if her parents never gave her attention. Coming to think of it, she just always did things that were out of the ordinary, she hardly wanted to go home whenever we had to go to parties, and she had a habit of saying her mother enjoyed pretending whenever they were around people. None of us actually took note of the trouble brewing underneath there until the day finally came. The following day, we had to get up early to be on time for the first day of orientation week. We had to report to the Admin office to check if our registration was fully paid before attending orientation. I was always an early bird at school, although I’d be so late whenever I had to get ready, but that day, I was too excited and I didn’t want to wait in a long queue half the day. Beast and I video called one another the night before, and

that morning he sent me a text wishing me good luck. I was a little bored when we were split into our faculty choices during the start of Orientation. So, Kg went to hers, while Otilie went to hers as well, and I was stuck with potential Psychologists and Psychiatrists. I knew no one, and that really got the best of me, until a rather oddly, familiar voice crept up on me.

Mathilda: (surprised) “Hazel! My goodness! I thought that was you!”

She jumped on me and gave me a big hug. I was actually surprised, although we were no longer fighting, but we just weren't really friends.

Hazel: (surprised) “Hey, Mathilda. What are you doing here?”

Mathilda: "Oh, I'm so sorry for hugging you out of the blue like that. I'm working on myself, you know. My therapist told me that I suffer from a lot of neglect and as a result, I come on too strong."

Wait, she had her own therapist as well?

Mathilda: "Well, I am here as a student. I'll be studying Psychology."

Hazel: "Oh, me too."

Mathilda: “See? Everyone has issues. I do hope that you and I will get to know each other really well, Hazel.”

I wasn't too sure about being Mathilda's buddy. I mean she and I only learnt to tolerate one another the previous year, when we were in Matric. My goodness, it was just a little too weird, but I guess only time would tell. During the course of the day, she was actually a lot chattier than I remembered her. I felt as if I was speaking to an entirely new Mathilda. She just started telling me so much about her family, and what actually led her to go to therapy, it actually turns out she had a really tough upbringing. I never knew that she had it so rough. Mam'Rose used to tell me that the rich had more problems than the poor and middle-class, and if we knew, we wouldn't envy them so much. Slowly, but surely, I got to know the real Mathilda, and I actually liked her.

Ephesians 4:2 – 3 - “With all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

“We generate fears while we sit. We overcome them by action.” – Dr. Henry Link

Hazel

After a rather interesting and busy first day of Orientation, I offered Mathilda an invitation for lunch with my friends back at the flat, but she said she didn't want to overstep any boundaries. She made it clear to me that just because we knew each other from back home and were now doing the same course, it didn't mean we were friends. She didn't want me to feel forced to involve her or feel pity for her in any way, and I admired that. She showed real maturity and growth. I thought I was about to have lunch, when Beast sent me a reminder; “Don't forget your appointment with Dr. Zwide.” Oh, that. I had completely forgotten about that. I was so hungry, but if I didn't go, Beast would have not taken it well. In fact, I would have been in the dog box since I promised him that I'd make an effort into getting better. I texted him back and off I went, lunch could have waited. I followed the directions given to me on the email she had sent me days before. I had to walk all the

way to Floor 4. That was a drag, but I think I was having a hard time adjusting to someone new already, someone whom I had to get comfortable with first. I was worried that she might have been judgmental or the total opposite of Dr. Speelman. I finally found her office and I knocked nervously. She answered almost immediately. I never understood what it was about psychologists and being punctual. They are just always on time.

Dr. Zwide: “Come in!”

I took a deep breath and opened the door. I found a very beautiful, fair-skinned lady before me, with the most beautiful figure I had ever seen. Her skin was so gorgeous, so flawless, like glass. When she smiled, I saw her dimples protruding and I just knew that she was a very humble woman. She was also quite young.

Dr. Zwide: (smiling broadly) “You must be Hazel. I am so pleased to meet you.”

She extended her hand and gave me a warm handshake. I felt at home instantly.

Hazel: (nervously) “H.. Hi, Dr. Zwide. Yes, I am Hazel. How did you know that it’s actually me?”

Dr. Zwide: “I have an appointment with you, remember? Besides, your description and picture fit you

perfectly. You are such a beaut. Boys must be fighting for you left, right and center.”

I chuckled while looking down embarrassed.

Dr. Zwide: “Please, take a seat. You must be hungry, I mean I know all about orientation, those guys will keep you busy until you can’t feel your stomach any more. Have something to nibble on and something to drink.”

I looked at her table and she had a few doughnuts, some water and juice. I think those people knew their patients’ weaknesses. I mean, I loved food, so they gave me food at all times. That way, I’d just pour my heart out, I guess. I was really glad to see those crispy doughnuts, I was parched.

Hazel: "Thank you."

I took one and nibbled on it immediately.

Dr. Zwide: "Dr. Speelman gave me a copy of your file and briefed me on your history and situation. I must say, you've been through quite a lot."

I nodded while trying to focus on the doughnut.

Dr. Zwide: “Let’s talk about you for a second. How are you feeling now?”

Hazel: “Well, I feel good, I guess. I mean, I got to Stellenbosch safely and my friends and I are together now, we are about to focus on the future, my first day wasn’t so bad, my boyfriend is supportive and I met Mathilda today. It turns out she is doing the same course I am doing.”

Dr. Zwide: “Hmm, Mathilda, the old school bully. I see. We’ll get to her later on. I asked you to tell me about you, and you have barely done that in those few sentences you have just shared.”

Hazel: (sigh) “Alright. In all honesty, I feel quite anxious, about everything. I am so used to being around Beast and now that I have to be alone and be away from him for a while, it makes me anxious. I am used to all the chaos at home and for the longest point, it was a normality for me, so I am having trouble adjusting to this new chapter in my life.”

Dr. Zwide: “Are you sleeping well and taking your meds regularly?”

Hazel: “Yes, I am.”

Dr. Zwide: “What you’re experiencing is completely normal. Remember, you have only been in Atteridgeville pretty much your entire life. Give yourself time to adjust and remember to meditate. It is important for you to learn to function without the medication, as you are still young. You just have to work on second guessing yourself a lot less. Other than that, you’re doing great. You have managed to take the very first step of removing yourself from toxicity, by choosing you.”

She made me feel a lot better after that. We carried on with our sessions, talking about general things in my life, as she was trying to get to know me a bit better. She also told me a little bit about her background, and she was just so brilliant at her job. She inspired me to keep going for that profession, much like Dr. Speelman. After an hour, I was still hungry. The doughnuts did a good job, but I was craving real food. I left her office around 3pm, and once I reached the bus stop, my anxiety kicked in once again. I saw very few people there, most probably waiting for the next bus. Immediately I received a message from Beast. “How was your session?”

I smiled to myself and responded immediately.

Hazel: "It went really well, I like her."

Beast: "I'm glad. You must be hungry."

Hazel: "Lol, you know me too well."

Beast: "Where are you?"

Hazel: "Still on campus, waiting on the next bus. I have no idea when it will even arrive. Trying very hard not to panic."

Beast: "No need, James is on his way to pick you up."

I frowned as I was typing.

Hazel: "James?"

Beast: “Yes, your assigned Uber driver. Don’t worry, he isn’t a stranger. He’s the very same driver who drove us during our entire vacation in Cape Town a few weeks ago. He’s totally safe.”

I really appreciated him caring about me that much, but I felt as if I was taking way too much of his time.

Hazel: “Beast, you really don’t have to keep doing such things.”

Beast: "I told you, it's a funny thing called love. He'll be there in five minutes. Hang tight."

Hazel: "Okay."

He kept me company while I was waiting for James. And indeed, he came and was right on time. He smiled as he saw me and greeted me.

James: "Greetings, madame. Remember me?"

Hazel: (chuckling) "How can I forget?"

James: "Eish (oh), your boyfriend is very strict, that one. He gave me strict instructions. If I'm late, I'm fired."

That was a bit harsh from Beast. While I was about to text him, he video called me and I had to answer.

Hazel: "Yes, baby."

Beast: "Put James on the phone."

James: "I'm here, Mr. Beast."

Beast: "You're carrying special cargo in there, James. You'd better make sure she is safe at all times. Remember, I pay a lot for her safety."

James: "Absolutely, I'll do so. Don't you worry. She's safe."

Hazel: "You are too much, you know."

Beast: (Chuckling) “I love you too. Oh, and James, ensure that she gets some food before she leaves. Should I send you some money?”

Hazel: “Beast bathong (my goodness, Beast), I still have money from last year already.”

Beast: “A girl can never have too much money. I’ll send some now. Buy enough for you and your friends. Text me as soon as you get home.”

It wasn't as if he wouldn't know if I were home or not. I bet he was tracking me, that one. I enjoyed him fussing over like that. I guess it was a funny thing called love. Indeed James took me to the nearest drive through. I couldn't imagine having to sit in and wait for food all over again, so I opted for Burger King. Beast sent me yet another R1000. I couldn't understand why he just kept sending me money for literally no reason. I stopped arguing a lot time ago. The more I did that, the more money he kept sending. Upon my arrival at home, it was already 5pm and I was a little tired. I found Kg watching tv, while Otlile was sipping on some red wine.

Hazel: "Hey, guys."

Kg: "Hey, oh, please tell me you have ordered some food for us. We didn't get time to go grocery shopping today."

Hazel: "Yes, I bought the food for us. I figured we might all be hungry after my therapy session, because I'm parched."

Otlile: "Oh, you're Godsent. This wine is literally making me hungry."

Hazel: "It's Monday, I mean should you really be drinking on a school night?"

Kg: "Try talking to her because I already have."

Otlile: “Would you two just relax? I’m just having a glass. Besides, a glass a day keeps the doctor away. I’ll have this in my room, to avoid any further judgment, thank you.”

She took her pack of food and left to her bedroom. Kg and I were just voicing our concerns, but I guess she took it to heart.

Kg: “How was your day?”

Hazel: “Well, you wouldn’t believe who is studying Psych with me.”

Kg: (frowning) "Do tell."

Hazel: "Mathilda."

Kg: (shocked) "The Mathilda Mabaso?"

Hazel: (nodding) "The one and only."

Kg: “Wow, small world.”

Hazel: “She’s actually changed, hey. She is a totally different person, and has actually confided in me about a lot of things involving her family. It’s actually quite sad.”

Kg: “Well, you know what they say about judging a book by its cover. I mean, any sane person could actually see that her behaviour was a cry for help. Whatever it is, I hope she found help.”

Hazel: “Yes, she has. Anyway, have you met anyone new?”

Kg: "Not really, I mean fellow teaching students are quite boring, to be honest."

Hazel: (chuckling) "You're funny. You'll meet someone you like very soon."

Kg: "We can only hope."

We went about talking about the rest of our day before I retreated to my bedroom. I took a shower and then Beast video called me. We spoke about our day and how he had new business going in Cape Town. I got the feeling he just wanted to be near me, or get people to be near me, you know, just to check up on me or something. I appreciated the fact that he never failed to check up on me, and not once did he mention sex or try to have sex with me. I was truly grateful for him not pressurizing me into it.

Three months later...

It had a rather interesting three months, and we were at the end of our first quarter, approaching the second semester. It had been quite busy, and a little tough. High School never prepared us for such days, to be honest. I was so glad that Mathild and I had grown so close to one another, and we were able to work together on most group projects and help each

other through assignments. I don't know, but I was able to confide in her a lot more than my friends. My therapist, Dr. Zwide did say that it was okay to confide in non-biased people, since Mathilda hadn't known all of me and so, that way, she wasn't going to be emotionally invested when giving me advice on an issue I might have had. Slowly, but surely, she was growing on me and without any pressure, I could vent to her without worry. I thought I was going to spend the night indoors, but of course, Otlile had other plans for us. She had been drinking pretty much every single day and how she still managed to ace her tests and wake up without a hangover puzzled me. I had just gotten back to the flat after my last day on campus before recess started, when she approached Kg and I.

Otlile: (happily) "Let's go out tonight

Advertisement

girls. Collin is hosting a house party tonight."

I didn't have a good experience with house parties, so I tried to avoid that at all costs.

Kg: "No offence, but you remember the last house party we went to?"

I remembered it quite well, everyone found out about Raymond being dead a few days later, while I knew the truth.

Hazel: "By the way, who is this Collin?"

Otlile: “Oh, a fellow student. He’s fun. Come on. We haven’t been out ever since we got here.”

Kg: “You mean Hazel and I have never been out. You’ve been out pretty much every single weekend.”

Otlile: “Okay, fine. I just want to have a good time with my two best friends. Can I do that? Just for one night? Please?”

I really didn’t want to go, but then I just decided to please her. Perhaps it was going to be good going out, as I thought to myself. Kg was also not very keen on going out, but she just did it for the sake of it, like I did.

Kg: "Okay, fine."

Hazel: "Fine, but we won't stay for too long. Three hours max."

Otlile: "Fine by me. I'm so excited."

I just couldn't shake the feeling that I had deep within my stomach, like something really bad was about to happen, but stupidly, I still went ahead. Otlile was more than ready by the

time Kg and I had finished getting dressed. I was still not a make up person, but Kg offered to help me. I still had some make-up Beast bought for me as well as some clothes I hadn't even worn. She gave me a quick face-beat and as we were about to leave, Otlile was on her last glass of wine.

Otlile: "Gosh, finally! I am even finished with this bottle because I had been waiting. By the way, I've ordered us an Uber."

Hazel: "No need for that. I'll just call James. He's my Uber driver assigned to me by Beast. He literally takes me everywhere."

Otlile: “Ag, come on. He’ll take forever to get here. Besides, the driver has been waiting for us outside. Collin and his friends have been waiting on us. The party is now being hosted at Sea Point.”

That awful gut-wrenching feeling in my tummy started creeping up on me.

KG: “I thought he’s hosting a house party.”

Otlile: “That was the initial plan, but he said he changed it last minute. Come on, it will be fun. We get to see the beach and get drunk on the sand.”

Hazel: (anxiously) “Isn’t Sea Point like 1 hour away from here?”

Otlile: “53 minutes to be exact, hence I was rushing you guys. Let’s go already.”

She finished her last glass of wine in one gulp and off we went. I was nervous the entire time. Throughout the conversation, my mind kept wandering off. I took out my phone and I was about to make a call when Otlile stopped me.

Otlile: “And then? Who are you calling?”

Hazel: "Oh, I'm calling Beast. I want to let him know where I'm going."

Otile: "Come on, Hazel. You don't have to literally inform him about all your whereabouts. Does he inform you about his?"

Hazel: "Actually, he does."

Otile: "You can't trust men. Besides, it's just a party. Relax."

KG: "Ai, you really need a man, wena Otlile. Someone to tame you down."

Otlile: "I'm still young, babes. Still young."

The further the driver drove, the more anxious I grew. We eventually made it to Sea point, and I recall the place a little because it was right near by the restaurant that Beast took me to. It was packed, it looked as if Collin had booked out an entire restaurant. When he approached us he hugged us all and looked at Kg and I in a very uncomfortable manner. I thought to myself that we had another Raymond on the loose. I had an awful feeling, and I just wanted to leave right after we had arrived there. Kg shared the same sentiments,

until she saw quite a few beautiful girls there. One of them approached her and asked her to dance.

Kg: "See you later, girls."

She went to dance with that girl, while Otlile went to mingle with Collin and basically told me to relax and find people to mingle with. I was rather irritated, to be honest. It just wasn't right for them to leave me hanging like that. We came together, so the least they could have done was think about our safety. I looked around and saw no one to relate to, no one I knew. I started looking for my pills in my bag and then I remembered that I changed bags before I got there. I started sweating, as I felt so overwhelmed. I nearly cried when I walked around and couldn't find Otlile nor Kg anywhere in the crowd. I truly should have listened to my gut feeling. I tried taking deep breaths and walked amongst the crowd looking for my friends, up until I was right on the shore. I tried looking for

them from there, since it was a bit further from the loud music. I tried calling them, but when they answered I could hardly hear them because of the loud music. I kept trying to call them, until I heard a very unfamiliar, male voice behind me.

Guy: “Hey, beautiful. Tjesses (Goodness), you’re fucking sexy!”

I looked behind me and saw a really big guy, filled with tattoos. He lusted after me, which made me so scared. I only remembered then that I didn’t even pray before leaving the house. I was trembling so badly, that I failed to speak. Instead, I tried taking a few steps back. While I did that, I felt myself being blocked by yet another guy. I looked behind me and saw another big guy. I knew when my heart started beating that fast, that it was most probably the end of me. We were a bit further away from the party, and even if I had screamed, no one would have heard me.

Guy 2: "Yerr, she is fucking sexy, jong (man)! Look at those green eyes!"

Guy 1: "I'd love to see myself in you."

Guy 2: "Kalmeer (calm down), man, Ricky. You always rush. Remember what happened last time? I get to have her first."

Wait, last time? So these guys had done that before? I was in deep shit and I should have listened to my gut feeling.

Hazel: (trembling) "Please... Let me go. I just came here looking for my friends."

Guy 1: "Don't worry, baby girl. We won't hurt you. I mean, we just want a taste."

By then I was right in the middle of those two guys. Both of them were touching me all over, I felt so many things happening to me. I tried fighting back, but they held me so firmly, while one of them was literally trying to rip my jeans apart. The guy behind me was licking my neck and face in such a rigorous and disgusting manner, that made me feel so sick. I

cried as my bag and phone fell onto the ground. I tried fighting with a little bit of strength left within me. I remembered that it was literally the third time that happened to me. Surely that wasn't normal. I looked up and said a silent prayer. I knew then that it was the end of me. Just as I felt them throw me roughly onto the sand, while the one was taking his pants off to prepare himself to get on top of me, the other was unbuttoning his pants and got ready to put his penis into my mouth. I had never even had one in my mouth before. Such violation. I tried screaming, and suddenly I heard the one guy screaming as he got off me, while the other one was cursing.

Guy 2: "Wat de fok (What the fuck)?!"

He was screaming too, and I realized that they had been pepper sprayed when I started feeling a little choked. A little bit of it had gotten into my eyes, as I rubbed them fast, I was able to see my rescuer.

Mathilda: "Hazel, are you okay?"

The moment I heard that voice, I just cried in her arms.

Mathilda: "Come on, let's go before they start running after us."

She got me up while I walked hastily with her. She picked up my bag and phone and we walked through the crowd. I couldn't even see Kg and Otlile anywhere, and I didn't even want

to. She just took me with her, as we got into her car, she locked the doors and allowed me to sob in her arms. I hadn't cried so hard before. It was such a horribly inexplicable feeling.

Mathilda: "Shh, it's okay. I'm so sorry you had to go through this. Where do you live? I can take you home."

Hazel: (shakily) "I... I... St... Stellenbosch."

Mathilda: "That's about an hour away. Do you mind if I take you to my house? I promise you we'll be safe there."

I just nodded as we buckled up and she drove off with me. I was in so much shock, that I didn't even notice the kind of car she was driving. Within 5 minutes, we arrived at a very luxurious complex, beefed with security. She parked her car in one of the garages.

Mathilda: (smiling) "Come, let's get you inside."

She held my hand throughout it all and we got into her place. It looked so luxurious and really big. The furniture was so modern and stylish, most definitely Mathilda's style.

Mathilda: "Please, sit. I'll get you some warm milk for the shock. I'll be right back."

She went to the kitchen, which wasn't very far from me. It was an open plan, so I could still see her. I think she was just trying to help me stay calm before she started talking to me again. While I was trying to calm myself down, my phone rang. We were so busy trying to get me to calm down in the car, we didn't hear my phone ring at all. I looked at it and saw 15 missed calls from Kg and a few messages. "Where are you? I've been looking all over for you. Please just answer your phone." Minutes later, Mathilda gave me a warm cup of milk with some tumeric in it.

Mathilda: "Here, my mother always gave me this whenever I was a child. She said it is good for nerves."

Hazel: (nodding) "Thank you."

I took a few sips. I realized I was a little bruised on my thighs.

Mathilda: "Let me run you a bath and we can go report those fuckers."

Hazel: "Thank you so much, Mathilda. I mean, if you hadn't even arrived on the scene, I'd be..."

I started crying again as I relived the entire scenario.

Mathilda: “Hey, it’s okay. I believe it was God, to be honest. Did you go there alone?”

Hazel: (shaking head) “No, I was there with Otlile and Kg. I went away from the party to call them because I couldn’t see them anywhere and I started panicking.”

Mathilda: “Well, they are assholes for leaving you alone like that. I’m sorry to say this, but friends don’t do that to one another, you know. I’d expect that from Otlile, but not Kg. I

mean, have they forgotten what happened at my house last year?”

She was absolutely right. I was deeply disappointed in Kg, actually in the both of them. We made a pact after that night that we'd always be there for one another no matter what and they just did me dirty like that. As Mathilda was about to get up to run me a bath, I received a call from Beast and I started panicking instantly. I didn't even tell him that I had gone to the party.

Hazel: “He.. Hello.”

Beast: (frantic) “Hazel! Where are you? Are you okay?”

Hazel: "I'm fine. I'm in Cape Town, at Mathilda's place."

Beast: "Give her the phone."

Hazel: "It's my boyfriend. He'd like to speak to you."

She took the phone and all I could hear was "yes" and "no" and "Okay" before she hung up.

Mathilda: “He said he has been trying to call you and that he will call you within 15 minutes. That gives you more than enough time to get into a warm bath, right?”

She smiled as she headed to the bathroom. She was so sincere, she put in bath salts and all with some foam bath, and I was struggling to come to terms with what had just happened. I kept thinking that it was the third time I had almost been raped. What if the next time I didn't get so lucky? Something within me felt very off. As I was about to go to the bathroom, Malachi called me frantically.

Hazel: “Malachi.”

Malachi: “Haze... I’ll be there tomorrow to pick you up. Get ready, we’re going to Polokwane first thing in the morning.”

With that said, he just hung up. Something felt really weird about him, he never panicked whenever he called me. He just sounded really worried. And who did we even know in Polokwane? I wondered why he wanted to take me there, but I just wanted to get into the bath as soon as possible. Mathilda left me to do my business in piece. She had a really big mirror in the bath room, so I got to look at my entire body. The moment all my clothes came off, I cried silently. What was it about men that just always felt they could take what belongs to you – take what’s in between your legs for themselves? My entire body was covered in purple spots, and I could still smell that repelling saliva of that one guy who had his tongue all over my neck. Perhaps I was just a curse waiting to explode. Why else would all that happen to me when I had done nothing wrong? What if I was paying for my mother’s sins or even my father’s? I was in such a mess emotionally, and that only triggered everything I had worked so hard to leave behind. It just opened up a huge can of worms.

Beast

I was fuming when I tried locating Hazel's phone earlier on that evening and I saw that she had been in Sea Point. For some reason, my calls weren't going through. I was even more pissed at Sporo for not doing his job. I gave him a call and he answered immediately.

Sporo: (nervously) "Boss."

Beast: (angrily) “Boss ya masepa (Don’t you boss me)! Where the fuck is my woman, Sporo?”

Sporo: “Eish (Oh), Boss, I was on her tail. I mean, the last time I checked James dropped her off at 6pm. When I checked on her again, she had left. I only heard that she left with her two friends with some Uber driver when I asked around.”

Beast: “Well, if you had done your job she wouldn’t have been nearly raped! Get me those two guys ASAP! Bring them to me!”

Sporo: “On it, boss.”

Beast: “And make sure that Mathilda’s flat has surveillance the entire night. If you fuck up again, you’re fired.”

Sporo: “Sho sho (sure sure), Boss.”

1 John 4:19 - “We love because he first loved us.”

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“The bad news is time flies. The good news is you’re the pilot.”

– Michael Altshuler

Hazel

I had a good night’s sleep in Mathilda’s spare room. She was so kind to me and even cooked for us. I managed to temporarily forget about that night’s horrific events. After a lengthy call with Beast and him reprimanding me for my actions, I had to switch off my phone because Kg and Otlile were bombarding me with messages. I didn’t know how to feel about what they had done to me – the second time at that. I felt like a real pile of shit for allowing them to do that to me. Yes, I wasn’t anyone’s charity case, but I was under the impression that if we go to a party together, we had to remain together – no matter what. I was conflicted and hurt, as if I didn’t have enough shit going on in my life already.

During that peaceful night's sleep, I had an odd dream – a dream I had had before. The same dream I had when I was in Cape Town with Beast; I saw a whole lot of people surround me, trying to attack me. I recognized a few, one of them being Beast's mother, but a few others I couldn't notice. This time, the woman who looked exactly like my mother was standing right before me protecting me alongside a man I didn't know, with Mam'Rose too. Beast was at a distance, I couldn't reach him. He was just standing there staring at me, while I couldn't see Malachi at all. He was right alongside Mam'Rose, but he was in a shadow form. I didn't know what to make of the dream, but I prayed about it immediately when I woke up. That was about 2am, and I hadn't managed to fall asleep again after that. It wasn't too long when I was woken up by Mathilda calling me for breakfast.

Mathilda: "Knock-knock. May I come in?"

Hazel: "Of course."

She had given me another set of sleepwear.

Mathilda: "Did you sleep well?"

Hazel: "Very good, thank you."

Mathilda: "I made us some breakfast. I'll meet you in the lounge."

I nodded as she walked out. I got up yet my entire body was sore. Beast was the first person to text me that morning. I swear, that guy had nothing else on his mind apart from me. Who texts their girlfriend at 5am? Kg and Otlile had left countless messages and missed calls, even voice mail messages, but I still hadn't responded, and I didn't even feel bad about it. I walked out and I was mesmerized by the amazing aroma of the food. Mathilda smiled the moment she saw me. She hadn't touched her food. She had been waiting for me to come and join her.

Hazel: "I'm sorry for keeping you waiting. Now you even got up so early to make me breakfast."

Mathilda: (chuckling) “Relax, I only come here on certain weekends when I want to get away from campus. I live at res, remember?”

She had such a good life. I mean her parents were really good to her, well, her father, amongst the circumstances. Her biological mother left her father because he was abusive towards her, and she had thought that she had abandoned her, her entire life. It took years for her to finally forgive herself for thinking such of her mother, and they had started to repair their relationship. She promised herself to give her mother the life she deserved the moment she graduated. I envied her, badly. I just wished that my mother and I could get along. It was still a need from my side. We had really good breakfast and I was not very surprised that she could cook, I was still surprised at how humble she was. She had dropped all her high school friends and she basically had no friends left – well, apart from me. Slowly but surely we became friends. She said that

she always knew deep down how much they loathed her and that they only befriended her because her family had money. It was a sad way to live through high school, but she came out a better person and I admired her for that. We always find refuge in the most unexpected people, and such is the beauty of life. While we were casually chatting, Malachi called.

Hazel: "Hello?"

Malachi: "Hey, I'm at the airport. Text me your location."

He was very brief, so I assumed that Beast must have told him about what had happened. Come to think of it, Beast never told me how he found out, but I assumed that perhaps Otilile and Kg called and informed him or something like that. As soon

as he hung up, I texted him the location and I went to take a shower, to be quick. Mathilda lend me a brand new outfit. We were more or less the same size, and she didn't have any big bums or breasts, so we were alright. I felt a little bad for lending her brand new outfit, but she just said it was just materials, it could always be replaced.

Hazel: "I really appreciate what you did for me last night, Mathilda. No words can ever explain how much it means to me."

Mathilda: "Hey, that's what friends are for. Besides, women should always be there for each other."

Hazel: "I wish I had your bravery."

Mathilda: “It takes a long time to reach this level, but slowly but surely you will get there. Don’t beat yourself up like that.”

We hugged as we said our goodbyes yet again.

Mathilda: “Don’t you worry about last night’s clothes. I’ll burn them for you.”

I smiled as she walked me out, while we waiting in the parking lot for Malachi to come. He strictly instructed me to be ready

the moment he arrived. And so, he arrived and hooted, and thanked Mathilda from inside of the car. He didn't get out, which signaled he was in a hurry. Mathilda took no offence at all. And off I went. I was a little nervous because I thought that he was going to yell at me for making the same mistake – twice, but instead, he was in his own world. He didn't really want to say much.

Hazel: "I was under the impression that I wouldn't be seeing you until next week."

Malachi: "Well, under the circumstances, I had to come now."

Hazel: "Oh, okay. What are we going to do in Polokwane?"

Malachi: "We are going to fix a mistake which was supposed to be fixed a long time ago. I need to do this while I'm still here. One day, you'll be all alone and you will need to know everything once I'm gone."

Why was he suddenly speaking about himself in the past tense?

Hazel: (frowning) "O ra bjang (what do you mean)?"

Malachi: "I'm just saying."

Hazel: "Okay. Where's Beast?"

Malachi: "He'll meet with us later, at Oliver Tambo Airport."

Hazel: "Okay."

I saw him drive past my flat
when I had to ask.

Hazel: "Aren't we going to go past my flat to get my clothes?"

Malachi: "I don't think now is the time to face your friends. I don't like what they did to you."

Okay, I guessed he was really upset with me. I was also upset with myself, but honestly, I was so happy to see my brother, after an entire year of not seeing him, and he was so hostile, so cold. I deserved that, I guess, for endangering my life like that. So, I decided to remain quiet. It would have been nicer to just talk to him and catch up about his time in the U.S, but I was forced to think and I hated that. Thinking brought pain and misery to me, more especially about emotional situations. So, my mind slowly drifted off as Malachi kept driving.

Beast

I hardly slept that night. I waited on Sporo to bring me those two fuckers and by midnight, I had found out that it was in fact Ricky and Fadiel, low life gangster wannabe's who tried to rape my woman. I knew that she was in a bad space and that most probably set her back a thousand times. Everything was a mess, and with everything that was about to happen, after Malachi told me, she was most probably not going to handle it all. I needed to be there for her more than ever before. While I was sitting outside on my porch having a drink and smoke, Sporo called me.

Sporo: "Boss, I have them. We're almost there."

Beast: "Sure, I'll text you a location where we should meet. Bring all the tools."

Sporo: "Sho sho."

I gulped the last of my whiskey while texting him the location of where I was headed. Those two needed to be taught a lesson. Clearly they hadn't heard enough about the mighty Beast. I got into my car and drove off. Within minutes, I arrived in the bushes, and waited for Sporo. I took a smoke while waiting and he arrived ten minutes later.

Sporo: "Boss, We're here."

Beast: "Take them out."

He had their hands tied with cable ties and their mouths taped the entire time. I had no idea how he managed to get those two huge fucks to fit in the boot, but I didn't care. He threw them on the ground and they were rather shocked to see me. I put my gloves on while Sporo removed the tape from their mouths.

Ricky: (begging) "Beast... I... I swear, bro, I had no idea she was your woman."

Fadiel: "Neither did I."

Beast: "Oh? So was it going to be okay if she still wasn't my woman?"

Fadile: "No.. No. I'm not saying that. Look, it was all Ricky's fault."

Beast: “You two have a pretty nasty record. It seems as if you just can’t keep your dicks to yourselves. And all your cases just end up getting thrown out of court.”

Fadiel: (shakily) “Look, Mr. Beast, I, I’m willing to change. Please, just let us go.”

Beast: “You know, my woman went through hell and back before what you did to her. And now, you have set her back more than anything. Do you have any idea what rape does to a woman? To any person for that matter, Ricky? Fadiel? I, personally hate rapists. My sister was once raped, and that just didn’t sit well with me. Until today, she is still recovering. So, I’m going to make your lives much, much easier as from now on. Sporo, bring the Side cutter.”

They were wide-eyed immediately. I enjoyed seeing the fear in their eyes. I hated men who hurt women.

Fadiel: "I beg of you, Beast. I'll do anything, let me go, please."

Sporo gave me the side cutter and rushed to Fadiel first, he took off his pants and underwear and then did the same to Ricky. The both of them were screaming and crying like little bitches when I hadn't even done anything yet.

Beast: (chuckling) "You go around raping women with those short, fat dicks? You must be playing. Say goodbye to your

dicks, it seems as if God has made a mistake by giving you two these tools. You have been abusing them for way too long.”

Fadiel: (crying) “Please, Beast, I beg you.”

I wasted no time as I cut his dick and balls off. He screamed while Ricky was staring in fear. I didn’t care that I had some blood spatters on my hands and clothes. I needed to see them in pain. I cut all five fingers off his left hand, while I went to Ricky and cut off his genitals too and cut off all five fingers off his right hand. They were in agony, and I enjoyed watching them cry.

Beast: “Let me give you two a signature memory, one you’ll never forget.”

I took out a knife and stabbed one eye each.

Beast: “Drop them off at the nearest Hospital, Sporo. You know what to do. If you talk, I’ll come back to finish the job.”

I took all my tools and drove off. I needed to get changed so that I could meet up with Malachi and Hazel. I was so fed up with this entire scene, but I was more worried about what had become of my relationship with Hazel. I had become more of a saviour than a boyfriend. If I wanted a normal and healthy relationship with her, I needed to teach her how to stand on her own two feet and how to survive even when I wasn’t around her. I loved her too much, yet I couldn’t always be there to protect her, and after realizing what was about to

happen, we all needed to face the facts sooner rather than later.

1 John 4:18 - "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love."

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“Don’t Let Yesterday Take Up Too Much Of Today.” – Will Rogers

Hazel

I must have dozed off because I was woken up by Malachi. I looked around and we were just in Beast’s yard. I thought we were going to chill and relax with Beast for a while, but Malachi had other plans.

Malachi: “Don’t get too comfortable. I’m going to the toilet then we’re leaving.”

I just nodded, as he went into the house, he fist bumped Malachi and they had a brief discussion and then Beast came right outside to meet me. I slowly went out the car and gave him a long, tight hug. Being right in his arms felt like home. I hadn’t seen him in three months, and just being in his arms, my source of refuge after what had just happened felt so magical and safe.

Beast: "How are you holding up?"

Hazel: (shrugging) "I'm trying. I don't really know how to feel."

I started tearing up and he wiped my tears off my face.

Beast: "Baby, you will be fine. You just have to learn how to be strong. I'll help you, okay?"

I nodded while he hugged me further. Malachi came out right on time. He didn't even want to have breakfast or anything.

Malachi: "Alright, love birds. Time to hit the road. Beast, I've been flying and driving for hours. I need a nap. Do you mind?"

Beast: "Sure, no problem. Straight to Mogalakwena, right?"

Malachi: "No, we're going to Kgosi Mampuru first."

My heart nearly beat right outside my chest.

Beast: "On it."

While Malachi took a short nap, Beast drove at normal speed for once to Kgosi Mampuru Prison. I felt so uncomfortable because it had been three months since I had seen my mother and sister. I knew that we were on our way to see them, I mean we knew no one else in prison.

Beast: "What are you so worried about?"

Hazel: "Isn't it obvious?"

Beast: "Well, I can only guess, but I'd rather you tell me."

Hael: (sigh) "I'm anxious about seeing my mother. I mean, why are we even going there? I thought Malachi was over them."

Beast: “Sometimes, you just have to say your goodbyes before any regrets, you know.”

Hazel: (frowning) “What do you mean goodbyes? Who’s leaving?”

Beast: (nervously) “Malachi is obviously going back to the U.S, Hazel. That’s what I meant.”

For the first time ever since I had known Beast, he looked nervous and he looked away. I could tell he was lying to me, but I didn’t want to pester him, so I let him be. Instead, I focused on my fear and worry about the journey ahead. I hadn’t even taken my pills and only then I remembered that I had left them at my flat. I had become semi-dependent on those pills. We arrived and Beast woke Malachi up.

Beast: “Mfo (brother), wake up. We’re here.”

Malachi: “Sharp, a re vaye (let’s go).”

Beast: "He's talking to you."

Hazel: (shakily) "Aren't you coming with?"

Beast: (shaking head) "This place has too many bad memories for me and besides, this is about you two. I'll be right here when you come back out."

I nodded as he gave me a quick kiss on the lips and off I went. Malachi was so firm and serious, it was so unlike him. It was as if he was racing against time, you know. I just couldn't read him at all. He walked in and greeted the guards, we went through the usual routine for visitors being searched, and it seemed as if he had already planned this visit long before he told me about it. He just dropped the bomb on me unexpectedly. As we walked through the long corridors, I could smell metal everywhere. The stench just ingrained captivity in one's mind. Prisoners were cleaning the floors, some were in their cells, some were just making casual noise. I was rather surprised to see a lot of young women there. I guess life happens. It didn't take too long for us to be taken to the visitor's rooms. Malachi and I sat next to one another and a few other prisoners were being visited by their own family

members. My anxiety was shooting through the roof. I could already imagine the scene my mother would cause and the words that would come out of her mouth. “It is your fault I am in here”, is what I thought would be her exact words, but instead Malachi and I got the total opposite. She was more than glad to see us. The moment the guard took off her handcuffs, she rushed towards us and hugged us. I was so shocked, it seemed so foreign. That was literally the second hug I had experienced from my mother. I was not used to receiving affection from her, so it always felt a bit forced and fake. We sat down and she was smiling. She looked a lot more different than what I was used to, her face looked a lot better and it was hard to see the damage all the years of alcohol abuse had left on her face. I could actually see her beauty, and she looked exactly like the woman who kept appearing in my dreams. Her smile radiated through her for the very first time I had known her.

Binah: (smiling) “How are you, my children?”

Malachi: “I’m fine, Mama. How are you?”

Binah: "I'm fine, great, actually. You, Hazel? How are you holding up?"

She sounded almost genuine and I almost believed her.

Hazel: "Fine."

Binah: "I don't blame you for hating me like this. I've been such a bad mother to you – to the both of you. In fact, you know, being here has been such a blessing in disguise. It has actually changed me and made me a better person. I got to do a lot of introspection here."

Hazel: "You've only been here three months."

Binah: "Three months feels like three years in here, my baby. I know, you might not believe me, but I'm willing to spend the rest of my life making it up to you – the both of you. I made you suffer and I shouldn't have done that. I am the one who is wrong, I have wronged you both so many times in more ways

than one and I just hope that you'll forgive me one day. I am so sorry for the bad mother I have been to you."

She was actually crying, I couldn't understand if she was being sincere or if she was just faking it all. If a person had wronged you your entire life, you wouldn't trust them over night and forget everything they have done to you.

Malachi: "I hear you, Mama, but I have some more urgent business to discuss. I need you to give me directions to Ga Mogalakwena."

I saw the shock in her face replace the sincere emotions she had seconds before.

Binah: (shocked) "For eng (for what)?"

Malachi: "I have some urgent things to do there. I need a ritual to be done for Hazel."

Binah: (looking down) "I'm sorry, but I can't help you. I mean, I haven't been there in years. I can't remember the place very well."

Wow, just wow.

Malachi: "Mama weh (for goodness' sake), I don't think you realize just how serious this is! Surely you remember how Salome cursed your children. Now we're in this mess because you never fixed it. Hazel was nearly raped again last night. Now, unless you want it to happen again, I suggest you give me directions as in yesterday."

Malachi was fuming. He hardly spoke to my mother in such a high-pitched voice, but he was not in the mood to take bullshit from anyone.

Binah: "Okay, I'll give them to you, but please, don't tell them I'm in here. I can already see the smug look on Hunadi's face -
"

Malachi: (interrupting) “This is not about you. I’m running out of time. Here, write them down.”

She gave him one look and then looked at me and then started writing down directions. I knew she was too good to be true. Afterwards, she handed the paper to Malachi.

Binah: “When are you going there?”

Malachi: “Today.”

Binah: “You know, my father came to visit me in my dreams – for the very first time since he died.”

Malachi: “You know very well what it means. We have to go. For what it is worth, I sincerely hope that you will be good to Hazel once I’m gone, otherwise, you know what the consequences will be for that. Hazel, say your goodbyes so we can leave.”

I had no idea why Malachi was acting so strange, but he immediately activated that tight knot in my stomach. Something just didn't feel very right. I couldn't even bring myself to say goodbye to her. I just got up and left as she started crying in her chair. While we were walking out, I was hoping that Malachi would tell me what that was all about, but he just wouldn't budge at all, so I let him be. We found Beast smoking outside the car and Malachi handed him the piece of paper with the written directions on it and headed right to the back seat. He dozed off almost immediately. Beast got in and off we went.

Beast: "Are you hungry?"

Hazel: (shaking head) "I ate some breakfast at Mathilda's flat."

Beast: "Well, baby, we all know you can't say no to food. Besides, it is about to be a long drive to Polokwane."

Hazel: "Fine, stop by the nearest drive through."

He did as told and indeed he stopped by the nearest McDonalds and got us some food. I managed to eat, of which actually surprised me. Along the way, my Beast was trying his best to make me feel comfortable as he played us some music. He tried making me sing along

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of which I was truly grateful. He never ceased to amaze me. I hardly even saw it as a long drive, but somehow he kept asking me about Malachi and the memories we made together, he kept making reference to a few things we did together. In my mind, he was just trying to go down memory lane, but little did I know that something bigger was brewing.

Beast: “Tell me something, hypothetically speaking, what would you do if I died today?”

That was a bombshell question.

Hazel: (frowning) “I... I don’t know really, but one thing is for sure I’d be devastated.”

Beast: "Why?"

Hazel: "What do you mean why? I love you and I'd be heartbroken that I'd have to spend the rest of my life without you."

Beast: "Well, if you must know, should I die today, everything of mine is in your name. So, I'd want you to take it all and start a new life with someone. Life's too short to dwell on Yesterday, baby."

Hazel: "Okay, well, then what would you do if I died today?"

Beast: "I'd kill myself."

Hazel: "What the fuck, Bethuel?"

Beast: (laughing) "I'd honestly find it so hard to live without you. It would take me forever to get over it, you know."

Hazel: "Okay."

Beast: "And if Malachi died? How would you feel?"

That felt like such a preparatory question.

Hazel: "Well, I don't know. I'd honestly be devastated. I mean, he had so many plans, you know. He would die before getting the chance to achieve them."

Beast: "Well, either way, life will have to move on, wouldn't it?"

He was right, but in all honesty, it would have broken me if my brother had died at that stage. I mean, I wanted him to see me graduate, have my first child. I needed him to play that uncle role in my children's lives. But, if it was God's will, I'd have no choice but to accept it. It always seems easier to say it until it actually happens to you. After two hours, we made it to Mokopane. Beast wasn't very familiar with Limpopo at all, and I on the other hand had never even been there. The only

person who actually knew the way was in prison, and we had to rely on the gps, which was wrong at times. Malachi was sleeping so peacefully, it looked as if he hadn't gotten any decent amount of sleep in days, so we relied on people for help.

Beast: "Sanibonani (Good day), do you perhaps know where we can find this address?"

Woman: "Oh, o batlana le ba ga Makwetla (you're looking for the Makwetla family) You are on the right path. You just need to go straight, it is about a thirty minute drive."

The sun was scorching hot there and I was starting to feel the heat. Another thirty minutes ahead is not what I had signed up for.

Beast: "Ngiyabonga, sisi (Thank you so much, ma'am)."

Beast drove further on while Malachi was still asleep. It was very much unlike him to sleep during the day but he must have

been truly tired. As we drove we found the house. It looked really big, and it was paved and painted really nicely. It had been the very first time that I had gone there. Just as Beast arrived at the gate, he woke Malachi up.

Beast: "Malachi, get up. We're here."

Malachi got up and he didn't look surprised at all.

Malachi: "The house has changed a lot since the last time I was here."

I was surprised. So Malachi had been there before? As we walked out, we found a woman, most probably in her early 20's sitting outside.

Malachi: "Rea locha ka mo gae (Good day), we are looking for the elders in this house."

Girl: "Le bo mang (who are you)?"

She was a little rude, but I guess the women from my mother's family were like tha

Malachi: "Re bana ba Binah (We are Binah's children), Malachi and Hazel. We have come to see the elders, please."

The girl was so stunned, she rushed up and went into the house.

Girl: (screaming) "Mama! Mma weh! Tla o bone (Come and see)!"

Hunadi: "Keng na (what is it)?"

The moment that woman stepped out of the house, I could see the resemblance between her and my mother. It was astonishing.

Hunadi: (shocked) “Yoh, mma weh (oh, my goodness)! Bana ba Bina (Binah’s children)! Yoh, (oh), you have finally come home, my children!”

She hugged us and started crying. It was very hard for me to relate, I mean someone I had no knowledge of was hugging me full of tears, so I just had to let her go with it.

Hunadi: “Oh, bana ba ka (my children), you have come to the right place. My grandmother has cried for you, up until her last day on this earth.”

Malachi: “Mmane (auntie), where are the uncles?”

Hunadi: “Oh, Matome le (and) Lesiba? Ba dula kwa toropong (they live in town).”

Malachi: “Please tell me Malome (Uncle) Frans is still alive.”

Hunadi: “Yes, o sa phela (he is still alive), it is just that he lives in Gauteng. How do you know of him? Your mother told you

about him at least. That one is cursed, always has been and always will be.”

I could tell there was no love lost between the two of them.

Malachi: “Is it possible for you to arrange an urgent meeting for us with them? It is urgent. Hazel needs a ceremony done for her.”

Hunadi: “You don’t even have to ask, my baby. Come, sit. I’ll get right on the phone. Oh, I’m so sorry, and you are?”

Beast: “I am Hazel’s fiance.”

He just had to take it there. Aunt Hunadi was more than happy.

Hunadi: (smiling) “O mosadi bjale (you’re a woman now), Hazel. I hope you turn out better than your lousy mother. One rule about this life, don’t run away from home and expect life to turn out well. It’s tough out there.”

She just went on and on to tell us about how lousy our mother was, but to be quite honest, it didn’t seem like she had achieved much either. They just disliked one another for some or other reason. I didn’t know the entire story of what happened, but it felt so good to see someone from my mother’s side of the family. All we ever knew was my mother’s story and so we took her word for it, although we knew that something worse had happened to her. I felt as if she had gone through a lot of trauma and that is how she turned out to be

the Binah she was. We had gone from Gauteng to see my mother's biological family for my ceremony, but little did I know that we were going to hear the real, true story about what actually happened to my mother and why her family despised her the way she said they did. Matthew 12:37 says; "For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned." All my life I had judged her, even though I was within my right, but something made me look at her differently from that day onwards. I was told through my therapy sessions that no one ever wakes up and decides to be a bad person, but that old wounds and traumatic occurrences make people that way. It is however a choice to stay a bad person, but only they themselves can determine the kind of people they become.

1 John 4:17 - "By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world."

“Nothing in life is to be feared, it is only to be understood. Now is the time to understand more, so that we may fear less.” —
Marie Curie

Hazel

Our Aunt Hunadi was very hospitable, but quite chatty. Her daughter Sinah was making us lunch, while she was telling us the entire story which led to my mother leaving her home town for good. Well, it was the entire, true story – according to her.

Hunadi: “Well, everything was fine when we were all living together here at home. Even after my mother died, our grandmother was taking good care of us. Binah was supposed to take care of us, as the first born – it's just the way it is. She seemingly did that for a while, and then she took us away from home to go live with Aunt Portia and Uncle Joel. We were the happiest there; I mean they both took care of us, even put some us through school. Our Uncle Frans even put Pebetse, Matome and Lesiba through school, but Pebetse sadly committed suicide because of Binah when he was just a first year student. Everything was good and well until Binah decided

to sleep with Uncle Joel and ruin his marriage. I'm sorry to say this, son, but you are a product of your mother's stupidity. Much like the ancestors, we don't hold anything against children. All is forgiven."

That didn't sound quite right. I got to realize that somewhere, somehow my mother's family had been toxic towards her and in turn she just couldn't take it anymore. She ran until she just couldn't any more. She had practically been forced to become a caregiver to all her siblings from a young age. She never really told me about it, but when Aunt Hunadi was talking about it, I could sense the bitter attitude right from her core. She spoke of my mother with such hatred, even went to the extent of blaming my own mother for her own failures in life. How on earth do you even blame your own sister for your misfortunes? For not finishing school? Something was very wrong with that whole family. Someone, somewhere didn't treat them right when they were children and now we were the one's paying for it. She kept talking so much, it was actually a bit exhausting.

Hunadi: "Where is she now? I bet she is still drowning in her sorrows. Someone said that she is a shebeen queen

somewhere in Pretoria. What a shame. My mother must be turning in her grave - “

Malachi: (interrupting) “Does Aunt Portia still live at her old house?”

Hunadi: “Yes, she has taken your father in too. I can take you there if you wish - “

Malachi: “No need. You can just give me her address. We’ll be back before sunset or when the Uncles arrive.”

Hunadi: “Of course, but what about lunch?”

Malachi: “We’ll eat when we get back.”

I could tell Malachi was so irritated by her and he wasn’t even smiling at anyone. I didn’t understand what that whole race against time was all about, but it got me so curious. Aunt Hunadi gave Malachi the address, although she wanted to go with us so badly. She was rather nosy to be honest.

Hunadi: “Le sure ga le batle ke le khape (Are you sure you don’t want me to go with you)?”

Malachi: “We’ll be fine. See you in a bit. Hazel, Beast, a re vayeng (let’s go).”

We got up and greeted her goodbye, although we saw the anxious look on her face and we left. Beast drove us without complaints and within about ten minutes or so, we reached the house. It looked a lot bigger than our home, with a much bigger yard. They seemed to be well off, though. I could see Malachi’s anxiety slowly creeping in on him, but he went in any way.

Malachi: “You two can wait here for me. I’ll be right back.”

Hazel: (shaking head) “No, you shouldn’t be doing this alone. We’re coming with you.”

Malachi: “Fine. Let’s do this.”

Malachi was the first to get out of the car. He knocked swiftly on the gate before entering. About a minute later, a beautiful, tall woman walked out of the house. She looked a bit young to be the wife of someone as old as Malachi's father, but the moment she saw him, she became tearful.

Malachi: "Greetings, my name is - "

Portia: (interrupting) "Malachi. My, boy, is this really you?"

Malachi: (nodding) "Yes, Mme (ma). May we come in?"

Portia: (teary) "Oh, of course, of course. I am so sorry. Please, let me get the key for you."

She asked someone to come with the keys.

Portia: (shouting) "Abel, weh (hey, Abel)! E tla le key ya gate (bring the key for the gate)! We have company!"

The moment the so called Abel walked out of the house, we all knew right there that it was Malachi's brother. The spitting image of my brother was standing right before us. They were more or less the same age, the resemblance was incredibly striking. Abel looked at Malachi and immediately knew who he was. I could tell by the look in his face. Portia wasted no time as she opened the gate. The minute it was open, she embraced Malachi while sobbing in his arms. It was rather emotional to see, as Beast held my hand firmly. Portia broke the hug and took a good look at the tearful Malachi and she wiped his tears off. She seemed so understanding for someone whose husband raped my mother and conceived a son.

Portia: (sobbing) "Oh, my boy. I have been praying for this day. Please, come in."

Malachi greeted Abel who hugged him instead of shaking his hand.

Abel: "Pleased to meet you, my brother."

It was such a warm welcome, something we had never received in years. Portia took one look at me and she seemed to know who I was too.

Portia: "You must be Hazel. My goodness, you are so beautiful."

She hugged me and then it was Beast's turn.

Hazel: "Oh, this is my fiance Bethuel, Mme (mother)."

I just had to.

Portia: (smiling) "I'm so pleased to meet all of you. Come, let's go in."

We all walked in after she hugged Beast. It was a beautiful moment. Malach was home; it was not the ideal setting as his father was a rapist, but then, he was home. We walked in and we were in total awe of that house. I had never been in a house that big, but I guess Limpopo people had a habit of going

big at all costs. We sat down in the lounge and Portia asked Abel to bring us something to drink, but I just had to step in.

Hazel: “No need, Mme. I’ll do it. Just show me where the kitchen is and I’ll be honoured to do it.”

Portia: (smiling) “You know, you remind me of your mother before she left here. The kitchen is right over there.”

Hazel: (nodding) “Bethuel, a re ye (let’s go).”

He got up and followed me as we left them seated there. I deliberately stalled to give them time to talk properly. I did say I wanted to support Malachi, but that was his moment. He of course had a million questions to ask his entire life. Whatever he was racing against, I let him be and I ensured he got enough time to get all the answers he needed.

Malachi

It had been a very eventful yet worrisome year. I had the best time of my life in the U.S. and I hadn't felt so happy in such a very long time. In that short space of time, I had achieved more than I ever had while growing up. I truly thank God and my ancestors for making me reach that far. Although Beast and I started our lives on a clean slate, we started it on the wrong foot. We both had to pay for that – one way or another. I wasn't proud of what I had done to get to where I was, but I did it so that I too could get a chance in life. For most of my life, I was Hazel's saviour, I put her first in everything I did and I didn't regret that at all. My only biggest regret was not choosing myself when the time came, but now that I had the chance to do amazing things in the States, I was more than happy to exit the world.

Months before I went back to South Africa, I had a revelation given to me. It hadn't been too long when I had arrived in the United States, when my grandparents and Mam'Rose visited me – in spirit. I had the most beautiful encounter with them; it was as if I was in a different spiritual realm. I had the best experience that night, lasting about four hours. They had taken me through a journey of my life, and honestly, I tried my best to be a good person. I had no idea that I'd end up leaving this earth at my age, but well, when the time comes it comes. I was

just glad they had given me a heads up and time to complete a few of my tasks at hand. I wanted to leave the world knowing very well that I had made amends with people who had wronged me and those I had wronged. Most importantly, I wanted to leave the physical world knowing very well that I had left everything in place for Hazel. I knew that she was going to struggle a little without me, but she had her own destiny to fulfil as I had done mine. When I received the message that she was nearly raped yet again

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I knew that I had to make things right. I got to see her future at hand before everything else, she was going to have a great life, but no good thing comes without suffering for some of us. She was one of those who would have to fight for what she wanted, because of her fragile heart. For as long as she hadn't tapped into her real self, fear was always going to hold her captive. I had done my part and I knew that my friend was going to take good care of her, but the choice was all theirs.

Portia: (smiling tearfully) "I'm so sorry, I just can't stop crying."

Malachi: "It's okay. I understand."

Portia: “Did your mother ever tell you what really happened?”

Malachi: (shaking head) “No, but I saw it in a vision. I’m a gifted person.”

Portia: (surprised) “Wow, you really are Joel’s son.”

I frowned in confusion.

Portia: “Your grandfather, Joel’s father was also a gifted person. He could see almost everything before it happened. I think you got the gift from him.”

I smiled. At least I got one positive gift from my father, though it was not directly from him.

Portia: “I’d like to tell you what really happened, given your permission.”

I nodded in suspense. I knew I wasn't going to like what I was about to hear, but I needed to hear it.

Portia: (sigh) "Your great grandmother, Binah's grandmother, was a very abusive person. Your mother was forced to go and work from as early as 13 to support her siblings, the same way her mother did. So, in turn she had a tough time with school, but she was a genius. She could read from an early age and everything looked like it was about to fall in place for her. So, Joel took a liking to her because he was her uncle's friend. Frans, was his best friend and Binah took Joel as a father figure since she didn't have a father. She adored how he took care of her, and she was skeptical, believe me. When things got so bad, I offered them a place to stay, along with Joel. Binah never wanted to be away from her siblings; she put them first no matter what and even though she managed to finish school, she contemplated going to Varsity all because she wanted to look after them no matter what. One day, she went to a party with her best friend Salome. Joel was also there, since the boy's parents also invited a few people. She had no experience with alcohol and hardly drank much that day, but she said she didn't understand why she woke up feeling as if someone had penetrated her. She was drugged and the moment she had a recollection of what happened that day, she

remembered what Joel had done to her. He betrayed her trust and abused her just like that. As a result, you were conceived, my boy.”

She spoke to me with so much sincerity and pain within her voice.

Portia: “I had wanted a child for so long, but I failed to conceive at the time. I offered to take care of all her siblings and you in exchange for her to go to University, but she just couldn’t stand to look at Joel, of which was completely understandable. Despite me divorcing him, she still wanted nothing to do with him nor me. I was so depressed when she left here. She wanted to take her siblings with, but they refused. That was the last day I had ever heard from or seen her. It broke my heart so badly, especially when I found out weeks later that I was also pregnant, imagine that, after ten years of trying. I wanted to find Binah, so that I could take the burden off her. It was hell on earth for me, because I loved Binah so much. I didn’t want her to suffer and in turn, she made you suffer. We looked everywhere for you, but to no

avail. All we heard was that she was dating a white man, that was almost 19 years ago.”

Malachi: “I see. And Joel?”

Portia: “I divorced him soon after the entire thing broke out. He has been trying to make up for it ever since. He has suffered for so long, he has been in and out of hospital. Now, he has stage 4 Pancreatic cancer and he is awaiting his final day on earth. I think he hasn’t let go because he has been waiting for you to come. Call me crazy, but that’s what I believe.”

Malachi: (nodding) “May I see him?”

Portia: “Of course. Come, I’ll show you where he is.”

She led me to his bedroom. I was a little reluctant at first, but I went ahead with it. I had nothing to lose. She opened the door and I could immediately smell the stench of illness. That entire bedroom literally smelled like a hospital room. It pained me to see someone I had never even known in such a state. He

looked half dead, with almost no flesh and just mere bones. His face had no meat whatsoever and his eyes looked sunken. His lips looked so dry and cracked. Portia leaned in to talk to him, as if he was senile.

Portia: "Joel, wake up. Someone is here to see you."

He opened his eyes slowly and they wandered around for a few seconds. He turned his head and looked at me. He smiled widely and reached out for me to hold his hand. I held his hand. It felt so foreign to me, yet it felt rather comforting.

Joel: (smiling tearfully) "My son. Oh, Malachi, when I first heard about you when your mother came to visit when you were just a kid, I knew that God truly exists. All I ever wanted was a son. I wasn't thinking straight. I hurt a lot of people in the process, my wife and more especially your mother. I stole her youth, her life from her and I made her a mother prematurely, more so against her will. She didn't deserve that at all. She trusted me fully and all I did was prove to her what a mother fucker of a man I truly was. Ever since then, I have lived each day of my life in regret. As a result, I have been punished by my ancestors. I have accepted the punishment, for I know

that they most probably might not even accept me in the spiritual world once I leave this earth. I know that I will never undo the damage I have done to your mother, and you suffered in the process. All I ever wanted was to see you, and now that I have, I can leave this world. Please, Malachi, find it in your heart to forgive me. I don't care what happens to me after I die, but all that matters to me now is your forgiveness."

That was all I had ever wanted to hear; a remorseful apology. I had accepted a long time ago that I was conceived out of rape and I never thought of myself as a rape child. I was a child of God and God makes no mistakes. That was how I was raised; I was so glad I lived a life filled with no regrets and I never held any grudges towards anyone – no matter what they had done to me.

Malachi: (tearfully) "Badimo ba gao ba go tshwaretse (your ancestors have forgiven you), Joel. All you had to do was meet me and apologize."

Joel: "I still will die either way. I still haven't apologized to Binah."

Malachi: “2 Corinthians 7:10 says; “For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death.” Before you experience your worldly death, Joel, you had to experience Godly grief. You have grieved for long enough and therefore, you have sought repentance and found it. The Lord has indeed forgiven you, Joel. No one is without sin, as said in John 8:7; “Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her.” God has forgiven so many whom some may deem unforgiveable. He has the last say, Joel. I say unto you now, that you are forgiven.”

I felt his hand relax a little as he slowly drifted off to sleep.

Portia: (crying) “What does this mean?”

Malachi: “He is preparing himself to leave. They have come to fetch him.”

Portia: "Can you see them? Those who have come to fetch him?"

Malachi: "No, I can only feel them. I was never introduced to them, remember?"

Portia: "We should fix that."

Malachi: "I'd really appreciate that, Ma. I don't have a lot of time left. I would like it to be done so that my son could be introduced to my blood line."

Portia: (surprised) "O nale ngwana (you have a child)?"

Malachi: "Not yet. When do you think it can be done?"

Portia: "I will call the elders immediately after this."

Malachi: (nodding) "I will still be here until tomorrow the latest. Perhaps three days max. We have a ceremony that will be performed for Hazel. I'll see you again soon."

Portia: "It was an honour meeting you, Malachi. Please, don't stay a stranger."

Malachi: "I wish it were that simple, Ma."

I truly wished it were that simple, but all my plans were put in place for my offspring. I had accepted my fate a long time ago. God's grace has indeed been more than sufficient to me.

James 4:6 - "But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble."

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“You are the sum total of everything you’ve ever seen, heard, eaten, smelled, been told, forgot — it’s all there. Everything influences each of us, and because of that I try to make sure that my experiences are positive.” — Maya Angelou

Hazel

After our visit to Portia and Joel’s house, it wasn’t too long when we left the house that we were told Joel was no more. Life is truly so futile, who would have thought that Joel was actually waiting on his son to arrive before leaving this world? It turns out he had been ill for an entire year, imagine that. Being ill with Stage 4 Cancer for a year. That must have been painful. While we drove out, Malachi suggested we go to the nearest bottle store to get some beers, and then we went to a park nearby, to stall some time. None of us were looking forward to Aunt Hunadi’s company, she was a bit too much for us. Beast went in and bought some beers and some cider for me, and then we went to park the car at the nearest park.

Malachi: “Mfo (bro), do you mind if I take your wife here for a short walk?”

Beast: “Go right ahead as long as you don’t convince her not to marry me.”

They both laughed and fist bumped before Malachi whisked me away. Their relationship was so beautiful. I envied that. I always wondered if I’d ever have such good friends since Kg and Otlile were such fuck ups. I hadn’t even spoken to them ever since that night. They kept blowing up my phone and I either put it on flight mode or switched it off since I was with Beast in any case.

Malachi: "So, how are things at Varsity? Enjoying the adult world?"

Hazel: (sigh) "To be honest, everything was fine, until last night. I keep having these panic attacks every time I have to go out – especially alone."

Malachi: "You know, Mam'Rose used to say that when you were born, something weird happened; it was as if a beaming light was shining right through you. She named you Hazel Hannah for a reason, you know. It means "God sees". It's also the name your Grandmother, our mother's mother gave to you. She's your guardian."

That explained it all. The woman I kept seeing in my dreams, protecting me.

Hazel: "Is that the woman who looks just like Mama? The one I keep seeing in my dreams protecting me?"

Malachi: (nodding) "She is one strong ancestor that one. She has fought for us from the moment we were conceived. She is always appearing in your dreams, Hazel, because she favours you most. I need to teach you how to pray, how to call on her whenever you need to before I'm gone."

Hazel: "You mean before you go back to the states?"

Malachi: "Something like that. Anyway, Hannah was given to you because it means "Grace of God", you were born out of Grace, Hazel. Mama was going through so much hell when she was carrying you, just like when she was pregnant with me, but because of God's grace, she couldn't get rid of you. Also, one day, you will learn exactly how powerful that name is and why exactly you were given that name. You are the only one in your blood line who has received that name."

Hazel: "I don't understand, I mean ga bo mama (Mama's family) only gives Sepedi names. Only Mama gave her children English names."

Malachi: "Mama's family isn't your only bloodline. Anyway, what have you been doing about the strange dreams you've been having?"

He kept diverting my questions, but then, that's Malachi for you.

Hazel: "I've been praying."

Malachi: "What happened to the method I taught you? Lighting a candle whenever you pray?"

Hazel: "Eish (oh), brother, sometimes I feel so tired from school, you know."

Malachi: "Hazel, you need to pray even when things are okay. Prayer isn't only sufficient for troubles. God revives your spirit when you pray, He gives you energy and hope even when you feel worn out. You know, Phillipans 4:6 says; "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God." God wants us near to Him, Hazel, that way, you cannot be led astray. Do you honestly think that had you been prayerful like I taught you that you would've ignored that gut feeling you had last night?"

He was getting deep and I just hated that because he would speak nothing but the truth.

Hazel: (shaking head) “No.”

Malachi: “You know, I am nowhere near perfect, but I have tried my best in this life. I have taught people how to pray, how to forgive and most importantly how to forgive themselves. I have taught them the importance of living each day through the eyes of the Lord. No one has to live straight according to the Bible, we are only human, but for as long as your heart is pure, God will show you the way. I love you, Hazel, you know that and I have always been there for you, but I feel that you may be too weak for this life. It is not for the faint hearted. Which is why, I need you to be steadfast in prayer. Do you see how Beast prays? He prays even for you – and I know he prays whenever you guys are together.”

Malachi was talking of himself in the past tense, which made me wonder.

Malachi: “You have a good man right there, but trouble is always looming. It only takes a second for the devil to win a person over. He knows all our weak points, and that is when we are in mourning, sad, depressed, anxious and weary. We start questioning so many things and we start questioning God. That is when he brings all ridiculous possibilities at hand and he enforces rage and anger and bitterness. He wants us to fail, for when you are enraged, you do ungodly things at most and you end up regretting them when it is far too late. So many people have killed, have contracted viruses all because of a moment of a lapse of judgment when they questioned God. It is okay to be human, however, we tend to live the rest of our lives with the memory of that one mistake. I don’t want you to end up like that. I need you to be strong, and strong-willed. One day, you will be so fierce, that even those who grew up around you will be surprised.”

I chuckled because I myself could not even see the picture. In a nutshell, he called me a wimp, low key. However, I always appreciated our conversations, they were so meaningful and unforgettable.

Hazel: "You are so deep today."

Malachi: (laughing) "I've always been deep, you just never noticed."

Hazel: "Well, one day you will be a great father to a son or even a daughter."

Malachi: "I'd love that, but my children might never see me in the flesh."

Hazel: "Oh, brother, you are so full of nonsense today. Why o kare wa laela so (why does it seem as if you are saying goodbye)?"

Malachi: "Don't be silly. Come, let's go back before your future husband comes to fetch you."

We walked back to Beast and enjoyed our beers. We weren't really hungry, we just engaged in good conversation which led to a beautiful trip down memory lane. After nearly three hours, I had three Savanna's, and I wished I hadn't because I felt tipsy, while Beast and Malachi had so much. They were used to it already. Aunt Hunadi called as she had taken our numbers before we had gone to Portia's house. She told us that the uncles had arrived and were very anxious to meet us.

Apparently it took them so long because they had gone to buy all the necessary things needed for the ceremony, including two goats. When we arrived, we saw so many cars outside, it looked like a festival was about to occur. A tent was already being set up

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which led us to be confused. The moment Aunt Hunadi saw us, she came running. She had an odd structure, big at the top, and thin at the bottom, unlike my mother, who had a bossom to last a life time.

Hunadi: (excitedly) “Bana ba ka (my children), e tlang (come)! Bo Malome ba gona (the uncles are here)! Lesiba! Matome! Ba fihlile (they are here)!”

As soon as she said that, out came two rather tall and fairly dark men, dressed so well and they smelled so good. They looked a lot like my mother, but they had so much composure. They looked almost the same age.

Lesiba: (shocked) “Yoh, nna (oh, my goodness)! Binah a tla a dira mehlolo (Binah is something else)! How could she keep her children from us for so long? Gape ke monna le mosadi mo (they are so grown now)!”

Matome: “Greetings, batlogolo (niece and nephew), my name is Matome, I am the second born right after your mother, and this here is Lesiba, who comes after me. Hunadi there whom you met already is the last born. We are so pleased to meet you. We have been dying to meet you for so long.”

Lesiba: “Binah has ignored so many of our traditions by keeping you from us. It is now our duty to protect you and introduce you to our customs and ancestors.”

While he was welcoming us, an older man appeared, who was most probably in his 80’s or so.

Frans: “Bana ba Binah (Binah’s children), we are so pleased to finally meet you and we welcome you fully. As the eldest male

in this family, it is my duty to show the younger ones how it is done before I also depart this earth. As you can see, I am very old and I haven't seen Binah in over 40 years. My heart has been aching ever since; I felt as if I have failed my darling sister. She must be so disappointed in me."

Hunadi: "You shouldn't blame yourself, Malome (Uncle). Binah o ikgethetse (Binah made her own choices)."

Frans: (annoyed) "Now is not the time for such foolish behaviour, Hunadi. I won't allow you to subject these children to such tendencies."

Hunadi: "Askies, Malome (Sorry, uncle)."

Frans: "Now, we have bought everything that is needed for your ceremonies, and we shall await the rest of the family to be here so we can begin. We need to do it early in the morning."

Malachi: (frowning) "The rest of the family?"

Frans: "Yes, Celia still has to come with her children. Don't you worry, we won't take too much of your time, but rooms have been prepared for you."

Hazel: “Oh, Malome (uncle), you shouldn’t have. I mean, we don’t want to impose. Besides, we came here with my fiancé, and I wouldn’t want you to think that I’m disrespecting your house when we have just met.”

Frans: (laughing) “Child, this is not the 1800’s, your husband is more than welcome to sleep here. Now, let me have a word with Malachi and your husband, while you get to meet the women. We’ll speak soon.”

I saw him whisk away Malachi and Beast, while I was forced to sit with Binah, her daughter and Frans’ daughter. Also, it turned out that Lesiba and Matome didn’t have any daughters, which was really weird. Hunadi just kept talking like a fireball, she just didn’t quit. Her daughter had taken her character, but she was quite smart. She had finished matric, and hadn’t been studying for whatever reason, but she had an ambition to go study law. That would most definitely have worked in her favour since she

was a chatter box. I was asked about my father and my mother and she even asked me if my father was rich since he was white. I mean wow, people can be so small-minded. I kept ignoring messages and calls from Otlile and Kg, while also trying to ignore Hunadi. Thank goodnes I received a message from Beast.

Beast: "Are you still alive?"

Hazel: "Yoh (oh), you're still asking. I'm drowning. My ears can't take it any more. Mmane o bolela thata (Aunty talks too much)."

Beast: "Lol, come outside. I'll meet you right behind the tent."

Hazel: "What do I tell her?"

Beast: "Tell her you're going to fetch some wine from the car."

Hazel: "Aowa (no), I don't even know if she drinks or not."

Beast: "What on earth do you think she's been drinking in that mug all day?"

I chuckled to myself.

Hazel: (clearing throat) “Mmane (aunty), Ka boa (I’ll be back). Ke sa lata wine kwa koloing (I’m going to fetch wine from the car).”

The excitement on her face was mind blowing.

Hunadi: (excitedly) “Aowa, go lokile, ngwanaka (Oh, that’s alright, my child). I hope it is tasty, gape mo di plaseng mo re tseba dilo tsa go cheaper fela (here on the farms we only know cheap ones).”

Hazel: "I'll be sure to bring you a good bottle of Chardonnay."

Hunadi: (excitedly) "Heh (wow)! Sinah, wa di kwa tse (did you hear that)?! Dilo tsa makgowa (White people's things). Aowa, a wa topa kgole, ngwanaka (Oh, the apple doesn't fall far from the tree)! Your father must be one big millionaire!"

I just chuckled, while I walked out. Uncle Frans's daughter was somewhere, but she was just too much of a slay queen that one. Her son was so spoilt, it was beyond me. He had broken so many glasses ever since he arrived and no one told him a thing. Her husband has been on the phone ever since he arrived and before we knew it, he was nowhere to be seen. If having money makes people that way, then I surely didn't want any of it. I

walked out and indeed I found Beast hiding behind the tent. He embraced me and kissed me passionately.

Beast: "I missed you."

Hazel: "Bathong (goodness), Beast. You literally saw me a few hours ago."

Beast: "Yes, a few hours ago. Men tend to get boring after a while. I just want to be in my woman's arms."

Hazel: "Well, I promised Aunt Hunadi a bottle of Chardonnay, and we don't even have any."

Beast: "Says who?"

I frowned as I saw him go to the boot. He opened it and he literally had a few bottles of wine in there.

Hazel: "Bathong (goodness), Beast. Really?"

Beast: "I have to impress, besides, I called you out here because your Great Uncle Frans has run out of cognac. You have posh uncles, hey. Come on, let's take a drive."

Hunadi: "Let me give Auntie a bottle before I leave."

I took one bottle and went to give her. She was so excited, she hardly even heard me say that I was quickly going out. My Beast and I took a drive to the nearest bottle store. Good thing it wasn't even 8pm yet. Beast told me he was going to buy Cognac only for Malome Frans, but instead, he bought tons of bottles and I don't mean cheap whiskey and Cognac, I'm talking 18 year old whiskey.

Hazel: "Beast, man. O batla go tagwa bo malome ba ka (you want to get my uncles drunk)?"

Beast: "No, I want to make an impression. That way, they'll allow me to sleep next to you tonight."

Hazel: "In your dreams, lover boy. Where have you ever seen that happen?"

Beast: "Oh, well, a man can only dream."

He proceeded to make payment before we left. I didn't even want to see the price because I knew that I was most definitely going to flip. He just spent money like it rained money every day on earth. He always said that money was just material, and that it could always be replaced, but memories couldn't. Ai, what a justification. I just let him be, it was his money at the end of the day.

1 Thessalonians 5:17 - "Pray without ceasing."

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“Everything you’ve ever wanted is on the other side of fear.” -
George Addair

Hazel

After all that alcohol Beast bought, everyone had a great time. They never slept and surprisingly Aunt Hunadi drank the entire bottle and passed out. They said whatever I gave her was brilliant and that next time I came to visit I should bring a bottle of the very same thing. They said I was the first one who managed to shut her up. It was actually hilarious. The house was very big – it had ten bedrooms in total. After midnight, I went to bed, leaving all the men outside to enjoy themselves. They most probably went to bed around 2am in the morning. Around that time, my phone rang. I was so irritated, because I never received calls around that time of the morning. I mostly assumed it was Otlile or Kg, but I answered anyway, only to find it was Beast.

Beast: (whispering) “Can I come in?”

Hazel: "Beast, do you have any idea what time it is?"

Beast: "Yes, baby, it is 2am. I just want to sleep next to my wife. Please."

Hazel: (sigh) "Fine. Just be sure to be out of here before the crack of dawn."

Beast: (chuckling) "On it."

It didn't take a minute, when I heard the door handle open. Beast walked in.

Hazel: "How long were you outside my door?"

Beast: "Not long, about ten minutes. I just wanted you to answer your phone first. I couldn't afford to scare you."

He was telling me that while taking off his clothes. He always slept naked.

Hazel: "Keep your briefs on."

Beast: "Eish, wena mara (oh, you, though). You're killing me."

Hazel: "How when we don't even have sex, Bethuel?"

Beast: "Intimacy, baby. Feeling your soft skin against mine is the best feeling in the world, but I will settle because I don't want your grandmother to haunt me, you know. It is her house after all."

I just laughed weakly and dozed off immediately the moment he wrapped his arms around me. While sleeping, I had the most pleasant yet weirdest dream. It was even hard to explain. I was sleeping, yet I dreamt of myself waking up with Beast fast asleep next to me. I was actually woken up by the

voice of an unfamiliar woman. When I looked up, I saw her. She was a bit old, but very beautiful, just like my grandmother, although it wasn't her. She looked at me and smiled. It felt so surreal, but her spirit wasn't intimidating at all. It was calm and alluring.

Hazel: "Who are you?"

Koko: (smiling) "I'm your great-grandmother, child. I am your mother's grandmother."

Hazel: "Is this real? Can I see you?"

Koko: “Yes, but in your dream. You’re not like your brother, if we show up in reality, you would become very afraid. So, this is the best way to communicate with you.”

Hazel: “Why are you visiting me? Did I do something wrong? You’re angry because Beast is sleeping right next to me in your house, aren’t you?”

Koko: (chuckling) “No, child, not at all. I just wanted to come and visit you. I have come to give you my blessings, blessings I failed to give you whilst alive. You see, Hazel, I was a very bitter woman while your mother was growing up and I suffered for my actions til my own death. I have no idea why, but I somehow had a great part in the way your mother turned out, which I still regret. Spirit feels no pain, but we always try and make amends so that the generations after us could learn from us and do better – be better.”

Hazel: “Oh, I see.”

Koko: “You are highly favoured, Hazel. Don’t ever doubt yourself. You are so much like your mother, fiesty, intelligent and beautiful, you just don’t know it yet. Soon, you will realize that you bring out the best in people, and that is one of the reasons why the wrong people will try and win your heart. Stay strong, my child, whenever you’re weary – pray. We’re always there with you and now that you will be officially introduced to us, you will be able to see life more clearly.”

Just like that, she walked out of the closed door and I woke up almost immediately. I could still feel her aura, even when I looked at the door. I thought that I was going crazy.

Beast: "What's wrong? Bad dream?"

Hazel: "No, just an odd one."

Beast: "Want to tell me about it?"

Hazel: "Later, you have to go. It's almost sunrise."

Beast: “Eish (oh), okay. I’ll see you later then, Ndhlovukazi (queen).”

He got dressed and left. I just shook my head and tried to go back to sleep. It wasn’t long before I was woken up by Aunt Hunadi. Yerr, she seemed rather chirpy for someone who had so much alcohol.

Hunadi: (knocking on the door) “Hazel, tsoga nana (wake up, baby). It’s almost time for the ceremony. Don’t keep your uncles waiting. I want you to meet your great aunt Celia before we go out.”

I had forgotten about that one. She came rather late. One would assume she was held up because of her husband and children, but she had no children and she was never married apparently. She was a Matron at Kalafong Hospital, I mean who knew she was right under my nose the entire time? I got dressed and found her sitting in the lounge with Hunadi.

Hunadi: “Oh, there she is. Hazel, come. Meet your great aunt Celia, Mamogolo (aunt), this is Hazel, Binah’s daughter.”

She was so shocked, that she analyzed me in a very uncomfortable manner from head to toe.

Celia: “Wena (hey, you), why o le o mo khibidu bjana (why are you so light)?”

Not that again.

Hunadi: “Goodness, Aunty, her father is white. I told you.”

Celia: (shaking head) “So Binah had three children from three different men? Ja, neh. The daughter I saw her with wasn’t this light, but at least you’re beautiful, hey.”

The shock in me.

Hazel: (frowning) “Le ra bjang, Mamogolo (what do you mean, aunty)?”

Celia: “I mean, I saw her some time, a few years ago at the hospital when she came in with a burn wound. I saw her with a daughter which wasn’t you.”

That was just it. I could then see where my mother’s hatred grew. That woman was vile, even with her gaslighting under tone. I felt bad for even thinking that way, but no wonder God denied her the ability to have children of her own.

Hunadi: (clapping) “Hah (wow)! Aunty! You saw Binah and never told us?”

Celia: “Be ko le botja ke re eng (what was I going to say to you)? I saw the surname and I knew that it was her. When I peeped through I saw her, but I never went to speak to her. A ke batle mathata nna (I don’t want any trouble). I’m very fine alone, the next thing you know, they’d be all over my house and work place asking me for money.”

She had no shame, to be honest. On top of that, she acted like she was better than everyone, when Uncle Lesiba and Uncle Matome had way more class and money than her. She also acted like she was way better than my mother, which upset me quite a lot. Yes, my mother was a bad mother, but she didn’t deserve to be treated like a low life even in her absence. Hunadi must have seen the displeasure in my face.

Hunadi: (nervously) “Mamogolo (aunty), we’ll see you later. Hazel, a re ye (let’s go) and get you dressed properly for the ceremony. You’ll take a bath later.”

She took me to her bedroom and I had to hide the tears behind my pain.

Hunadi: “Don’t mind her, she’s like that. Ga o makale a se ne bana so (no wonder she has no children).”

I just kept quiet and got dressed in the skirt and doek she gave me. She was nice when she wasn’t throwing insults at my

mother, but I knew that deep down she was angry at my mother for leaving her behind. She was the last born and she was a girl, so she had no one to relate to and was left behind when everyone went to Varsity. I could only imagine how my mother felt. We went out and Celia was not in the lounge any more. Everyone was outside and Malachi had a jacket on and they had already given him beads to wear around his wrist and gave me mine as well. Then, Malome Frans (Uncle), as the eldest male started chanting and praying – despite Celia being older than him.

Frans: (chanting) “Badimo ba ga Makwetla (the Makwetla ancestors), we come before you, we bring you your long lost children Malachi and Hazel Makwetla, may you welcome them with open arms and protect them from this moment on. May you protect their off spring and allow them to flourish in this world. May you also find it in your hearts to forgive their mother, for we all make bad choices for as long as we are living in the flesh. Guide them in this world and protect them from their enemies. We thank you for this moment, hence we have brought you animals for slaughtering as a sacrifice and a way to finally connect them to you.”

The goats were slaughtered and they were chanting clan names. It was so beautiful to be a part of that, and it was the very first time that I had experienced that. I felt something change within me, something spiritual, it was truly beautiful. Right after they slaughtered the goats and started preparing them, something really odd happened. It suddenly rained, but it rained within our yard only. The rest of the area around was sunny and bright, while we had brief rain pour over us. Uncle Frans told us that it was a sign of rebirth and a sign that our ancestors were rejoicing. Hunadi was ululating along with her daughter and a few other relatives, while Celia was standing there with sunglasses on like the madame of the house. She also came to kneel down and pray for us, but I could tell she was doing it as a formality and not because she wanted to. After the brief rain passed, it was time to enjoy ourselves.

The cooking began and the men were drinking, I really enjoyed myself and I loved being around family, even though I didn't

know half of them. I was around Sinah most of the time, while peeling and preparing for the food. I wasn't allowed to touch the food, though. I was the guest of honour, so I was allowed to do anything except help around and serve people. While we were enjoying ourselves, my late great aunt Salome's daughters finally emerged. Apparently they had "forgotten" about the ceremony. They came dressed in style in heels for days, they kept asking if I was really studying Psychology and if Malachi was really studying in the U.S., yet they themselves never finished Varsity. Sinah told me that they both went mad after their mother died when they received all the policy pay outs.

Apparently Salome was the one who cursed my mother's children at one point hence we were all meant to be real low life fuck ups, but thanks to Malome Frans for helping us lift any curses, our lives had some light ahead of us. I didn't mind them, because I figured they had taken after their mother. They were bitter and ill mannered, they were talking about me as if I was some filthy trash with fake white hair, yet they were drinking alcohol bought by my man. I hated such leeches. I became really infuriated when one of them started drooling over Beast – despite having been introduced to them

as my fiance. Even Beast didn't take me seriously when I told him, he just enjoyed my jealous behaviour so much, that it was a little frustrating. While those two were still talking about Beast like he was a piece of meat, he walked into the house.

Beast: (smiling) "Good day, ladies. Forgive me for interrupting, but may I please have a moment with my wife?"

Hunadi: "Oh, of course, not at all."

Aunt Salome's annoying slay queen daughters were quite interested in speaking to Beast
but he cut them off shortly by speaking to me.

Beast: “Mkami (my wife), I just felt like checking on you. I miss you dearly.”

Before I could even get any response in, Beast kissed me so passionately, I felt the silence consume the room, while my knees got weak. Only after he broke the kiss I became completely embarrassed. I could feel my cheeks become flushed immediately.

Beast: (clearing throat) “I’ll see you later, ladies.”

Sinah: (surprised) “Yoh (wow)! Sesi (sis), you have a real man right there. Look at the way he looks at you. Tjo (oh), I can’t wait for the wedding.”

Hunadi: “Me neither. All I want is to wear some nice clothes and meet the man of my dreams.”

Come to think of it, Aunt Hunadi never told me about the father of her children. I assumed he died or something. Beast really did well by shutting up those two tramps, while Aunt Celia was too good to spend time with us. I felt a little bad due to the fact that there we were having a blast while Portia and her son Abel were mourning Joel’s death. It was just not very nice, but then, life has to go on. We continued with the festivities, until the wee hours of the morning. This time, Beast was sitting with me outside in front of the fire, while everyone went to bed one by one, including Malachi.

Beast: “Finally, everyone is asleep. Now, can we go to bed, please?”

Hazel: “Bethuel, wa gafa (are you mad)? Do you want my great grandmother to visit me again?”

Beast: “I won’t touch you, I promise.”

Hazel: “You won’t vele (of course), because I’ll be sleeping clothed.”

Beast: "As long as you'll be next to me, I couldn't be bothered what you'll be wearing."

Hazel: "Ao (is it)? Wena (you)? You always make it a point for us to sleep naked."

Beast: "Yes, when we're not sleeping in people's houses. I respect you too much for that. Come, let's go."

We tip-toed slowly into the house and made our way to the bedroom I was sleeping in the previous night. I had such a pleasant night's rest and no dreams. It was a good night. The

following day came, and it was Malachi's turn to head to Joel's house, where the elders were waiting for him. Wow, the Makwetla family was very supportive, you know, they literally all went with us to support Malachi with his ceremony. He got cleansed and got introduced to the ancestors, it was a beautiful thing to witness. It was a bit sad because Joel was deceased, and they were allowed to slaughter since Joel was already gone. Everything had gone well and Portia asked us not to be strangers, along with Abel.

We had to leave, I was glad to meet my mother's family, but I was so glad to be leaving. I hated sleeping in people's beds, hence I hardly visited. On our way back, we had a pleasant drive, Malachi was no longer Mr. Serious, while Beast was just all over me. Malachi was the one driving us that time, while Beast and I were in the back, singing along to all our favourite songs. It was a great road trip. We stopped at Zamebsi mall before we were on our way to Beast's house, we just didn't want to be associated with any negativity at my mother's house. No one had been there for months, which probably meant the house was in ruins. We went to Crowdaddy's to get some food and drinks. Drinks were always the order of the day

whenever it came to Malachi and Beast. I just didn't protest because it was their thing. While we were waiting for our orders, Malachi's phone rang and he stood up to go answer it away from us. That was odd, Malachi never received personal calls, which raised my eyebrows. I looked at Beast, who didn't seem surprised at all, which meant he knew something. Of course he knew – he was the best friend.

Hazel: (raised eyebrow) "And?"

Beast: "What?"

Hazel: "Aren't you going to tell me what that is all about?"

Beast: “What do you mean?”

Hazel: “Seriously, Bethuel? You’re going to act a fool right this moment?”

Beast: (shrugging) “Nna akitsi selo (I don’t know anything).”

He was lying right through his teeth. After Malachi’s lengthy phone call, our drinks arrived and he finally came back to our table. I just gave him one look and raised my eyebrow.

Malachi: (frowning) "What?"

Hazel: "Is there something you'd like me to know?"

Malachi: "I don't know, is there something you'd like to know?"

Hazel: "Who was that on the phone? You never have private phone calls."

Malachi: (chuckling) “Hazel, o rata ditaba (you like news). If you must know, that is my girlfriend, Beverly.”

Okay, I honestly didn't expect that. I looked at him in awe and my jaw nearly dropped. Beast was casually taking pictures unbothered. He obviously knew all that.

Hazel: (shocked) “And I only find out now?”

Malachi: “You've had a lot on your plate recently, so I didn't want to bother you with my boring news. I was going to tell you any way, but if you must know – I'm going to be a father soon.”

Now that was a bombshell.

Hazel: (excitedly) “Oh, my goodness! Congratulations, brother! This is the best news yet. Although I don’t know Beverly and I haven’t even met her. I mean, what does she say about that, huh?”

Malachi: “Luckily for you, Bev is not bothered at all. She’s relaxed and knows that my family is here in South Africa. You’ll meet her soon.”

I was so excited, I mean I was a bit nosy, but I needed to know more about the woman who had captured my brother's heart. We ended up having a lengthy conversation about Beverly and the kind of woman she was, and I even got to see her pictures. He wasn't ready to have me video call her, though, but I was happy that my brother had found love after all. It was the icing on the cake after the few days we had. After our great meal, we went straight to Beast's house. Malachi went straight to the guest bedroom, while Beast and I were still watching tv in his bedroom. Oh, I was actually very glad to be home, because I never even took any clothes to change in when we went to Polokwane. I was just so happy to be home. Beast's house was a home to me and I was more than happy to call it that. I took a shower while Beast was making some snacks for us and preparing some drinks and by the time he was done, I was dressed in sleepwear. He came rushing into the bedroom with ice cream, popcorn and wine, while I was already in bed.

Beast: "Ah, wa nropa now (you're cheating). I thought I'd find you naked."

Hazel: (chuckling) "Beast, it is not as if you have seen me fully naked."

Beast: "My eyes don't forget, baby. Here are our snacks, love wa ka (my love). What are we watching tonight?"

Hazel: "I don't know, I'm thinking The Notebook."

Beast: "Uyabona manje (you see now), you want me to watch that with you and then I'll have to up my game. I mean, white people are more romantic than us darkies (blacks), you know."

Hazel: (laughing) “Come on, I’ve never even seen the movie. I just saw the trailer, so I thought it would be nice to watch it with you.”

Beast: “Only because I love you.”

I chuckled and then he came to sit in bed with me and we played the movie. Halfway through the first half hour of the movie, I kept feeling his hand touching my thigh. I kept getting these warm, fuzzy feelings everywhere on my body. It felt like electricity shooting right through my body, and then all of it landing right on my privates. I let him play around, I mean he was my man after all. When I felt his hand touch my tummy, it felt as if my stomach was being separated from the bones, in a

good way, though. His hands slowly travelled to my breasts and he started caressing them, gently. I felt my body behaving in a very weird manner, I felt so shy suddenly and my cheeks felt so warm. I could barely look him in the eye. He just couldn't help himself as he started to kiss my neck gently. My body responded automatically as I gasped in pleasure. My breathing escalated with every kiss and touch, while the rest of my body was vibrating.

Hazel: (breathing heavily) "Oh, Beast..."

His lips travelled to mine and our lips met yet again. We kissed one another so passionately, his warm breath against mine felt like our tongues were consumating our relationship. His hands were just touching me, but it felt like they were doing magic, like a person playing a guitar, with his strings making love to the strings. He found himself on top of me, as I spread my legs to accommodate his body. We were still fully clothed, but it felt

like something out of this world. The more we kissed, the more warmth I felt down there.

Hazel: (whispering) "Beast, I think... I think we should stop."

Beast: "Am I hurting you?"

Hazel: (shaking head) "No, but... my... it feels weird down there."

Beast: (chuckling) “You’re wet, baby. It is completely normal. Don’t worry, I won’t have sex with you. You’re not ready yet. I just want to make you feel pleasure, without feeling the need to have sex with me. Just relax, okay?”

I nodded and he continued kissing me. His one hand was running my breast, while the other was traveling down to my pants, and he slowly put it into my pants. I had never experienced that before. There is just something about intimacy, it opens up room for vulnerability. I never understood why some people would behave like absolute lunatics after having sex with people, but it is because we become so vulnerable. We weren’t even having sex, but it kind of felt like it. His hand gently touched my clit. I myself had never even done that to my own vagina. His one finger started playing with my clitoris, rubbing it in circular motion. His pace changed with time as he started going faster and faster. While I breathed faster, his pace went up as well.

Hazel: (moaning) “Oh, Beast...”

I could feel his erect Penis sending an invitation to my vagina, even right from inside his pants. The more he rubbed my clitoris, the wetter I became. I felt some warmth slowly come up to my face and then down to my lower body. Within minutes, I just heard myself cry out in pleasure, and release some fluid from my vagina.

Hazel: (moaning) “Oh, shit!”

I never knew I could even do that. He took a moment to look me right in the eye, making me feel so embarrassed.

Hazel: (panting) "What the fuck just happened?"

Beast: "You've just had your first orgasm, baby."

Hazel: (frowning) "I mean, I knew it was possible, but I honestly thought it was a myth. Your hands are dangerous, man, Beast."

Beast: (laughing) "I'll be right back. Stay put."

He came back with a warm cloth and he gently wiped me down there. It felt so normal for him to look at my naked body, whereas I had never seen him naked. It was just too odd for me, considering that we had never had sex. He kissed me and we continued watching the movie as if nothing had just happened. All was well and my Beast and I fell asleep right in each other's arms. I felt that I had experienced love, and it was so enjoyable and so good, that I just couldn't wait to experience that feeling again.

Proverbs 17:17 - "A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity."

“Let us make our future now, and let us make our dreams tomorrow’s reality.” – Malala Yousafzai

Hazel

A few days later...

It had been such a marvelous few days. Malachi was still home, but he was planning on leaving for the United States, while I was still having a blast with my Beast. I hadn’t been able to think of all the negativity surrounding my life, but I had been ghosting Otilie and Kg, while my relationship with Mathilda was slowly growing into something beautiful, which was a little bit unfair, even though they really did deserve it. They had been bombarding me with messages everywhere, and I couldn’t keep avoiding them forever, since we did live together. Beast and I had just finished dropping off Malachi at the airport, and he just looked so concerned about me. I just took it as his normal worry about leaving me behind, after everything I had endured, but he just seemed like he really didn’t want to leave, but he honestly had to; for Beverly and his unborn son. My mind still

couldn't wrap itself around the idea of me being an aunt within the next few months, though.

Malachi: (worried) "Sis, take good care of yourself, and no matter what happens, know that I love you, okay?"

Hazel: "Yes, of course. I love you too."

Malachi: "I mean it. You are a lot stronger than you think, and for as long as you focus on my love for you – you won't go astray, okay?"

I just felt so weird, weird in a very worried way. Why was Malachi so deep all of a sudden? Come to think of it, he had been quite deep for a few days.

Hazel: "I know, brother, I know. I love you too, now go before you miss your flight. Beverly is waiting on you."

He gave me one long hug, which left me nostalgic as soon as he left. Beast and I walked to the car with my mind wandering all over the place.

Hazel: "Beast, is it just me or has Malachi been acting weird for the past few days?"

Beast: "It is you, baby."

Hazel: "I'm serious."

Beast: "So am I. You tend to overthink, when honestly, he is just being concerned. Don't read too much into things."

Hazel: "I suppose you're right."

Beast: "Speaking of reading too much into things, when are you going to respond to your friends? They've been texting and calling. I'm pretty sure they feel like proper shit right now."

Hazel: (deep sigh) “I don’t know, to be honest. I mean, I don’t know what to say to them. I haven’t spoken to them in quite some time, it would just feel a bit too foreign, you know.”

Beast: “All I am saying is hear them out. I mean sure, they were pretty shit for pulling such fucked up stunts, but I don’t think they were intentional about it. You guys are still young, and honestly, you are all trying to figure yourselves out. I do hope that you are able to sort out your mess, or else I will have to move you to another flat.”

Hazel: “Aowa (no), Beast, bjanong o dira thata (you’re becoming too much now).”

Beast: “How so?”

Hazel: “I can’t always expect you to rescue me like that.”

Beast: “For as long as I am alive, I’m willing to do that for you wholeheartedly, all day – every day. If you allow me, I’d be more than willing to pay lobola even tomorrow.”

I thought he was joking, but he was quite serious. I wasn't even ready to be someone's girlfriend, let alone wife. I was still learning the ropes of dating, man.

Hazel: "Beast, no man. Don't do that. You're worrying me."

Beast: "I'm just saying, that's how serious I am about you. I'm giving you a year tops to do whatever you want to do – explore, live life and experience new things. After that, uzoba umkani ngepmela (you'll be my real wife)."

Hazel: "I have no idea how to behave as a girlfriend, let alone a wife."

Beast: "Marriage has no remedy, you will learn as we go along. All I require is lots of love and hopefully, lots of sex."

Of course, he just had to send me blusing.

Hazel: (blushing) “Wa thoma (you are starting again).”

Beast: “I’m just saying, love. The day you experience it, you won’t want to stop.”

He kissed my forehead and we got into the car and drove off. Upon driving out of the airport, I felt that perhaps it was a good time to speak to Kg and Otlile. I mean, we had been through quite a lot and they did save me a lot from Mathilda back in the day. That still didn’t give them the audacity and right to do what they did to me. I could have died, though. Yes, I made the choice to go to the party, but I could have died.

Hazel: “Beast, do you mind if I meet up with Kg and Otlile? I just texted them both now and they said that they are at Menlyn.”

Beast: “No problem, I have something to do that side in any case.”

Hazel: "Thanks."

Within minutes, he off ramped to Menlyn, and we had arrived in the parking lot. He dropped me off and said that he wanted to go to a Jewelry company nearby for some business and that I needed to call him as soon as I was done with my meeting. We said our goodbyes and I got into the lift. I was a bit skeptical at first, so nervous, which was really odd. I had known those two for half my life, really and they were all I had known. After I had gotten out of the lift, my heart started beating unsteadily, as I approached Parrots. It reminded me of that day when we went out with Mam'Rose to celebrate our big win after our Hockey game. Those were the good old days. I saw them not far from the entrance. I didn't have to ask the waiter as Otlile had already started waving. She looked really nervous, for someone who had always been outspoken. I slowly made my way up to them and they were even afraid to hug me.

Hazel: "Hi."

Kg: (nervously) "Hey, Haze."

Otlile: "How are you? It's been a minute."

Hazel: "Yeah, I'm really sorry about that. It's been quite rough."

Otlile: "No need to apologize. We both know we were real bitches and it wasn't fair towards you."

She didn't even wait for me to get a drink.

Kg: "Aren't you going to wait for her to grab a drink first?"

Otlile: "No, I have been dying to get this out of my system. I mean, that is if it is okay with you, Hazel."

Hazel: (nodding) "Oh, of course."

Suddenly, the conversation took a different turn.

Otile: (deep sigh) “I have never told you guys this, but my life is not what it seems. My dad has been having an affair with my mother’s sister for years now, up to the point where he has decided not to keep it a secret any more. It is so bad, that behind closed doors, all they do is fight and threaten to wring each other’s necks. I haven’t told you guys this because I feel ashamed. I drink and party so much, because that is how I know how to let go of all the pain I am carrying around. Everyone thinks that I have such supportive parents, but in reality, I don’t know them at all. I feel so alone.”

I had never seen Otile cry much before, so it was such a sore sight. That explained how she would behave whenever she spoke about her mother’s sister and how the two of them just never got along and would bicker in the midst of people.

Otile: “I know, I have wronged you, Hazel – not once but twice. I am such a failure of a friend and I honestly didn’t do it on purpose. That night I was so carried away with just escaping my pain, being around people whom I thought understood me because we would always drink together, and I honestly assumed that you were going to be alright mingling. Never did it cross my mind that you would be entangled in such a disastrous situation yet again. I am so sorry, friend. Please,

find it in your heart to forgive me. I know, I am a fucked up person, but my heart and feelings about you are very genuine. I love you so much, you are my sister.”

I was about to respond, when Kg also started spilling her own set of beans.

Kg: (teary) “I’m so sorry, Hazel. I was driven with the feeling and desire of meeting new people and finally being allowed to be myself. The truth is, my parents are such culturists and Biblicalists, that they despise homosexuals. If they even knew how much of a lesbian I actually am, they would disown me in a heart beat. Every day, I am reminded how gays and lesbians are such a sin and that they deserve to die because God did not intend for them to even live. They call them rejects, can you believe it? I once asked my mother what she would do if I turned out lesbian? I saw so much hatred within her and she said to me that she would curse me until the day she died and that if she could kill me, she would. Only then I told her that it was for a speech in Life Orientation. I wasn’t thinking either, and I of all people should be ashamed of my behaviour since you share your pain with me and what you have been through. No words can excuse my behaviour towards you, but please – forgive me.”

Hazel: (teary) “Guys, I am honestly sorry for ghosting you like that, but it really wasn’t my intention. The truth is, I had no idea how to even start a conversation with you after what happened. Yes, what you did was really shitty, but I forgive you. We have been through so much and you two have always had my back. Just know that I won’t be partying with you two any time soon.”

They both chuckled out of relief as they both hugged me.

Otlile: “Thank you, Hazel. You won’t regret it. I promise you.”

Kg: “Yeah, lesson learnt for real.”

Hazel: “It’s alright. Just as long as it won’t happen again. Now, where is the waiter? I need a drink.”

We were finally back to our old selves, even though there was a tiny part inside of me that would never trust them like I had before. Yes, I still loved them as my friends, but I vowed to

never party with them ever again. It felt so good to be open and honest and to speak my mind. I really hoped that I grew into a person who did that often in the near future.

A few weeks later...

After our holiday, it was back to school. Man, I wasn't really psyched on going back because the pressure was mounting as we were approaching June Exams. I was though, psyched about one thing – my upcoming birthday. Everyone kept dropping hints and suggestions on how they wanted to me to spend my 19th Birthday, and in actual fact, I hadn't really thought about it. I was just glad that I was growing a year older by the grace of God. Beast had some business to take care of in Cape Town, so he was staying at our flat with us for a while. We hardly even saw Kg and Otlile since we had so many assignment deadlines to meet. So, they were always out of our way. And also, Otlile was out partying or drinking every Thursday, while Kg had a new girlfriend who stayed at Res. So, she would occasionally sleep out, while Otlile was always out partying. She had cut down, though, and her grades were always on par. I had just gotten back from Campus after a rather draining day, and I found Beast cooking for us – topless in the kitchen.

Hazel: (smiling) “Well, here’s something I don’t get to see every day.”

Beast: (smiling) “Mkami (my wife)
how was your day?”

He gave me the usual peck on the lips before I answered and offered me a glass of wine.

Hazel: “Ag (oh), it was just a hectic day. I had such a hectic assignment and honestly, if it weren’t for Mathilda, we wouldn’t have finished on time.”

Beast: “Well, as long as you’re back home in one piece.”

Hazel: “It smells delicious in here, what are you making?”

Beast: “Well, I am making us a three course meal, baby girl.”

Hazel: (surprised) “Hmm, do tell me about it, please.”

Beast: “Well, if you must know, Mkami (my wife), I am making us seared oysters with home-made garlic bread as a starter, with a Seafood Boil as our main course, and my famous lemon cheesecake for dessert.”

Hazel: “Hmm, I can’t wait to taste it all. I am getting hungry just by standing around here.”

Beast: “Which is why you need to go take a soothing, long bath. I ran half the water for you. Go, before it gets cold.”

I could never say no to Beast’s tender loving care. He was so sweet and I knew that I had to expect a very good surprise in that bathroom. I rushed to my bedroom and took off my clothes. I folded them neatly and placed them in the laundry basket. Beast was very neat, so in turn, I had adjusted to his OCD. I felt really odd when he would fold away clothes I had left on the bed. I wrapped myself in a towel and went to the bathroom. I was accompanied by the beautiful aroma of the

bath salts and candles all around the bath tub. I saw a big bunch of roses with some notes in it, you know, the famous gift given to women lately. There was also a note accompanying the big rose bouquet. "Enjoy this bath, my love. This is going to be the beginning of a new chapter for us. Happy 5 Months anniversary, baby wami (my baby). Love, Beast." I felt so happy when reading that note, that I had to read it a few more times. I just couldn't wrap my head around the fact that my Beast loved me so much and I in turn submitted to that love, naturally. My mother would always tell me that there was no such thing as a romantic man or true love and that once they had gotten what they wanted, they would leave you. That was the kind of grooming I was subjected to by my mother, but something told me that something big was going to occur that night – something life changing and beautiful. My heart could feel it and so could my soul. Immediately when I submerged myself into the water, I felt my soul calmed down. Within minutes, I heard him walk in slowly and play me some music as he left it on top of the stand in the bathroom and walked back out. I felt so good, it is amazing what the small things can do to one's soul. After about an hour and wrinkled fingers and toes, I was ready to walk out. I was actually asleep, until Beast woke me up.

Beast: “Baby, come on. It is time for dinner.”

I saw him standing before me in a tuxedo, an actual one.

Hazel: (frowning) “Is everything okay?”

Beast: (chuckling) “Why wouldn’t they be, love? Come, I am waiting for you.”

He had the towel ready to embrace me and the moment I walked out of the tub, he wrapped it around me and hugged me tightly.

Beast: “I love you so much, Hazel Makwetla. I hope you know that.”

Hazel: “I love you too, Bethuel Sibiya. I hope you know that, too.”

Beast: “Go get dressed in the bedroom, I’ll clean the tub for you.”

I nodded and thanked him. As I approached the bedroom, I was so amazed to be met by the most beautiful surprise in my entire life. There was a gorgeous red, backless dress on the bed, accompanied by golden heels, and a black, rectangular jewelry box on the bed, also with a note. It had been such a romantic evening, that I still hadn’t recovered from the roses. “I can’t wait to spoil you tonight, Mkami (my wife). Love, Beast. P.S. Please wear this and don’t spoil the surprise.” I just quickly patted my entire body dry and lotioned myself. I figured I had to put on some make-up, and I was getting there all thanks to make-up tutorials on YouTube. I put on the dress and I could barely recognize myself. Red is such a powerful colour, I mean it can transform even the dullest dress into the most spectacular one. I hadn’t even opened the jewelry box until last, and when I did, I nearly cried. I stopped myself because of the make up. It was the most beautiful diamond necklace I had ever seen in my entire life. Actually, it was the only diamond necklace I had ever seen and touched. It was so stunning, I could see my own reflection in it. Wow, I thought to myself. What on earth was Beast up to?

I put it on myself and I just nearly cried. My curly hair accompanied the red dress and the beautiful diamond necklace like something straight out of a movie. I put on red lipstick as a finish and my goodness, I looked something like Marilyn Monroe. Never have I ever thought I'd ever look that gorgeous before. I made my way out of the bedroom, and all the lights were dimmed. There were red candles everywhere, and music was playing. Yes, Beast and I's favourite song – Ami Faku's uBuhle Bakho, with Beast standing right in the middle of our lounge / dining area holding something out of sight in his hands. He looked so beautiful in his tux. I had never seen such a big, beautiful man in my life before. He just never ceased to amaze me. Oh, I so wish that moment had been captured on camera, because it had been my very own love story. Tears were a natural part of my life and they never were shy to make an appearance. As I approached him, he just didn't hesitate. He lowered the music using the remote and recited the most beautiful words to me.

Beast: "Hazel Makwetla, you are so beautiful, no word in the English dictionary can ever explain your beauty. No word is even worthy of explaining your beauty. You are so beautiful that you command respect, your presence itself commands everyone to notice you. Ever since I fell in love with you, I knew

that you'd be my wife one day. You are more than special, for you are unique, you are so desirable, that I never want to let you go. Losing you scares me to death and seeing you wake up next to me is a dream come true. You literally make my heart jump for joy and I skip a million heart beats a minute just seeing your flawless smile. Your calm nature brings peace to my soul, and I can't wait to grow old with you. You make me want to achieve so many things I never thought I ever could. You are my smile keeper, Hazel, your green eyes make me feel like I am staring into the garden of Eden whenever I see you. You bring so much joy, peace and serenity to my life – all at once. I am myself around you and I want to be vulnerable around you until the day I die. I vow to always be by your side – no matter what. You are the queen of queens and you deserve all the gold. The beach simply signifies and explains the type of person you are – pure of heart and peaceful. I want to grow old with you, Hazel Makwetla, if you give me the chance, I promise to make you so happy, you'll think that happiness is literally a four-letter word. Allow me to make you the queen of queens, Mkami (my wife). Hazel Makwetla, will you marry me?"

That came as such a shocker to me, but I was in so much tears already, that everything felt so right whenever I was with

Beast. Our love felt so pure, so easy and never forced. I didn't know what the future held, but I knew I wanted to be with him.

Hazel: (tearfully) "Of course, Bethuel! Of course I will be your wife!"

He had already been on his knee and had the most gorgeous diamond ring I had ever seen in my life. He slid it on my finger and it fit so well. That explained all the weird behaviour from Kg and Otile. They both knew he had been planning that. And that mysterious meeting with a jewelry business a few weeks prior? Bethuel was something else. He kissed me so passionately, that tears just flowed down my cheeks, welcoming that new chapter in my life.

Beast: "Thank you, Baby, thank you for making me so happy."

Hazel: "No, Beast, thank you for making me so happy."

He pulled the chair for me and served me my food. We just couldn't take our hands off each other. Everything just felt so

right, so pure and relaxed. After eating our delicious meal, and drinking a hefty amount of wine, we were a little tipsy, but I felt so horny, that I just couldn't hold it in any more. He looked at me with his squint, horny eyes and I just knew what I wanted to do. He pulled me up to dance, but I just couldn't any more. It must have been the alcohol or the seafood since they did say it was an aphrodisiac, but I just went with it. I kissed him so passionately, until he broke the kiss.

Beast: (breathing heavily) "Slow down, Baby wami (my baby), I might not be able to contain myself."

Hazel: (whispering) "I don't want you to contain yourself. I want you, Beast. I'm ready to have you."

Beast: (breathing heavily) "I was hoping for this on your birthday, besides, we don't have protection."

Hazel: "Otlile always has some in her bedroom."

Beast: “Haibo (goodness), Baby. You want us to use cheap condoms, now?”

I couldn’t help but burst into laughter.

Hazel: (laughing) “No, man. She uses this brand she buys. I don’t know what it is, though.”

Beast: “Hmm, okay. Are you sure you’re ready?”

Hazel: “I am.”

Beast: “Okay.”

He took me to the bedroom while I quickly went into Otlile’s bedroom and snuck out a few condoms. I didn’t know how many I might have needed, so I took two packets. I rushed to my bedroom, and Beast made beautiful love to me that night. It was of course painful, but my goodness, after a few rounds it felt like magic. It wasn’t the first time he had his face all over my vagina, but that night just felt like something out of

this world. He made such passionate love to me, that I felt as if my soul was escaping my body and then came rushing back once it was all over. I didn't want the moment to end, and my Beast made me the happiest woman in the world that evening.

Beast: "I love you Hazel."

Hazel: "I love you too, Beast."

Slowly, but surely, we made countless love until our bodies gave in and we drifted back to sleep. Something happened within me that evening, I gave a part of my soul to him, and I had captured a part of his, it felt so surreal, but it was the most beautiful thing I had ever experienced.

1 Corinthians 14:4 – 8 - "Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away."

Chapter 64

“We generate fears while we sit. We overcome them by action.” – Dr. Henry Link

“Today’s accomplishments were yesterday’s impossibilities.” – Robert H. Schuller

Hazel

One week later...

My birthday had finally come and despite all the excitement and happiness that was surrounding me, I just had a rather peculiar week. Everything just wasn't coming right; it seemed as if everything I did or touched was falling apart – slowly. Beast had to go back to Pretoria for business, but he kept in touch as always. My birthday was on a Saturday, and immediately from that Monday, the very beginning of my birthday week, my entire life felt like a horrid movie. Firstly, I woke up late because I didn't hear my alarm ring that morning, which was very odd because I always heard my alarm clock ring, even though I was generally late because I was just a slow dresser. Then only to find that my phone battery was dead, even though I do recall plugging it into the charger right before bed time. It turns out that the charger somehow fell out of my phone charger socket. From there onwards, my entire day was just ruined, I had to wait for it to charge a little bit before I could call my Uber driver, and then I was late for a lecture. Luckily, Mathilda made notes for me to keep up, she assumed I was having a bad day of which was really true.

I went to bed early that evening, since I was just not feeling that day. On Tuesday, I got up on time, but I kept dropping

things such as my keys, and everything fell out of my bag right before I reached the door. My day was okay but yet another whirlwind. Wednesday, I lost my cellphone somewhere on Campus, because the moment I landed in the Uber, I couldn't find it. I asked James if I could call make a call to my phone using his cellph0one, but it was off. So, I called Beast soon afterwards because I just knew he would worry, and of course, all he said was he'd track it down and if all else failed, he would buy me a new one the following day. I was honestly over the week before Friday. By Friday, I was just tired. Nothing seemed to go my way, and to make matters worse, I kept having the very same recurring dream, except it just felt really cold whenever Malachi's shadow was standing beside me. I tried calling him before I lost my phone, but I never got hold of him. He kept sending me messages however, saying we would speak soon and by the time he was free, I was fast asleep. Talk about time zone.

To make matters worse, by the time I had gone home that Thursday evening, I had a very nasty fall right in front of the gate outside our flat. It was so weird, considering that I was sober, wearing flat shoes and it wasn't even slippery, but

somehow I just tripped on something and fell, I injured my knee as a result. Beast insisted that I go to the doctor so that I could be booked off for a few days, but I had a test to study for which I had to write on Friday, the day before my birthday. Even after the pain killers and antibiotics I had received from the doctor, my knee was so painful. I could barely even sleep. Beast had flown to Stellenbosch to meet me for my birthday, and I honestly thought that we were going to have a quiet day in or something. I didn't really think he had something planned, since he had proposed to me and gave me the highlight of the year. He even found me sleeping that Friday afternoon at about 5pm. So, after all that, I was phoneless for about two days as I had to wait for Beast to personally deliver my new phone. I just knew he was extra like that.

Beast: (softly) "Wake up, Mkami (my wife). I'm home."

Hazel: (groggy) "Beast? Is it really you?"

Beast: "Yes, baby. Wake up."

I struggled to wake up, that is how bad my sleepless nights were.

Beast: (frowning) "Yini (what is it)? Awulali ebsuku (don't you sleep at night)?"

Hazel: (shaking head) “Lately, it has been a struggle. You know just how outrageously ominous my week has been. I just want it to be over already.”

Beast: “No, baby. Birthdays only come once in a year, besides, this one has to be special.”

Hazel: (sigh) “What do you have planned?”

Beast: “Well, Firstly, I brought you your new phone.”

The Hazel that I was days before that shitty week, would have been so pleased, but the tired Hazel was glad for all the effort he had put in, but I was tired.

Hazel: “Thank you, I really appreciate it, baby.”

Beast: “Secondly, I got us two tickets to The United States. We’re going to Massachusetts, baby.”

Well, he was rather pensive enough to think of that idea, it was actually an enthralling idea to go visit Malachi and meet the people who had been a part of his life for nearly two years. I was very excited – from within, I mean my soul truly was happy, but my body could barely respond to the inner joy.

Hazel: (faint smile) "That's fantastic, babe. I'm honestly glad you thought of something like that."

Beast: (frowning) "You really don't look okay."

Hazel: "I'm fine. I just need some rest."

Beast: (sigh) "What a bummer. Our flight is scheduled for tonight at 10pm, but I can reschedule and get us on another flight."

That would have indeed ruined his plans. He knew just how nervous air planes made me but I loved traveling regardless.

Hazel: (shaking head) “No, that would ruin the perfect weekend you have planned for us.”

Beast: “I just want to make sure you’re okay.”

Hazel: “I will be. 10pm is far away. Let me try and rest a bit for two hours. I’m sure I’ll be fine when I get up.”

Beast: “Okay, I’m going to make you some soup to gather your strength.”

He kissed me on my forehead while I dozed off immediately after he left the room. I didn’t even have the energy to look at my new phone. I had yet the very same, odd dream. It startled me after I dreamt of it the second time, and I sent Malachi a message about it, but all he responded with was “I’ll call you soon. Nothing to worry about.” I couldn’t shake the feeling that the dream was trying to tell me something. Despite me praying about it while lighting a candle every night, I just didn’t get any answer or relief from the dream. After two hours of sleeping, Beast woke me up with a bowl of butternut soup.

Beast: "Wake up, baby. Here's some soup, as promised."

Hazel: "Thank you. I appreciate you so much, you do know that, don't you?"

Beast: "I know that, otherwise I wouldn't be here with you, now would I?"

Hazel: "I see."

Beast: "Eat up. We have to get ready for our flight."

Hazel: "Oh, but I haven't packed any clothes yet."

Beast: "No need to worry about that. I already packed everything you might need in your luggage bag."

Hazel: "Bathong (goodness) Beast, you have got to stop spoiling me like this."

Beast: "I told you, baby, it's a funny thing called love. Eat up then take a shower and freshen up. I'll be in the lounge when you're done."

I finished eating that appetizing soup before I headed to the shower. My knee was still painful, but I could walk and do everything I needed to do. I took a quick shower and got dressed, by the time I went out, he was readily waiting for me.

Beast: "Finally, are you ready to go?"

Hazel: "Oh, let me just say goodbye to Otlile and Kg."

Beast: “They’re already out. You won’t find them here.”

Oh, I was really hoping to say goodbye to them, considering the fact that we always spent my birthday together – like a little tripod. Mathilda had also become such a close friend, that I confided in her more than I did in those two. I didn’t feel guilty about it. She gave such sane advice and we could relate very well to one another. Beast and I walked out and got into James’s Uber. He took us straight to the airport at about 8pm and we arrived there at 9pm; just in time to catch our flight. Beast hated being late, and I knew that he only tolerated my chronic late behaviour because he loved me, otherwise he wouldn’t have bothered. We checked in our tickets, and our bags went through the normal process, which gave us just enough time to relax and for me to check out my new phone, yes, another brand new iPhone.

Beast was just something else. He was busy on his phone checking out some business emails and responding to the important ones, and before we knew it, we were ready and on the plane. I really hated flying and that night, he gave me a sleeping tablet, because we were going to fly for about 1 day and 9 minutes, that was literally 24 hours on a plane, with two stops in between for refueling. If I didn't die then, then there was no way I was going to die after another flight. Beast was wide awake, as if he was some kind of robot. By the time we reached midnight, he didn't fail to wish me a Happy Birthday.

Beast: (softly) "Happy Birthday, my love. May this year bring you nothing but happiness, joy and the Grace of God. I love you so much and I can't wait to be known as South Africa's best Psychiatrist's husband."

Hazel: (smiling) "Thank you, baby."

Beast: “Do you mind if we pray?”

Hazel: “Of course not.”

Beast held my hand firmly and he started praying.

Beast: “Dear God, The father of Jesus Christ. We humble ourselves before you. We thank you for being there for us, most importantly

we thank you for the Gift of Life. We wouldn't be here if it weren't for you, oh, Lord. Your mercy and grace has preserved

us and you have continued to show us persistent mercy and love. We ask that you please let these next few days be substantial in Hazel's life, for she is growing into a beautiful woman. May she be wise and as loveable as she is right now, and may fortune and favour be gracious to her for all eternity. We pray this in Jesus' Mighty Name. Amen."

I always enjoyed it whenever Beast prayed for me – for us. He made everything seem like it would be alright, no matter what. It was as if he never went through the hell he went through. I appreciated the light he brought into my life. After exactly 1 day and 9 minutes, we landed in Las Vegas, at about 10:10 am, and I honestly thought we were going straight to Massachusetts, but he obviously had other plans. I thank that long flight, because I was able to sleep for quite some time, and I managed to catch up on some much needed sleep.

Beast: (smiling) "Welcome to Las Vegas, baby!"

Hazel: “Beast, bathong (goodness), do you ever sleep?”

Beast: (laughing) “Yes, I do, but I was so happy that we made it safe and alive, that I just couldn’t wait to get us started.”

Hazel: (sigh) “Okay, but can we at least go freshen up before you take me anywhere, please?”

Beast: “Of course. What do you take me for?”

He laughed while we stopped right outside the airport and got a taxi that took us straight to the Venecian Resort. It was so beautiful and elegant, I don't even think Vintage would have been the best word to describe the place. It had such high walls and the pool water was so clear, I had never seen such a majestic place before in my entire life. I was in such awe, that I contemplated never leaving for a minute.

Beast: (chuckling) "You like what you see?"

Hazel: "Are you kidding me, Beast?! I bloody love it!"

Beast: "I see you are awake now."

Hazel: "I don't even think I want to sleep at all tonight."

Beast: (chuckling) "That can be arranged."

I just blushed as we made our way to our room. The sublime look of the room just made me feel as if I was already on my honeymoon. The bed was so comfortable, I just felt as if I was sleeping in heaven. Beast and I freshened up and got ready. Thank goodness I didn't have to dress up because I was not in the mood. A simple jeans and crop top with sneakers did the trick. Since it was morning and we had been on the plane for a little over a day, he decided it was the perfect time for us to get some breakfast. Of course, it was no ordinary

breakfast. I'd never had seafood boil in my life before, so that was a completely distinctive experience. We had such big lobster, which I had never seen before. I ate like the food was expiring within minutes, and I absolutely loved every minute of it. From there, Beast had a few activities lined up for us for the day, including a full body treatment and massage at the Hotel Spa. They fixed certain parts of my body I even forgot existed. I really needed to blow off some steam in that manner. It felt so nice to have him right there with me, doing all those "girly" things, I mean he even got a facial and masculine manicure and pedicure, and he just loved every minute of it.

I just loved created memories with my Beast. From there, we went into the Spa Jacuzzi and enjoyed some champagne, and then it was a day filled with fun activities, from Bowling at the Brooklyn Bowl Las Vegas, to the Gondola ride at the Venetian. He wanted us to go on the High Roller, which was a beautiful rollercoaster ride, but I couldn't waste the amazing food I had just ingested, so I opted out. He even took me to Madame Tussauds, which was quite an experience. Those wax sculptures look so real, and I adored the one of Kim

Kardashian. From there we went Exotic racing and by the time the day was nearly over, he begged me to go sky diving with him. I really didn't want to, but I had to do at least one thing with him that screamed adventure and just danger. Of course, I felt like my heart was about to go right out of my asshole, but I was so glad I did something like that. Beast dared me to do better, to be better; he dared me to go for the impossible and be whatever it was I wanted to be. That was something I could never change of him and I just loved that quality about him.

Of course, he couldn't let me end my birthday on a boring note, so we went back to the hotel to freshen up for the evening. What we always see on tv is absolutely real – Las Vegas transforms in the evening. It becomes so shiny and there are lights everywhere, almost as if it sleeps during the day and comes alive at night. It is true what people always say, "what happens in vegas, stays in Vegas". It reminded me of the Hangover movies, it was absolutely lit. We had so much fun and when we went to the casino, I just went wild. I didn't really win anything, but he was on a winning streak and we just enjoyed ourselves there. The drinks were flowing and the company was really great. By midnight, we were leaving the

casino, absolutely drunk and incredibly horny. We just couldn't keep our hands off each other.

Beast: (whispering) "Why don't we take this party to our room?"

Hazel: (nodding) "I can never say no to you, Mr. Sibiya."

He smiled at me while we occasionally touched one another until we got to our room. I never thought I could be so sexual; I ripped his clothes off within minutes and I initiated everything. I guess alcohol does make people feel like they are in control even when they are not. Beast and I made such good love to one another, and I wished that the night could be repeated. I just wanted to relive that moment for the rest of

my life. I had the most amazing 19th Birthday, and I couldn't wait to experience more birthdays with my Beast. The following morning, I could hardly keep anything down, I was a real mess, I was paying for all the alcohol I had ingested the previous day, but it was all worth it. Beast found me sleeping in the morning, and of course, he just had to wake me up.

Beast: "Good morning, Sunshine."

Hazel: "Yoh (oh)! Aowa (No), Beast. E sale vroeg (it is still early)."

Beast: "It is 10am in the morning, Hazel. You have got to get up."

Hazel: “How can I when you kept me busy all day and all night?”

Beast: “I did promise you the perfect birthday, so I am not about to stop now. Here, drink this.”

He gave me some mixture of raw egg and vinegar. Apparently it helped with hangovers.

Hazel: “How on earth am I supposed to stomach this, Beast?”

Beast: "You just close your eyes and think of the amazing day we're about to have today."

Hazel: "Can anything top yesterday, though? I am so tired."

Beast: "I keep telling you that you need to exercise with me. You will feel energetic."

I just closed my eyes and tried so hard to stomach his disgusting mixture. It felt so nasty, that my insides were slightly

turning. He ensured that I munched on a lemon soon after ingesting the mixture. I thought we were going to sleep off the hangover, but he had other plans.

Hazel: "So, when are we going to see Malachi?"

Beast: "Soon. He is just a bit busy with school and this major thesis he has been working on. I just thought we would give him some space and enjoy our time here for the time being."

Something didn't seem right with Beast. It felt like he was hiding something from me. He couldn't look me in the eye when I asked him about Malachi, and it seemed as if Malachi was somehow avoiding me. I mean, he didn't even video call me for my birthday, but instead, he sent me some money and

an sms. Whenever I tried calling him, he just never responded. I just didn't know what to make of it, but then, I just decided to go with it. I didn't want to seem like I was paranoid all over again. So, I went to freshen up for the day and off we went. We got on the tour bus and drove around Vegas, but something just felt so off. I couldn't shake the feeling I had deep within my gut. I just didn't understand what it meant, but it just didn't seem right. The entire aura around me seemed off and I even felt Beast was on edge the entire time. He seemed nervous and hardly said much unlike before. While we were on the bus, I just felt so anxious, and something in my mind told me to call Malachi. I called him, but his phone rang and took me to voicemail. I tried again and same thing. I just couldn't shake off the feeling that something odd was happening.

Hazel: (nervously) "Beast, I don't feel so good."

Beast: "What is it?"

Hazel: "I don't know, but I feel like something is not right with Malachi."

Beast: "Baby, you are just over thinking again. Please, try to breathe."

The more I tried to breathe, was the more I ran out of breath. I couldn't believe it and I couldn't shake it off. I tried breathing, but it felt as if I was being suffocated, which made me even more anxious.

Hazel: (frightened) “Beast... I... can’t... breathe...”

Beast: (worried) “Baby, look at me, try to breathe. Deep breaths, come on, Hazel, please.”

I felt myself hyperventilate as I started gasping for air. I could hear everyone around me gasp in shock, while others shouted that someone call 911. It felt like a horrible movie, but it was so real. I couldn’t catch my breath, and the more I looked at Beast, was the more I saw Malachi’s face in front of me, slowly fading away.

Hazel: (hyperventilating) “Malachi...”

From there, Beast's voice slowly drifted away from me and everyone around me was panicking, all their voices were echoed and I slowly saw darkness. Nothing had prepared me for the whirlwind that was about to come my way.

Romans 14:8 - "For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's."

Chapter 65

“Light tomorrow with today!” – Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Beast

The moment Hazel started telling me that she was feeling uneasy about Malachi, I had already known what was wrong. Yes, I felt like complete shit for hiding the truth from her, but how on earth was I going to tell her that her brother saw his own vision of himself dying? He knew he was going to die, and he made me take a vow not to tell her, as it would only upset and disrupt her academics. I couldn't have that. I knew that it was going to be painful to lose my best friend, but I knew that I had to protect Hazel as well. I vowed to him that I'd protect her with all of me. When she started having those hyperventilations, I knew that it was happening, those two were so connected, it was only a biological factor that they were not twins. She felt him dying, literally. It was so painful for me to witness her going through all of that, while I knew the whole truth of what was happening. He strictly instructed me to give her the best birthday ever, as it would be the last birthday of hers that he would ever be alive.

He didn't want to be near her, for he didn't want her last memory of her birthday to be as bad as her witnessing his death, so he opted for dying far away from her. Massachusetts, wasn't that far from Las Vegas, so I ensured that we were close enough for her to say goodbye to him for good. When the paramedics finally came, she was unconscious, but still breathing. They responded so quickly, I was actually impressed. We were taken to the nearest hospital and I was told that she experienced a panic attack, but a much more severe one than usual, for she had actually fainted. I couldn't face her, I mean we weren't married yet and already I had lied. I kept such a big secret from her, but I only did it to honour the wishes of the dying. I couldn't let her know, it would have broken her more than she'd ever know. After the briefing I had received from the doctor, I went to her room and found that she had woken up, but she was still anxious.

Beast: "Baby, are you okay? How are you feeling?"

The moment she saw me she started crying.

Hazel: “Bethuel, tell me the truth. What is actually going on with Malachi? He’s been behaving so weird lately, and he hasn’t called me in so long – not even on my birthday, and it is so unlike him. I keep having this really bad dream about him, I don’t see him in the dream any more. I can’t even explain it, but I can feel my gut. Something really horrible is happening to my brother and I have a feeling you know. Tell me, please. What is going on? Why is he not answering his phone?”

Beast: (teary) “Hazel, I - “

Hazel: (interrupting) “Don’t you dare lie to me, Bethuel! I know you know! Please, tell me. Where is my brother?”

Beast: “I - “

I was about to respond to her by derailing the situation, when I received a call from Malachi’s girlfriend, Beverly.

Beast: “Hi, Bev.”

Beverly: (crying) "Hi, Beast. Please, put Hazel on the phone."

Beast: "Sure, I'll put you on speaker."

Hazel: (distraught) "What is it? What's wrong?"

Beast: "It's Beverly."

Hazel: (anxious) "Beverly! Is everything okay? Where's Malachi? Did something happen?"

I could hear from Beverly's voice that she was in a real mess.

Beverly: (crying) "I'm so sorry, Hazel. Malachi is... He was involved in a car accident."

Those few words right there sent Hazel into a state of manic depression.

Hazel: (shouting) “What do you mean?! No! He literally just texted me a few hours ago! What happened?! Is he alright?! Oh, Beverly, please tell me he is going to be alright!”

Beverly: “He doesn’t have much time left. I think he is hanging on so that he can say goodbye to you – both of you. Flight time from Las Vegas to Boston, Massachusetts is about 4 hours. I’m afraid that is terribly long, so I have requested that a helicopter come and fetch you guys. I hope that is alright with you.”

I could see that Hazel was not coping with the news and she was barely registering what Beverly was telling us.

Beast: “Yes, sure, Beverly. We would really appreciate that. We shall get ready.”

Beverly: “Okay, I’ll send the location where the helicopter will fetch you guys. I’ll see you soon.”

Hazel was still asking so many questions, she was distraught and in so much disbelief. My heart was aching for her, knowing that I was part of the problem made me feel a lot worse.

Hazel: (shaking head) “No, no, no. This can't be. I mean, this must be a mistake, right, Bethuel? Yesterday, just yesterday I celebrated my 19th birthday. So, how on earth was Malachi involved in a car accident? This makes no sense.”

Beast: (teary) “The only way we will know for sure what happened is if we go see him, Hazel. Come, I’ll help you up.”

Hazel: “I’m fine. I can walk. All I know is that this is some serious mistake and that my brother will live. There’s no way Malachi can die now. There’s no fucking way.”

Malachi

I hadn’t been myself for the past few weeks. I mean sure, who would act normally knowing that they are going to die and when? I was so perplexed, that all I was thinking about was Hazel, my unborn child and Beverly. Beverly was taking it really

well, she understood me and my gift from the onset and of course, most white people grow up with the reality of death surrounding them and knowing that they have to go through that as part of life. They are prepared for it when the moment comes hence they accept grief a lot better than most people. I was so worried about Hazel, I mean I knew that she would have a hard time accepting my departure from this earth. I was ready to leave until I started feeling my little man kicking inside of Bev's stomach. I was ready to leave, until I saw Hazel's future, and it looks hellish. My poor sister was about to go through so many turmoils, that would either make or break her. What kind of person would I have been had I not pleaded with my ancestors? I knew the moment I would die, so I didn't want to be around Beast and Hazel when it happened, hence I refused to spend her birthday with her. I was actually supposed to depart on her birthday, but I prayed and begged for an extension. I mean

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no one can bargain with God, but I had to plead with them. I didn't want her to spend the rest of her life knowing that her birthday and the day of my death were the very same day. I could feel my mother's ancestors calling me, telling me that the time was near when I decided to go for a walk. I told Beverly I'd be right back, when I knew that I wanted it to happen very far

away from her. While walking on the side walk, in our peaceful neighbourhood, I saw a car speeding and even though I was right on the side walk, the car moved off the road and hit me, while I was just walking. When your time of death has been signed off, no one can dispute. I could feel my body in so much pain, but my spirit was at peace. I knew that I didn't have any grudges with anyone, so I would depart in peace and rather quickly, but while my soul was still preparing to transition, I had to beg.

Malachi: "Koko (granny), I am begging you. Please, give me a chance to at least let Hazel get some closure."

Dimakatso: "Malachi, I've given you so many chances. As you can see we have come to fetch you."

Malachi: “I know, I am not disputing your choices and my time, but I just want her to say goodbye to me. Please, you know how fragile she is.”

Dimakatso: “Malachi, as we have told you before, your time has come, mainly because your job in this world is done. You would have just created more damage than good had you stayed in this world any further. You were going to treat Hazel like an egg, and you would have been the result of her not being able to reach her full potential. We spoke about this. She has to go through this – it is written in her book of life. She has to transition like this – the very same way you have reached your destiny. She is a lot stronger than you think, but unfortunately, for her it will take much more time than it did with you to reach her full potential.”

Malachi: “But she will marry the wrong person, Koko (granny).”

Dimakatso: (shaking head) “That is her choice to make, the same way you were allowed to make yours. She won’t be abandoned – you will be there right by her side as her guardian angel and you will shed light whenever you need to. If you wish, you can also give her your gift, or part of it. You know all of it. We have prepared you, my son. You are blessed, more blessed than others.”

Malachi: “What about Mama?”

Dimakatso: “See what I mean? You have always sacrificed yourself for others. That one still has a long way to go. I have given her a long rope to hang herself. Her father hasn’t spoken to her in years, and you know what it is like when your

ancestors decide to turn their back on you. Let them be, Malachi. Your son and Beverly will be alright.”

Malachi: “Okay, just give me some time until Hazel and Beast say goodbye, then I will leave with you.”

Dimakatso: “Fine, but after today, you have to leave with us. We cannot wait any longer than that.”

Malachi: “Thank you, Koko (granny).”

Hazel

I was so anxious the entire ride through. Beast was quiet, and I could sense just how perturbed he was as well. He was usually so jolly around me, but his silence said a lot. So, he actually believed that Malachi wasn't going to make it? Well, I had faith and I was sure that God would save my brother. I was praying silently throughout the entire helicopter ride. It took us two hours less than it would have with the plane and we finally made it to the hospital Malachi was at. I didn't want to focus on anything else – Malachi was my priority. We were taken to his ward where we met the distraught Beverly. She was already showing and she crying. I could tell by her swollen eyes that she hadn't slept a wink. My guess was that he had the accident hours before they called us. Why didn't they call us immediately after it happened?

Hazel: "Hey, Beverly. How is he?"

Beverly: "Oh, thank goodness, you two are here. He is in a really bad shape. The nurses say that he is actually brain dead and that they are waiting for the next of kin to pull the plug on the machine. I didn't want to do that before you arrived."

Hazel: (Frowning) "Wait a minute. You want to remove him from life support?"

Beverly: "Well, yes, I mean it is only right. He won't wake up from this."

Hazel: (shouting) “How sure are you of that, Beverly?! Don’t you believe in God?! In miracles?!”

Beverly: “Hazel, he has lost all of his brain activity. The machine is breathing for him. His heart isn’t even pumping on his own.”

I didn’t even want to hear what she wanted to say further. I was so annoyed, and actually disgusted that she wanted to kill my brother. They weren’t even married for crying out loud. That was just how angry I felt. When I walked in, I could barely even recognize my brother. His entire face was draped in thick bandages and all I could see was his shut eyes peeping through. He was tied onto machines, and the breathing was just abnormal.

Hazel: (crying) “Abuti (brother), it’s me. Please, wake up. You and I still have so many dreams to achieve. You have shown me so many things I had never seen before. You have taught me so much, Malachi. Please, you have to wake up. You have to see me graduate, get married. What about your son? He still needs you as a father.”

I felt Beast’s alluring aura when he entered the room and gently held my shoulder.

Hazel: (crying) “Malachi, please! I need you.”

Beast just held his hand firmly without saying a word. His tears were doing the talk for him. Beast was just crying silently, while I was losing my mind. Everyone around me had assumed,

actually they had made up their minds that Malachi was going to die.

Hazel: "Beast, come on. Why don't you have faith in him? He will wake up. He jus thas to."

Beast: "I'm sorry, baby, but we need to let him go."

I burst into such melancholic tears, that I just couldn't believe it. I bet the entire hospital heard me wail. I cried so much, shouted and screamed and the moment I heard the machine beep into one, long sound, I knew that Malachi had gone.

Hazel: (crying) “Malachi, no! Please, don’t leave me! I still need you! Don’t do this to me!”

The moment I saw his chest stop moving, I knew that something was ripped from my chest. I could never be the same again. How on earth was I going to manage that? I had to try and adjust to life without Malachi, my only brother – my ride or die. I couldn’t even phatom it. It took me quite a while. My Malachi was gone and I had to face life without him.

Luke 23:43 - “And he said to him, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.”

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“Keep your face always toward the sunshine, and shadows will fall behind you.” – Walt Whitman

Beast

My heart was aching beyond any comparable emotion. I couldn't stand looking at Hazel being in so much pain. The moment she heard that machine beep, she knew he was gone for good, I could tell she was going through more than just emotional pain. She was feeling pain in every way possible. She was screaming so loudly, the entire hospital must have heard.

Beast: (crying) “Hazel, baby, please. We need to let go.”

Hazel: (crying) "No! I can't let him leave me like this, Beast! I can't!"

Beast: "You have to, please."

Hazel: (wailing) "What am I going to do without him, Beast? What will I do?"

Beast: (voice breaking) "You... You have me. I'm here. Come on."

Hazel: (shaking head) “I can’t. Please, wake up, Malachi. Please, Abuti (Brother).”

Beverly: (teary) “Let me get a doctor to sort her out.”

I just nodded in thanks, while Hazel was growing even more hysterical. She refused to let go of Malachi – she didn’t even want anyone to switch off the machines. The moment the nurses came in, they sedated her, while I took my chance to say goodbye to my best friend.

Beast: (crying) “Good bye, brother. I promise to honour your wishes. You have been an amazing friend, one I’ll never forget. Look out for me on the other side, will you? I love you. Until we meet again.”

I followed the nurses to a room where they took Hazel. Everything was so busy, we didn't even get a chance to check up on Beverly.

Beast: "How are you? I'm so sorry, I never got the chance to check on you the moment we got here."

Beverly: (teary) "It's alright. I understand. You know, he prepared me for this moment, but it doesn't get any better. I'm only trying to hang in there because of our son, you know."

Beast: (nodding) “I feel horrible. I’m not a good person. You and I – we were prepared for this, but Hazel on the other hand is just in shock. She won’t cope.”

Beverly: “That is what you’re here for, Beast. You will help her through this. Malachi might have been selfish for not telling her, but how well do you think she would have handled it had he told her?”

Beast: “Are you going to be alright? I mean you have to rest now.”

Beverly: "John 14:1-4; ""Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. And you know the way to where I am going. I'll be just fine. My father is on his way to pick me up."

Beast: "I'm sorry you have to go through this. I mean, you have enough on your plate already and now you have to organize the funeral."

Beverly: (shaking head) "Malachi lived his entire life in South Africa. If you don't mind, you guys can organize it. I'll be there for the funeral, though. Everyone else would love to give him a proper send off."

Beast: (nodding) “I’ll organize a repatriation for him. You are one of a kind, Bev. Malachi was blessed to have you.”

Beverly: “No, I’m the blessed one. Thanks to him, I get to keep his legacy going with his son. I’ll see you soon, okay?”

I gave her a comforting hug before we parted ways, and then I went to Hazel’s hospital room. She was sleeping due to the injection she was given, but I just took a moment to look at her. I felt as if I had betrayed her. The entire secret was eating me up from the inside, making my entire intestines turn. I felt like such a hypocrite, I told her I’d protect her at all costs, but I lied to her – to her face. I literally slept right next to her knowing very well her brother was going to die. What kind of man did that make me? I didn’t know how much longer I was

prepared to keep that secret, but I knew that I would have had to spit it out sooner rather than later.

What turned out to be the best birthday for her, became our worst night mare. I couldn't sit around and mope all night, I had to organize with a burial company back home to have Malachi's body taken back and prepped for his burial. Then there was his mother on top of it all. How would Hazel handle her at a time like that? She and Bella were set for release in two days. They were lucky enough they didn't stay until the end of June, and on top of it all Bella was due soon and all I knew was that the father of her child wanted nothing to do with her nor that baby. It was a mess, and Hazel's exams were about to start. All I knew was that I'd be there for her in every way possible and I'd try my level best to be as supportive as possible. The only fortunate part about it all was that Malachi asked to be buried back home, in Mogalakwena, instead of Atteridgeville. He said the reason for that was that he had such a hard time belonging in this world, so he wanted to be laid right next to his maternal family, where he would finally belong in death. I took a moment to pray as I held Hazel's hand, for I needed all the strength in the world.

Beast: (praying) “Father God, it is I, Bethuel, your son. Lord, I know that I am most probably one of the least deserving of your mercy, grace and kindness, but all I ask of you now is strength, lord. Grant me the strength to get through these coming few days, I ask you to please help my girlfriend Hazel get through this difficult time in her life. She needs your strength and guidance way more than I do. I ask that you bring peace in our lives and help Malachi have a safe journey to the spirit world. He has indeed been one of a kind and even though we may feel that his departure was way too soon, we may not question your ways, but we should trust in You. I ask this in Jesus’ Name. Amen.”

I left her for a while as I walked out of the hospital to make a few calls and I took a few smokes while at it. I didn’t know what was going to happen, but all I knew was that Hazel was going to be alright. She just had to be.

One week later...

Hazel

It had been such a dreadful week for me – for all of us, actually. I explained the situation to my lecturers, and they gave me an extension for the exams that I had to write during that week. I was such a mess, I couldn't eat, sleep, I could barely even talk. I was most probably the only one who struggled with coming to terms with my brother's death. Even though everything seemed so bleak, I finally received an email from Finance, stating that I had received a bursary that already paid for my entire four year course up front, and that all costs included accommodation fees, and pocket money of R10 000

per month. It was so insane, and unrealistic, that I actually thought it was perhaps a scam. I even called finance to make sure and indeed it was true. I asked Beast about it briefly, and he told me that God was working over time to provide for me. I was a little relieved that he would get some relief in paying for my fees, although I had no idea which bursary fund that was. Finance refused to grant me their name, as they said it was a fund that wanted to remain anonymous.

Immediately after I signed and emailed them back the documents, since I wasn't in Stellenbosch any more, I received my first allowance. I mean, that was really strange, to be honest. Accommodation had its own separate account from the fund, all I had to do was give them the details of my landlord in which they would deposit the rental every month. I was heartbroken the entire week. I kept looking at all my videos with Malachi and even though I dreamt of him a few times, telling me that all would be alright and that I needed to trust God, it still didn't take the pain away. Beast and I went home the following day after Malachi died, and the following day after that, my mother and Bella were released from Prison. They were completely different – or so they said. They

asked me for forgiveness, and they both said they had learnt their lesson.

I was in such a bad space, I had no time to evaluate what they were even saying to me was true or not. We didn't have the time to touch base, as the funeral was going to be held in Mogalakwena. My mother was very much displeased about that idea, and even contemplated not going –all because she couldn't face her siblings. I didn't give a fuck. If she refused, I was going to leave her right there in Atteridgeville. Beast and I left for Mogalakwena along with Bella and my mother on Tuesday, and we agreed to have the funeral on Thursday. Malachi was no ordinary man, so it was best to bury him as soon as possible instead of delaying the whole funeral.

Of course, upon our arrival, Aunt Hunadi was more than livid to see my mother, but she was called to order immediately and she tried to contain herself while we were there. My mother was being her usual self, she would disappear in the morning to the nearby shebeen and only come back later on when we had a prayer session. Bella was so hands on, I was even scared. I

hardly said a word to her, but she kept wanting to talk to me. I still hadn't healed from all the pain they had caused me, but I wanted to focus on one painful moment at a time. Beast was so hands on, he was supportive and he was working overtime, whenever they needed extra charcoal or wood for the fire, he was there. When they needed someone to carry things – he was there. I was so proud to see him there. Even Aunt Portia came along with Abel and everyone who knew our mother's family came daily to assist with the preparations for the funeral. I was mostly in my room, I wasn't allowed to do much because they said I needed to rest. I had no idea why, though. I needed to keep busy, so I used all my spare time studying. When the evening before the funeral came, we all knew that the body had to arrive at the house at 5pm, from there it would stay there in one of the bedrooms and then the rest of the people were going to cook and prepare for the funeral's feast. I didn't want to tag along to the Mortuary because I knew that seeing Malachi's lifeless body like that would break me even further. I had tried so hard not to cry ever since the Monday, so I didn't want to crumble. Beast went along with my uncles, while my mother went AWOL yet again when she needed to go along with them. Bella wasn't allowed as she was pregnant and already showing. It was customary, so they said. I was in my room which I was sharing with Beast the entire week

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preparing myself for the body's arrival when Beast came in to check on me. He didn't say much, but he hugged me from behind and just inhaled my scent for a few minutes.

Beast: "I'm sorry I haven't been able to check on you much nowadays. It's been hectic. How are you doing?"

Hazel: (sigh) "I'm trying. At least I haven't cried ever since we got here."

Beast: "Crying is not a crime, baby. I know tonight is going to feel like the final before the final moment, you know. I need

you to be strong and hang in there. I'll be right by your side tonight. Let me just change."

I nodded and he quickly changed. He smelled like fire and smoke half the time because he was so busy. I hadn't seen him in a suit the entire week and when he came back from the mortuary, when they had gone to bathe Malachi's body, he was a real mess. He drank half a bottle of whiskey and still wasn't drunk after that. It really broke him seeing his friend so lifeless. We walked out of the bedroom and went to the lounge. I was growing even more anxious when I heard people start singing outside. I could even feel my own heartbeat beating the silence out of my body. Beast stood up with me and held my hand firmly. I then saw the white coffin enter the house. I could feel my entire body almost going into shock. My mother was there, and I had no idea where she came from because she was gone the entire day. It only took her to start crying, and then each one of us started crying one by one after that. She started wailing loudly, and even though she was annoying half the people there, they let her be.

Binah: (weeping) “Oh, Malachi, ngwana wa ka (my child)! O ntlogeletseng (why did you leave me)?! If wena o se teng ko hlokomela ke mang (if you’re gone, who’s going to take care of me)?!”

She started crying, and I felt warm tears make their appearance in my eyes. The coffin was opened, so that we could view him. Slowly, they all started and they cried. I just couldn’t do it.

Beast: (whispering) “Come on, I got you.”

I just nodded and felt my entire body wobble in weakness. I could barely move, but somehow Beast was helping me do it. I caught a glance of a few people crying, and I even saw Aunt Hunadi comforting my mother. Grief is something else, truly. We slowly made our way to the coffin and I saw Malachi so peaceful – he was the most peaceful he had ever been in his entire life. I didn't see him smile, he was just – sleeping. He was dressed in a beautiful white suit and looked like an image of perfection. The moment I realized he wasn't smiling nor breathing, looking at his pale face made it all a reality. I just felt warm tears flow down my cheeks and I couldn't feel my legs any more. I was about to land on the floor, but Beast held me firmly. I couldn't speak, all I did was cry silently as he carried me back to my bedroom. I could hear people instructing Beast on what to do with me, but everything sounded so inaudible. I felt so much pain in my heart, I felt as if it was constricted, and being crushed firmer and firmer the more I tried to breathe. I saw Aunt Hunadi bring a glass of sugar water and handed it to Beast.

Hunadi: "Here, give her this. It will calm her down."

Beast: "Drink some, baby."

I took the glass with my shaky hands and gulped the water down. I looked up and saw my Beast's eyes were bloodshot. I felt completely guilty for not even asking him how he was doing. I just held his beautiful face and stared him deep in his eyes. He didn't say much, he just let the tears run down his face.

Hazel: (sobbing) "What are we going to do without him, Beast?"

Beast: “We’ll fulfill his wishes and live, baby. It will be hard at first, but we will heal. As long as we have one another, we will heal – together.”

I nodded as we sobbed silently in each other’s arms. I must have dozed off because I woke up in Beast’s arms. When I looked at the time, it was about 3am in the morning. Usually, Beast woke me up to pray with him at that time, but he must have been so worn out from working the entire week, that he didn’t get up at all. Something must have woken me, because I didn’t set an alarm for prayer. The room felt so odd, as if there was another entity in the room besides Beast and I. It was dark, but the lights outside made it clear enough to see within the room, and I could hear the people outside making fire and cooking while talking and drinking. I looked around and I saw something really unbelievable – something I had never experienced in my entire life and I never thought could even be experienced. Malachi was standing right there before me, dressed in the white suit that Beast had bought for him, he wasn’t alone – he had my grandmother, great grandmother, my

grandfather, Mam'Rose and so many others I didn't recognize. The room felt so peaceful, so spiritually protected. They were all smiling at me – unlike in the dream I kept having before Malachi passed on.

Hazel: (teary) "Malachi..."

Malachi: "I'm here, sis. I'll always be here. You have no reason to be afraid. All of us you see standing before you will always be there to protect you. Do not fear."

Hazel: "I wish you didn't have to go."

Malachi: “Everyone has their own race to run, Hazel. One day you will look back at this day and not cry any more. I have to go now, always remember that I love you no matter what. Most importantly – don't ever forget to pray; no matter how dark it gets.”

I was about to respond, but they all just disappeared. I thought it was most probably a dream, but I could still smell him in the room. I had a spiritual epiphany and it felt so amazing. It brought a little bit of peace in my heart knowing that I got hear him say goodbye to me. It was a little scary, though. How on earth would one explain that they keep seeing their deceased family members in real life?

The funeral day finally came, and with everyone running up and down to prepare for the funeral, I found Beverly already dressed in the house that morning.

Hazel: (surprised) "Hey, Bev. You made it."

Beverly: (smiling) "Of course. I wouldn't miss it for the world. So sorry I could only come now. I have been so stressed the past few days that my doctor ordered me on bed rest. My baby was in distress and I have developed a mild case of pregnancy hypertension."

That was understandable. Imagine looking forward to the birth of your first child while preparing to bury the child's father.

Hazel: "I understand. Did you come alone?"

Beverly: "No, I came with my father. Go get dressed, I'll meet you outside."

I nodded as I quickly went to the bathroom. Beast was probably already dressed. I didn't get why he didn't wake me, though. I got dressed and for once, my mother was dressed and on time. She was in the tent, wearing Sunglasses right in the front next to Bella. I went to sit next to Beverly, as Beast came to sit next to me. I saw so many people in the tent, and some I had never even seen before. I saw quite a few white people – besides Beverly, and it turned out my brother had touched so many people's lives while he was in America. The very first person who spoke about him really amazed us all. His name was Professor Atkin.

Prof. Atkin: "I greet you all in the name of our loving Father Jesus Christ. My name is Professor William Atkin, and I met Malachi almost two years ago when he first came to study at Harvard. He was one of my students, but his intelligence and spirit just caught my eye from the moment I started engaging in him. My life was a real mess before I met him; I was a chronic drunk, which caused me to become a horrible father and an even worse husband. I grew up knowing Jesus, but I guess I never really had faith in Him - I didn't really believe in Him. Until Malachi showed me what my life would be like if I invited Jesus into my life wholeheartedly. I changed my entire life, I became a full believer and I started seeing miracles come my way. I changed, and in turn my family life became better and my wife no longer wanted to divorce me. When Malachi opened his own church, I couldn't even believe how many people were flocking to his church. He has helped so many people. When he came to me one night telling me that he saw a vision of himself dying, and that his time on earth was nearing its end, I thought he was going mad, but when he gave me his full thesis he had been working on, I knew he was serious. He wanted to change people's lives even while he'd be gone. In turn, I agreed to publish his thesis, and his book will soon be

available. To Malachi's family, you may feel robbed by losing a loved one as great as Malachi, but rest assured that he changed so many people's lives and that God will indeed comfort you all. Ecclesiastes 3:1-17 says; "For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing. May God be with you all throughout this difficult time."

I was so shocked but inspired at the same time. I never knew what my brother was up to back in the U.S. I was even more shocked when he said that Malachi saw a vision of himself dying, which made me wonder if Beast knew anything about it or maybe Beverly. I mean she took it rather well, unlike me. Beverly was the next one to speak.

Beverly: “I have known Malachi from the moment he landed in the United States. He found me broken, dirty, drug addicted and he didn’t even judge me. He was a student himself, fresh from South Africa, yet he saw great potential within me. He helped me get clean and he helped me deal with my demons and get closer to God. When he told me his story, of how he became a product of rape, but he chose to live his life as a child of God, I was in disbelief. I too felt that my problems were not that big. I turned to drugs because I couldn’t face my family, I felt like a real disappointment and when I had to face them, I chose the easy way out – drugs. Malachi was the best thing to ever happen to me, and in turn God blessed me with the ability to carry his seed. My love, I promise you that I will fulfil your wishes, I promise you that your legacy will live on and that our memories will never fade. I got to know love, God’s love through you. Until we meet again, my love.”

There was so much I didn’t know about Beverly and what she had just said was completely new to me. I looked at her and thought, “there’s no way she didn’t know he was going to

die". I felt a little played. If she really did know, why didn't she tell me? A few other speakers spoke further about the beautiful soul Malachi was and they said that they had already built a center to help drug dependent individuals in his honour back in the United States. I was rather amazed; Malachi did great things even though I felt his life was short-lived. God has plans for each one of us, and we never know when our last day will be on this earth. He was fortunate enough to know when he was going to die, so he got time to get his ducks in a row. That for me, was a real blessing.

John 16:33 - "I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."

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“The bad news is time flies. The good news is you’re the pilot.”

– Michael Altshuler

Hazel

The funeral was a funeral – filled with tears and all kinds of woeful emotions, but overall, I was actually glad it was over. I hated crying for so long. Of course after eating it was time for the after tears. We all know black people and funerals - they dress up for the occasion and use it as a get together. Beast was right there with me and my friends Otlile and Kg couldn’t make it, though we did speak via video call. Beast ensured that he got us plenty of alcohol, and he could finally rest. My uncles thanked him for all his hard work and were praising him so much. My cousin Sinah sat with us, probably because we got along and also, because we just didn’t want to mingle with old people after the funeral. The funeral was just exhausting and we just wanted to blow off some steam with people our age. Well, Beast was not my age, but he could relate. I was just praying that my mother didn’t ruin everything, since she behaved the entire time. Just when I had faith in her, she decided to show us her true colours. She walked up to us and I

could smell the alcohol on her from a mile away – though she was trying to walk as straight as an arrow, but I could tell she had been drinking. One would have thought that prison made her hate alcohol, but it didn't seem to have done much.

Binah: (stuttering) “Hazel, ngwana wa ka (my child). Ntlatse ka 20 nyana ke reke something ke kgone go tshwana le bana ba bangwe (Give me a R20 or so so that I can buy something and be like other people).”

There wasn't even a please in there.

Hazel: “Mama, maybe you should go lie down a bit.”

Binah: (angrily) “Oho, I see. Now that you have your gangster boyfriend by your side you think you are better than me, neh (right)?”

She just had to go there. I was so drained and I could tell Beast was also not in a fighting mood.

Hazel: “Mama, I - “

Beast: (interrupting) “Sis’Bee, here. Take this and go, please.”

He just handed her a R200 note just like that? I didn't like the fact that my mother enjoyed embarrassing me and the only way to shut her up was to buy her alcohol. Instead of saying thank you, she grabbed the note from Beast in a heart beat as if he would have changed his mind and insulted him.

Binah: (clicking tongue) "Mxm, o nagana gore ke tlo go rata wena ge o mfa tshelete (you think I'll like you if you give me money)? I still think you're no good for my daughter. She deserves better. Your dirty money means nothing."

I was so annoyed, that I started boiling from within, but Beast told me to let it go.

Beast: "Let it go."

Hazel: "Why did you do that?"

Beast: "Because I don't want Malachi's funeral to be tainted by bad behaviour. Let it go."

I just chose to listen to him and as she was about to move away from us, something beyond us happened.

Selaelo: (shocked) “Heh bathong (my goodness)! Binah Makwetla! Ke wena o (Is this you)?!”

That lady looked so happy to see my mother, she even leaned in for a hug, but my mother stepped back in refusal. She looked so beautiful, so sophisticated and she looked more or less my mother’s age.

Selaelo: (frowning) “Hao (goodness), Binah! Ga o sa nkgopola (you don’t remember me)? It’s me, Selaelo. Your best friend whom you ditched years ago.”

Binah: (embarrassed) “I... I don’t know you.”

Selaelo: (chuckling) “Bathong (goodness) Binah. Are you serious?”

Binah: “Yoh, mosadi towe (for goodness's sake woman)! I just said I don't know you. Leave me in peace.”

My mother just left the woman standing there in shock, leaving us stunned as well.

Selaelo: (smiling) “Hi, you must be Hazel. You are so beautiful – even more beautiful than your mother. I'm Selaelo, your mother and I were best friends while growing up.”

She had extended her hand for a handshake, and as I extended mine to shake hers, she pulled me in for a hug.

Selaelo: “Oh, God knows how I have been looking for your mother. Ever since I saw her in Jo’burg with Malachi when he was a child and that white man, I honestly thought she would finally live her dream of being a doctor, you know. It is just so sad that Malachi had to die so young, but only God knows best.”

She was rather chatty.

Hazel: “Yes, re tla reng (what can we say)?”

Selaelo: “Yes, I assume that white man is your father? I mean no offence, but you don’t really look black. Your mother was beautiful back in the day, it is just so sad that she had to turn out the way she did, you know?”

My goodness, it seemed as if people enjoyed talking about what a failure my mother was. Yes, she was a mean person, but she was still my mother. I didn’t enjoy hearing people belittle and badmouth her like that.

Hazel: "It was nice seeing you, Ma, but I have to go somewhere else now."

Selaelo: "Oh, of course, I am so sorry for delaying you. But if you ever come to Jo'burg, feel free to contact me. I have a big house that will accommodate you all. It would be so lovely to catch up with your mother when she is sober."

She just kept going and refused to see past the annoyance on our faces.

Hazel: "It was really nice seeing you."

Selaelo: "Of course, bye."

Beast: (shaking head) "O nale nako (you sure have time), baby."

I just ignored that and we spoke of something else. The day went on and everyone was already drunk by 6pm. All I wanted to do was sleep and get up just in time for our trip back home. Beast and I went to bed and we just slept the entire night through. Our bodies were tired and we just needed the rest. First thing in the morning, I was woken up by movement in the room. When I opened my eyes, I realized I was in Beast's arms, so it couldn't have been him in the room. I checked my phone and it was only 5am, but the sun was already scorching hot. I looked up to find something really disturbing.

Hazel: (shocked) “Mama?! O etsang (what are you doing)?”

My own mother was busy searching my bag. She was so busy being a thief that she didn't even see me wake up. At first she was startled, but then she decided to be the bad bitch she had always been.

Binah: (shocked) “Ah, man ne ke batla something for one nyana (I just wanted some money to buy one drink).”

Hazel: (angrily) “So you decided to help yourself to my belongings?!”

Beast woke up and was startled by the noise.

Beast: "What's going on?"

Hazel: (fuming) "My own mother is going through my bag that's what."

Beast: "Sis' Bee - "

Binah: (interrupting) “Hayi (no), man, le wena (not you too)! You two like acting like you are better than all of us. I just wanted a mere R20! 20 fela (a twenty only)!”

Well, instead of just taking a R20 from my bag, she took a few R100 notes. I was about to get out of bed to sort her out, but Beast held me back.

Beast: “Mo tlogele (let her be).”

Binah: “Ja, utlwella juba ya gao ya tsotsi (yes, listen to your thug boyfriend).”

She threw the bag on the floor and looked at me unashamedly.

Binah: "Don't look at me like that. I'm going to pay you back."

She just walked out leaving me fuming.

Hazel: "Why did you let me leave her?"

Beast: "She's not worth it. Save that energy for your exams coming up."

Hazel: "But she took our money Beast!"

Beast: "It's just money. E tlo fela e seng kgale (it will be finished soon). She is just nursing her depressed life. Let her be. Pick your battles."

I was highly annoyed, even though deep down I knew he was right. I just didn't want him to act like it was okay for her to do that to us every chance she got. It just wasn't right. I went to get ready and after I left the bathroom, I saw Bella who was on her way there. She greeted me and I immediately smelled the alcohol on her breath. I just passed her in annoyance, I mean

who drinks while 7 months pregnant? Everyone knew just how fatal that was to children. I was so over them, I mean they couldn't even act responsible just for once. I wasn't perfect - I was nowhere near perfect, but I expected them to at least try to change for themselves and for the better. I knew that Bella was just being pretentious, and that her acting nice all of a sudden was just a stunt. It just was too good to be real. She was never nice to me – ever. It was finally time to say goodbye to the family and as much as I hated it, we had to drive back to Pretoria with Bella and my mother. My mother had the nerve to wait for us with a paper bag full of alcohol she bought with the money she had stolen from my purse. She deliberately waited for us as if we were going to leave her. Actually, I was going to ask Beast to leave her, but he was in no mood to argue with anyone. The moment Beast unlocked the car, my mother was the very first person to get in at the back seat. Bella greeted everyone goodbye, and then Beast and I followed. I promised to keep in touch with Sinah, she was the nicest of them all. Of course, Aunt Celia was nowhere to be found, she left immediately after we came back from the graveyard. I still didn't understand why she was so bitter. She and my mother didn't even speak at all.

Hunadi: “Take good care of yourselves and come back soon. The next time you come, it had better be for your wedding, akere (right)?”

Beast: “Rest assured, aunty, we will be back soon.”

Hunadi: “Make sure you don’t sleep anywhere near my crazy sister. That one can kill you. Ga tseye gabotse (she’s not well in the head).”

Hazel: “Speak soon. Bye.”

I didn't want to entertain any more conversations about Binah Makwetla, I mean she was like the celebrity that entire week. Everyone was so shocked to see her and most were more shocked that she was even still alive. She ignored and dodged everyone who wanted to ask her about her life. The moment we got into the car, she just had to annoy us.

Binah: "Yoh (oh)! Le lena le tseya nako ya lena (you guys sure do take your time), man. I mean we were supposed to be on the road already."

Hazel: (irritated) "Mama, e le gore o jagetse eng (what are you rushing for)?"

Binah: "For my house. I have to clean it, in case you forgot I have been imprisoned all thanks to my daughter for the past five months."

Hazel: "I thought you said you changed. That little speech you gave me before you were released. Or was it all lies?"

Binah: "I have changed, you know, it doesn't mean I am not angry."

I just ignored her and decided to speak to Beast the entire way. She just tried her best to annoy us, and I was so embarrassed. I even started wondering if Beast actually wanted to marry a girl

like me, who came from such a dysfunctional family. My mother kept demanding that we increase the volume and play certain songs, skip certain songs and to add to our woes, she kept asking us to stop along the way for her to urinate, while drinking on the way home! Beast begged me not to burst or lash out the entire way and I tried my best, but my anger bottled up in my throat like a huge golf ball restricting my breathing. I just wanted to tell her where to get off. How could she embarrass me like that in front of Beast? That was my future husband and she still insulted him every now and then, but he just took it and didn't respond. When we finally landed in Pretoria, she had to ask for food.

Binah: "Yoh, nna gape ke tshwere ke tlala (Oh, I'm so hungry). Aren't we going to stop by for food?"

I was boiling. I wanted to speak, but Beast stopped me – yet again.

Beast: "Okay, we can stop by a drive thru, Sis'Bee. What do you want to eat?"

Binah: "Aowa (no)

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I want to dine in like white people do. It's been a while, I'm pretty sure you're used to that now, aren't you, Hazel? Since well you live with a man."

I just couldn't take it any more. I went against Beast's wishes and just burst.

Hazel: (annoyed) “For crying out loud, Mama, weh! Is there such a need for you to embarrass me like this?! First you ask me for money and then insult my boyfriend –then you steal from me and still insult him! You have been demanding from us the entire way and I’ve been quiet! Beast is tired, in case you haven’t noticed he has been working tirelessly to ensure that all went well for YOUR son’s funeral! You are in no position to demand anything from him right now! Please, stop what you’re doing!”

Binah: “Sorry geh (then). I wasn’t trying to be rude.”

Hazel: “Well, you were!”

Binah: (sigh) “Beast, askies (sorry).”

It didn't even seem genuine, but Beast was just calm.

Beast: “It's alright. Let's stop by Burger King and everyone can order whatever they want to, okay?”

I didn't like what he was doing. I mean he was the one always telling me that I needed to stand up against my mother and not allow her to walk over me demanding things, but he was doing exactly that. We went to the drive thru and of course, Bella ordered so much food. It wasn't even about the food nor the money, but it was about my mother's attitude towards Beast

yet she still had the audacity to ask him for things. I could barely touched my food and of course Beast couldn't eat while driving. He started off in Atteridgeville and dropped off Bella and my mother first. Instead of her getting off and going into her house, she showed me just how much audacity she had left within her, while Bella was nice enough to thank us for getting them home safely.

Binah: "Hao, le ya tsamaya (Oh, are you guys leaving already)?"

Hazel: (irritated) "Yes, as you can see."

Binah: "Ao (oh), Hazel, ska ba snaaks (don't be rude)."

Hazel: “Mama bolela gore o batla eng (tell me what you want).”

Binah: “We don’t even have money for groceries. I thought maybe you’d leave us with something since well we all know you don’t sleep on an empty stomach.”

I was fuming so much, that if I could have slapped some sense into her that day, I would have. Beast didn’t want any drama, instead, he just did the total opposite. He took out his wallet.

Beast: “How much will you need?”

I could see my mother looking inside of Beast's wallet inquisitively.

Binah: "Ah, a ke sure, waitse (Oh, I'm not so sure, hey), but I think R3000 e tla loka (will be enough)."

Beast: "I only have R1000 on me. Send Hazel your number, I'll eWallet you the rest."

Binah: (joyful) “Thank you, Beast. Modimo a be le wena (May God be with you).”

He just nodded and off we went. I thought we were going to go straight to his house, but he had other plans.

Beast: “Do you mind if we go home to see my mother? She texted me saying she wants to see me quickly.”

Ma’Sibiya was yet another pandemic of her own. For some odd reason, I was really moody and I got quickly angered more than usual. I just was so sensitive to everything and I just was tired.

Hazel: "Okay."

Beast: "We won't be long."

Hazel: "No problem."

I think he knew just how uneasy his mother's presence made me, let alone the mention of her name. We drove to his house and he opened the door for me. I honestly thought he was going to let me wait in the car, but he wanted to walk in with me instead. Upon entering the house, we found her sitting with one of his sisters, the youngest one of the three. Brenda was the first born, she was already working all thanks to Beast who

took them all to school. She was the nicest of them all, and hardly said much. Ziyanda was the second born, she was still studying, although it was her last year of Varsity and Phumzile was the last born, she was the loudest and the troublesome one who always demanded money from Beast. They were having the time of their life, until they saw me alongside Beast.

Beast: "Sanibonani (Hello)."

Hazel: "Dumelang (Hello)."

Phumzile couldn't pretend and her rudeness was just appalling. She didn't respond, while the mother responded in a rather awkward manner.

Ma'Sibiya: "Oh, sawubona ntombi (hello, girl)."

Beast: (firmly) "Phumzile, didn't you hear my fiancée greet you?"

Phumzile: "Haibo, Bhuti (wow, brother). Since when am I forced to greet people now?"

Beast became agitated for the very first time that day. I felt the grip around my hand become firmer.

Beast: (angrily) “Askies (excuse me)? Ngicela uziphinde ngoba angik’zwanga kahle (Please repeat yourself because I don’t think I heard you correctly)!”

Phumzile: “Hayi (no), man. I didn’t mean it like that, brother. What I meant was - “

Beast: (interrupting) “You guys think that I’m playing games, don’t you? My woman just lost her brother and I just lost my best friend and here you are being rude to the woman I love?! The woman I’m about to marry?!”

Ma'Sibiya: "No, Bethuel, we didn't mean it like that - "

Beast: (angrily) "Save it, Ma. I'm not in the mood for this shit. You guys don't respect me. The next time you want me to come here, you'd better make sure you have respect for her or else – you're all dead to me."

With that said, he pulled me away and we walked back to the car. He was even shaking from wrath. Beast really didn't want anyone to touch me let alone be rude to me. Yet, he was quiet the entire time my mother was rude to him and he didn't want me to say anything regarding the matter. We got into the car without saying a word and we drove to his house in silence. We walked in without saying anything as I put the food on the kitchen counter. For a moment I thought I had done something wrong, but I guess he was also dealing with his own emotions

regarding Malachi's death. He held me around my waist and looked at me.

Beast: "Come, let's go take a shower."

Hazel: "We just took a bath not so long ago."

Beast: (softly) "Please... I need you..."

I was still a bit of a slow learner, but I figured what he meant. He wanted to be close to me and that was the least I could do

for him. I just nodded as we walked hand in hand to the bedroom and proceeded to his bathroom. We looked into each other's eyes while taking each other's clothes off. Once we were completely naked, we got into the shower. He opened the shower taps and let the water run over our skin. It was May month and it was already a bit cold, heading towards Winter Season, so being inside of a warm shower was always great for the body. We kissed slowly, so passionately. It wasn't about having sex that day, we were making love and he wanted to feel better. I thought that if I took charge it would be a stepping stone. I was about to go down on my knees, but he stopped me.

Beast: (shaking head) "No, you don't have to. Just kiss me, please."

We continued kissing and made slow, intimate love for a while in that shower. Once we were done, we dried ourselves and

didn't even have time to lotion our bodies. We got straight into bed and slept. We kept waking up and making love in between until about 5pm. By the time I woke up, he had already made us dinner. I put on my robe and found him in the kitchen.

Hazel: "Why didn't you wake me?"

Beast: "I didn't want to bother you. You looked so peaceful and it was the first time since what happened that you slept like a log."

That was absolutely true.

Hazel: "Still, you could have woken me up so that I help you cook. I told you to stop spoiling me like this."

Beast: "I will never stop spoiling you, babe. Besides, dinner is almost ready. Go sit at the table. I'll be there soon."

Hazel: "At least let me set the table then."

Beast: "Alright, you can do that."

While I set the table, he was dishing up for us. He brought the food and a bottle of wine. Once we were all set, we prayed and dug in.

Beast: “Baby, I’ve been thinking. I don’t like this of us having unprotected sex. I mean we have done it twice already, and I don’t want to be in the way of you and your goals and dreams. I want you to graduate, I mean I promised Malachi a while ago that I’d ensure you become better than your mother.”

Shit, I hadn’t even had time to think of all that. I mean, we had sex and didn’t use protection? That was pretty stupid of us.

Hazel: “Oh, shit. I’ve been so absent minded, Beast, that it completely slipped my mind. I hope you don’t think that I want

to trap you with a baby. That is not my intention, I mean imagine what your mother would say if - “

Beast: (interrupting) “Whoa, slow down, Hazel. That is not even what I’m thinking of, believe me. I mean I just don’t want you to fall pregnant before you even graduate. I want you to enjoy your Varsity years and I want us to enjoy our relationship. I don’t want you to have to make difficult choices that will change your life forever.”

Hazel: “I understand.”

Beast: “It would be completely unfair of me to ask you to go on contraceptives, so we will go back to using condoms. I’m very

sorry I put you in such a predicament and rest assured it will never happen again.”

My goodness, Beast actually felt so guilty, but it wasn't entirely his fault.

Hazel: “Beast, it isn't entirely your fault, you know. I mean, we both did it and we're both adults, so we're both to blame.”

Beast: (shaking head) “I'm older and which means I have to be the most responsible amongst the two of us. I love you too much to set you back like that in life. I want you to know though, that should it happen, I want you to choose you above everything.”

Hazel: (shocked) "What are you saying? Are you saying that you'd want me to abort?"

Beast: (nodding) "So you can reach your dreams."

Hazel: "But... you love children. You want children."

Beast: "Yes, when the time is right. I don't want you to have to raise a child under horrible circumstances."

That sort of hurt me a little bit. I expected him to say that we'd get through it all should the need arise, but I just chose not to entertain that. I had too much on my mind to worry about a baby that didn't even exist.

Beast: "I'll be sure to get you morning after pills before the Pharmacy closes. I'll be right back, okay?"

I just nodded as he left. While I was waiting for him to get back, I decided to check my phone for any pending messages. I was irritated when I saw fifteen messages from my mother, asking me why I hadn't told Beast to send the money yet. The nerve. I had no idea why God chose to do that to me, you know. I was stuck with the most loveless mother on earth and now that Malachi was resting I was the only one who would have been

on the receiving end of her hell. Little did I know that I'd be praying and wishing for her go to back to prison from that day onwards. My problems started arising from that day onwards and they took too long to leave my side.

Psalm 5:8 - "You have kept count of my tossings; put my tears in your bottle. Are they not in your book?"

68

“Don’t Let Yesterday Take Up Too Much Of Today.” – Will Rogers

Hazel

I was still fuming at my mother’s unashamed behaviour. I felt like giving her a piece of my mind at that point. While I was typing a long message to send to her, Beast walked in as he came back from the pharmacy. He could see how distressed I was, my face always gave it away.

Beast: (frowning) “I’ve literally been gone 15 minutes. Have I done something wrong?”

Hazel: (clicking tongue) “Mxm, it’s my mother! This woman has a bloody nerve, you know!”

Beast: “Slow down, what has she done now?”

I wanted to speak, but the rage consumed me and got me tongue-tied, so I showed him the message instead. He read it and reacted in a completely opposite way.

Beast: (sigh) “I thought she insulted you again. Forward me her number so I can send her the eWallet.”

Hazel: (frowning) “Just like that? No, Beast. Can’t you see? She is using us, she is using YOU.”

Beast: (shaking head) “Hazel, I told you – pick your battles.”

Hazel: “What do you even mean by that, Bethuel?!”

He was a bit shocked at how I was addressing him. I’d never raised my voice at him before.

Beast: (surprised) “I mean you have exams coming up. Your mother should be the last person you need to worry about.”

Hazel: (irritated) “Aren’t you the one always telling me that I need to stand up to her and that I shouldn’t give her money? That I need to cut ties with her?!”

Beast: (sigh) “Hazel, she has just come out of prison, give her time to redeem herself. You’re going to give her time to look for a job and obviously we have to lend a hand or two now that Bella’s about to give birth. Remember, she is still your mother and I want to marry you. We can’t get married with her refusing to bless you, because that will only end in her cursing our marriage – which is not what I want.”

Hazel: (loudly) “I don’t get what you’re saying, you know!”

Beast: (surprised) “I can see that you’re feeling rather off about this, unless there is something else bothering you. I mean, lately, you’ve been getting rather pissed at nearly everything. I don’t want to upset you any further. Here, take two pills now. You might feel a bit nauseous as time goes, but the symptoms should disappear after about three days. I’m going out to smoke and get some air.”

Just like that he left me fuming at my own self in the kitchen. I felt like absolute shit. I couldn’t control my temper those days, and he was right. I got upset at everything and everyone and now, he was at the receiving end of my emotional rollercoaster. Fuck, it must have been all the stress or perhaps I was going through PMS. Now, I was in tears because Beast was mad at me. I just went to the bedroom and cried in peace. I

updated a status of a broken heart on WhatsApp and Mathilda was online.

Mathilda: “Hey, hun. It’s been a while. How are you holding up?”

Hazel: “Honestly, I think everything is still so raw. Now, my mother is upsetting me by demanding money from me and Beast doesn’t seem to think it is a big deal. He keeps going on about me having to pick my battles. I’m so over everything.”

Mathilda: “It must be the stress, babe. Please, take it easy. Remember, he is also going through a lot, I mean he has just lost his best friend.”

Hazel: "Yeah, I know. Maybe I have been a little selfish."

Mathilda: "No, I wouldn't call you selfish, you have just been a little inconsiderate. Just talk to him. You guys will be fine. All couples fight."

Hazel: "I suppose you're right. How was the exams this week?"

Mathilda: “Ah, those two papers were a walk in the park. I know you are going to ace it. Everything we studied was asked. You’ll be fine, just take it easy.”

Hazel: “Thanks, girl.”

Mathilda: “Anytime, let me love and leave you. Bye for now.”

We ended our conversation there, and I browsed a few statuses, when Beast sent me a message through WhatsApp.

Beast: "I'm still waiting for your mom's number, babe."

I didn't feel like protesting any more, so I forwarded it to him.

Beast: "Thanks. Now, tell me, who broke your heart?"

Hazel: "No one."

Beast: "Hmm, is it me?"

Hazel: "No..."

Beast: "Then who is it?"

Hazel: "I don't know, I feel like I am angry at the world, at God, at everyone."

Beast: "Do you trust me?"

Hazel: "Of course I do."

Beast: "Then trust me when I say, Trust the process of healing. Take it one day at a time and you'll be fine – we both will be."

Hazel: "I'm sorry for speaking to you like that. It wasn't right."

Beast: "You're only human. It's okay."

Hazel: "I'm glad we're fine."

Beast: "I'm quickly going out to buy us some ice cream, we've run out. Care for some Netflix when I come back?"

Hazel: "That would be nice, bring some chocolate as well, please."

Beast: "Your wish is my command."

He logged out of WhatsApp and I heard him drive off. A few minutes later he came back with tons of ice cream and

chocolate and a few drinks. We watched Netflix almost for the entire night and drifted off to sleep in each other's arms. The following day, we woke up early and I was off to Cape Town. He couldn't fly with me because he needed to sort out the lobola negotiations and get his uncles to send the letter soon, so he wanted to speak to his mother first, before anyone, which did make sense, but knowing her she would have told him to cancel the entire thing. I hadn't really flown alone since I went to Stellenbosch, so it was quite a nerve-wrecking experience. He told me to relax and do my breathing exercises while up there, I mean it was only going to be about 2 hours or so. It was quite lonely without him by my side, but I had to do it. I eventually arrived and found Kg and Otlile were not there.

It was a Saturday, so they must have been out or something. As always James drove me to my place. I sort of suspected that he was under Beast's strict payroll, but I didn't mind. I texted Beast that I was home and dived into my books immediately. I needed to study as I had to catch up on the two papers I had missed that week. I had quite a long day of studying as I arrived at the flat at 12 midday, and I studied up

until 4pm. By then I was tired and I needed a break. I made some food for myself, and found myself craving Strawberries for some odd reason. I called James and headed out to Woolworths to buy some and a few other fruits, before going back home. My friends were still not back yet by 6pm, so I didn't want to text them and make them cut their trip short. I mean I had studied more than enough, but I was bored. I didn't want to talk to Beast 24 hours of each day, so I texted Mathilda and took a chance.

Hazel: "Hey, are you busy?"

Mathilda: "Of course not."

Hazel: "I'm bored. Wanna chill?"

Mathilda: "Sure, I am actually at the mall. Should I come pick you up?"

Hazel: "Sure, let me just go change."

Mathilda: "Cool, pack an overnight bag, you're sleeping over."

Hazel: "Cool."

I packed an overnight bag and texted Beast, telling him that Mathilda was going to pick me up. He was more than okay with it, as he trusted her. She came from a well off family and she pretty much had security all day round. What was quite surprising was that I hardly heard her father calling her to check up on her or anything like that. Family was just like that, they could be quite annoying. She came to fetch me and I was actually relieved that I had some company. We drove off to her place and off loaded the food she had bought.

Mathilda: "Make yourself at home, babe. I'll quickly whip us something to eat."

I was a natural foodie and although I had already eaten, I couldn't say no to food. I kept her company while she was making us some lasagne. She was such a good cook, just like Beast. I made a mental note to get a cook book or something. I

mean I was about to be the guy's wife, so I needed to at least be on his level of cooking, you know. We had a glass of wine each and the conversation was flowing. When it was dinner time, we decided to indulge in good conversation without the tv interrupting us.

Mathilda: "So, I know this is a stupid question, but how was the funeral?"

Hazel: (sigh) "Well, it was really horrible. There are many times I still wish he could come back and tell me it was all a horrible joke, you know. The one thing I loved about his funeral was the fact that he had touched so many lives, you know. He was just one of a kind, and I guess that will give me closure."

Mathilda: (nodding) “I totally get you, love. Just take it one day at a time and don’t ever skip your therapy sessions.”

She was right about that. I needed to go see Dr. Zwide. I had been avoiding her and delaying talking to her. She had been pestering me for a session over WhatsApp and I just wasn’t ready.

Hazel: “I need to speak to Dr. Zwide, you know. I have sort of been avoiding her.”

Mathilda: “It is perfectly normal, but remember, the difference between other people and people like you and I is that they can always bounce back, but with us, if we are not cleared by our therapists then we can have a major setback. I don’t want that

for you. You have made such good progress, and remember, you are going to be someone's wife, so you have to be emotionally ready for every curveball coming your way."

Hazel: "You're right about that last part. His mom is such a pain in the ass, I bet she will advise him not to go ahead with marrying me."

Mathilda: "That one shouldn't worry you. Most mothers are like that when it comes to their sons. Your man is real, he would literally walk on mountains for you. Don't ever doubt him."

She was right about that part. I needed to trust him and as he said, I needed to trust the process. We ended up staying up til

late and we had such a blast. I honestly enjoyed spending time with her. To be honest, I enjoyed spending time with her more than Otlile and Kg because those two had become two peas in a pod, while I was dealing with life. I felt as if I couldn't relate any more. They were doing different courses, but somehow, they were friends with the same group of people. Despite what happened to me, they still partied until late at night and still went to party at the beach occasionally, so I just let them be. Mathilda had been hinting at me that I should move into one of the flats there where she lived, and it was rather quiet and not so far from campus. It was a drive away, but she had a car and we were doing the same course, the same subjects, so we were obviously going to see each other more often. I needed to think about it and speak to Beast about it before coming to any conclusion.

Beast

I didn't want to fly to Stellenbosch with Hazel, seemingly because I couldn't always hold her hand whenever trouble arose. She needed to also be independent and I was getting concerned about her being so far from me. I know I said I'd cope, but I worried a lot about her safety. James was a good driver, but she needed to be a lot more independent than that, and that is why I wanted her to get a driver's license. It was high time for her to get one. When she told me that Mathilda was going to fetch her, I didn't mind at all. Mathilda was a better friend than those two little whores she called friends. I had eyes and ears everywhere

and they were quite a busy pair, even engaging in group sex whenever they felt like it. Kg was not the type I thought would be into such, but i guess people change. I wanted to speak to my mother before driving to KwaZulu Natal to speak to my uncles personally. I knew my mother was going to give me a hard time, but I wasn't going to allow her.

I had sent Sis'Bee R5000 instead of R3000 so that she didn't bother Hazel. I also sent her my number and told her to communicate with me whenever she needed anything - instead

of Hazel. She was more than happy to do so, except when she felt like calling me a thug. She was a hypocrite - everyone knew that, but she was going to be my Mother-in-law. She was going through too much already. I was growing weary each day as I still hadn't told her that Malachi had promised me not to tell her that he was going to die. Her behaviour was out of the ordinary and I didn't want to make things worse for her. She was still going to deal with his death. Upon arrival at my house, I found my mother drinking with Phumzile. Those two were growing increasingly annoying by the day.

Beast: "Sanibonani (Hello)."

Ma'Sibiya: (surprised) "Oh, my son. How nice of you to come see us. It has been such a long while. You know, ever since you have been with that girl, you just don't visit me any more."

Beast: “When you married Baba (father), did you visit your maternal home often?”

Ma’Sibiya: (frowning) “Hawu (goodness), Bethuel. Do you have to be so rude?”

Beast: “I’m not being rude, it’s a question. Don’t be like that. I told you, I won’t tolerate any negative words about or towards Hazel. I didn’t come here for that. I came here to tell you that I’m going to KZN straight after this to speak to Malume (Uncle) S’fiso. I want them to send the letter to Hazel’s family as soon as possible.”

Ma'Sibiya: (annoyed) "Oho, manje mina ngi ngenaphi (so where do I fit in all of this)?"

Beast: "I'm letting you know because you're my mother. I also want him to accompany me to Baba's (father's) family so that Malume (Uncle) Mandla can also be involved."

I knew she wasn't going to take that part very well.

Ma'Sibiya: (furious) "Ini (what)?! No ways! Over my dead body! Those people have treated me like dirt especially when your father abandoned us! I refuse!"

Beast: “Ma, I’m not asking you - I’m telling you. This is my future we’re talking about. My father’s family has to be involved because I was introduced to his ancestors. They are a part of my life.”

Ma’Sibiya: (shouting) “If you dare go there, Bethuel, don’t ever come back here! You can consider me dead! You will no longer have a mother, I’m telling you!”

Phumzile: “Bethuel, don’t you see you’re upsetting her?!”

Beast: “Hey, wena (you)! Do I look like your friend? You are forgetting who you’re speaking to. I take care of you – all of you and the least you can do is be happy for me, kodwa (but) you just want to stand in my way of happiness. I can’t believe how selfish you are being right now.”

Ma’Sibiya: (crying) “Go! Go, Bethuel! I don’t ever want to see you again if you’re choosing those people over me!”

Beast: “I carry Baba’s (father’s) surname, Ma. Which means Hazel will be a Sibiya, and you still use his surname. If you are so angry at him, change it back to your maiden surname. I have chosen you all for a very long time, and now, I am choosing me. I don’t care how you feel about it at this point. I will say it again, I won’t hesitate to cut any of you off should the need arise. Hazel will be my wife whether you like it or not.”

Ma'Sibiya: (shouting) "Hamba (Leave)! I will tell everyone how my own son – my only son abandoned me for that motherfucker of a man he calls his father!"

I didn't even say anything at all after that. She still went stark raving mad and started shouting and cursing me - she even started cursing Hazel and spoke ill of her family. I was taken aback a little because that was my mother. I went through hell and back for her, I mean I nearly killed for her and she couldn't even be happy for me because I was choosing the woman I loved. Mothers can be toxic too. I tried my best not to cry, but the pain was just too much. I got into my car and drove off like a maniac. I stopped at my club and parked there to contain my emotions before heading to the airport. I took a deep breath when my phone rang and I noticed it was Brenda, my younger sister who was born after me.

Beast: (voice breaking) "Brenda."

Brenda: "Bhuti (brother), how are you?"

Beast: "I wish I could say I'm great, but I'm far from it. How are you?"

Brenda: "Hayi (No), I'm alright."

Beast: "I take it you heard."

Brenda: "Yes, hence I am calling to check up on you. Are you really okay?"

Beast: "Not even, Bee. That woman can be vile whenever she feels like it. I mean how on earth does she speak of Hazel like she's some kind of trash? She clearly has forgotten where she comes from."

Brenda: "Bhuti (brother), you have done so much for us and I keep telling you to choose you. Don't you worry about them, you just focus on your life from now on."

Beast: "It's hard, Bee. I love Mama, but I can't stand this."

Brenda: "I really need to meet this woman. She has clearly captured your heart. You have grown, Bethuel, I am very proud of you."

Beast: (teary) "Those are not words I hear often."

Brenda: "Well, you should know that I am very happy and proud of you. I'll say it every day if I have to. Very few men would have carried their family the way you carried us. You shouldn't feel bad for choosing you in any way, and cut off every one who's against you if need be."

Beast: "Now I see why you hardly visit."

Brenda: (chuckling) "You know me, I enjoy my peace. I'll come by this weekend and see you and Hazel."

Beast: "I'd love that."

Brenda: "Greet her for me. We need a proper catch-up session. See you soon."

Beast: "Sharp."

I hung up and wiped my tears away. I decided to trust the process, like I told Hazel. She was mine and God was going to make it all possible. I quickly went into the club to check up on my Manager, when I bumped into someone I never thought I'd ever see again.

Sonto: "Hi, Bethuel."

I looked at her and she looked fuller than usual, when I looked down and stared at her stomach, I was overcome with so much shock.

Beast: (shocked) "Sonto, what are you doing here?"

Sonto: (chuckling) "Don't worry, I only came to meet a few girls."

I couldn't help but stare at her stomach.

Sonto: "Oh, you're staring at this? Don't you worry, it's not yours."

Beast: "Of course not. We always used protection."

Sonto: "Word around the street is that you and that yellow bone are engaged. Congratulations. I guess you have always liked them extremely light and skinny. Just make sure your babies don't become mixed-breeds like her."

Beast: (angrily) "You're not worth my energy. You just make sure that baby doesn't end up being a reject like its mother."

I left her standing there. I hated people who insulted my woman as if they knew her. To be honest, people will insult you with your looks because you intimidate them. They want to be you, but knowing that they can't they resort to ridiculing you and insulting you until you break. No one dared to insult Sonto over her weight for as long as we were together, because I defended her. I made her become the strong, confident woman she was and she never shied away from her weight. I broke up with her because I didn't love her anymore and I thought she was mature enough to understand that, but she just had to go there and insult a woman she never even met. To me, that was the most disgusting trait in a woman. I couldn't stand women who broke other women. I got into my car and headed to the airport. Upon arrival, all I could think of was my life with Hazel - how it currently was and what our potential future would have been.

I knew that Zulu's were a bit cruel and they just kept insinuating that she was white and didn't have culture and asked if she knew her ancestors, but she was the one I loved, and the

ancestors even confirmed that she was the chosen one for me. I for one knew that Malume (Uncle) S'fiso would be able to let this situation go a lot smoother, because he was a seer. I trusted him and I knew that if I confided in him, he wouldn't let my secret out no matter what. I had called him days prior to let him know I was on the way. He of course was too pleased to hear because he hardly saw me. He was actually my mother's uncle, so he was my Great Uncle and the only great male elder left. Everyone respected him and we all knew when to shut up when he spoke to us. All I knew was that I had never felt for any other woman what I felt for Hazel. I wanted her to be the mother of my children, she radiated such grace and elegance and she made me better. For me, that was enough, everyone could have had their ideas and thoughts about my relationship with her, but I didn't care. I just strived and prayed that I didn't make the same mistakes my father made. My flight didn't take that long, but the drive to the house was a bit long. The distance from King Shaka Airport to Dundee, Umzinyathi was about 3 hours 47 minutes. Even though I flew just over an hour From Johannesburg to King Shaka Airport, the three hour drive was a bit of a drag. Thank goodness to Ubers, otherwise I'd never have survived my Uncle's driving. I finally arrived and they were so happy to see me. It literally looked like there was a party or wedding at the house. The moment I walked out of the car, I heard my cousins cheering and shouting for everyone

in the house to come out. One of them was Mamkhulu (great aunt) Brenda, whom my sister Brenda was named after. Everyone called her Mamkhulu. She was my mother's elder sister.

Mamkhulu: (shouting) "Haibo (My goodness), Malume (Uncle)! Come out! He has arrived! Bethuel se ka fikile (has arrived)!"

Nothing made me happier than seeing them. Elders were always so wise. I rushed to her and gave her one warm hug. The rest of my cousins slowly followed. My uncle Sfiso came out of the house, eventually and we hugged. My mother's maternal family was very affectionate - even the males. We didn't believe in just handshakes. They gave love whenever and as much as they could.

Mamkhulu: (happily) “You have grown so much. The last time I saw you, you didn’t have a beard. Something tells me that the beautiful girl I see you is the reason behind all this. You are well-fed, Bethuel.”

Beast: (laughing) “Khale (Come on), Mamkhulu (aunty). Who told you that?”

Mamkhulu: “They don’t call me Mamkhulu for nothing, you know. Besides, my children know all about social media, so when you post, I know too. By the way, she is a real gem. All your cousins and uncles will be so jealous of you. None of them has managed to bag such a beautiful girl for as long as they have lived their pathetic lives.”

We both laughed and Malume walked out.

Malume Sfiso: "Kahle bo (come on, now). Yini ungathi niyahleba (why does it seem as if you are gossiping)?"

Mamkhulu: "Gossip is not my forte, Malume (uncle). I tell it like it is. Too bad your sister is the total opposite of me, Bethuel."

Malume Sfiso: "Brenda, give us some space to speak."

Mamkhulu: "Alright. See you later, Bethuel."

Beast: "Alright, Mamkhulu (aunty)."

He gave me one warm hug.

Malume Sfiso: "Mshana (nephew), it has indeed been a long while. Come, let us take a walk, shall we?"

He held me by my arm while he had his knob-kierrie and we took a walk.

Malume Sfiso: "How are things?"

Beast: "They are good, Malume (uncle)."

Malume Sfiso: "Are you sure?"

Beast: (frowning) "What do you mean, Malume (uncle)?"

Malume Sfiso: “We’ll get to that in a moment. Tell me about this girl that has captured your heart.”

I smiled instantly. Just thinking about Hazel brings joy to my entire body.

Beast: (smiling) “She is the one, Malume. I just know it.”

Malume Sfiso: (nodding) “Indeed, she is the one. Your ancestors have confirmed it and you have seen it yourself in your dreams. Keep talking to your ancestors, Bethuel, both

your father and your mother's ancestors. They hold the answers to everything."

Beast: (nodding) "I shall keep doing so."

Malume Sfiso: "Now, where is her father?"

That was a question I just didn't expect.

Beast: "I don't know, Malume. All I know is that she has never met him."

Malume Sfiso: (shaking head) “Well, she has to meet him soon, because he didn’t abandon her willingly. This is a complicated situation, Bethuel, for her mother’s ancestors love her so much, that they claim her as her own. But we all know that every child has ancestors of both the mother and the father. Now, the father’s ancestors keep wanting to claim her but they can’t find her because he never claimed her to begin with.”

Beast: (confused) “What does this have to do with me marrying her, Malume?”

Malume Sfiso: “This means that everything you want concerning that girl will always have to be fought for. You haven’t seen anything yet, Bethuel. You two are going to go

through the roughest patch you have ever gone through. Hence I keep asking if everything is indeed okay with you?”

Beast: “I’m happy, I’m praying, angazi ukhuluma ngani (I don’t know what you’re referring to).”

And then he dropped a bombshell on me.

Malume Sfiso: “I mean, what have you done regarding the boy you killed for her?”

That was when everything he told me made sense. I would have had to pay for all my sins. Love is a dangerous feeling.

John 14:6 - “Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

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“We may encounter many defeats but we must not be defeated.” – Maya Angelou

Beast

I was left dumbstruck for a minute or two.

Malume Sfiso: “Ngiyakhuluma, mfana (I’m speaking, son). What have you done regarding that issue?”

Beast: (firmly) “I don’t know what exactly you’re referring to, but Malachi helped me get cleansed for that.”

Malume Sfiso: "But have you appeased that situation? Did you ask for forgiveness?"

Beast: "No, he doesn't deserve that from me. He could have killed her and we wouldn't have been here today, talking about marriage, because she would have been dead."

Malume Sfiso: "Eish (Oh), Bethuel, you know how ancestors work. God doesn't want murder at all, and our ancestors can appease if you ask for forgiveness - the same with God. You never asked for forgiveness, because you never saw it fit to do so. Now, this girl's ancestors, her father's ancestors are fighting for her."

Beast: (confused) "But they're white."

Malume Sfiso: “So? You think white people can’t be ancestors? Her grandmother, the one she was named after was a seer as well. She is fighting for this child. She doesn’t think that you are fit for her great grand daughter. It is so complicated, Bethuel. Amasimba nje (It’s just a whole lot of bullshit).”

Beast: “So, what now?”

Malume Sfiso: “I’ll appease the ancestors for you, and I’ll also cleanse you again, but if they keep showing me that you will have to pay for what you did – then so be it. Ultimately, you will be back in her arms again. You will just have to fight for a spot in her life once again.”

Once again? That meant I was going to lose Hazel. Everything just seemed so dim and confusing, but he didn't want to elaborate any further on that and I respected that.

Beast: "So I'm going to lose Hazel, Malume?"

Malume Sfiso: "You being steady with her will depend all on her. That is the only answer I have for you right now. For now, we shall do what I tell you to do. We will go to your father's family and request that Mandla go with us to her family. For now, we shall only speak to Mandla tomorrow and draft the letter for her hand in marriage. It is all such a mess. Don't forget that her mother's parents are still angry at her. But you

will be alright. You have always followed suit. I just wish that you hadn't killed that boy. It will follow you for a long time."

I had no idea what he meant, but all I could gather at that moment was that I made a big fucking mess by killing Raymond. I shouldn't have. I would have had to pay for it, so be it. I was willing to do so if it meant that things were going to be alright between Hazel and I. I was prepared to face any consequences as long as it meant I'd be there for her.

Malume Sfiso: "Let's go back and eat before Brenda starts calling me. You know how she gets when you visit."

I chuckled as we walked back. She was bragging about how beautiful Hazel was, and honestly, I didn't blame her. My

woman was an absolute beaut. No one could compare to her. She made the moon jealous and during the day, the radiating rays of the sun were nothing compared to her beauty. They gave me the support I needed and I knew that I'd be safe as long as I had them in my corner. The biggest battle yet was facing my father's family. They were quite bitter and a lot harder to win over, unless you bought good quality alcohol. I decided to worry about them the following day when the moment arose. I spoke to my Hazel and everything was fine, she was having the time of her life with Mathilda, and she also was contemplating moving in with her but she wanted to hear my thoughts about it. I was actually happy she was considering that, because I was planning on getting her to do her license. She was taking the right direction with Mathilda. I always said that during our teenage years we know nothing, but once we're faced with the adult world, we are forced to grow up and that's when you get to see the real person. We had such a great day and we ended up sleeping very late. The following morning, Malume Sfiso and Mamkhulu Brenda got up early to accompany me to the Sibiya family. I was very anxious, because I knew just how full of shit they were. It always baffled me how Elders always made you beg for their blessings so that you could have a better life than they did. We took a near 2-hour drive from Dundee to Greytown. I was anxious the entire way. I was always an open-minded person, but my father's

family always brought the worst out of me. I was only doing that for peace's sake and so that Hazel and I could have a blessed marriage. We arrived at about 11am. Malume walked out and addressed them outside the gate before we could even approach.

Malume Sfiso: (shouting) "Greetings, the Sibiya family. We have brought your son, Bethuel, the son of Solomon Sibiya. He has brought an important message. May we please be allowed in."

After a few good 20 minutes, my Great uncle was about to give up. He got back into the car.

Malume Sfiso: “Hayi (no), these people want nothing to do with us. I have tried.”

As he was about to give up, out came Malume Sydney, who was the youngest of the brothers. Malume Mandla came before him and my father was the first born.

Malume Sydney: “Weh (hey), Sfiso. We here you. We’ll open the gate now. Come in.”

I was annoyed at the way he addressed Malume Sfiso because he was indeed older. We always grew up knowing that we respected those older than us. I let it slide in any case. The gate was opened for us and we drove in. We parked the car

and walked out. Malume Sydney addressed us and of course, he was drunk before midday.

Malume Sydney: (shocked) “Hawu (Goodness), Mshana (nephew)! You’re so big! What are you eating in Gauteng?! You must be taking your father’s genes.”

Beast: (annoyed) “I haven’t seen him in years.”

Malume Sydney: “Oh, hayi (no), one day you’ll also grow up and make mistakes. Don’t take it to heart. At least you are grown and you smell so nice now. Look at you, I hear you’re getting married. Is that why you came?”

Beast: (nodding) "Yes."

Malume Sydney: "Well, have you brought us something to drink at least? You know Mandla will give you a hard time, kodwa mina (but I'm) on your side."

He was a sell out like that. I went to the boot and took out all five bottles of whiskey I had bought and three bottles of cognac, some few wine boxes for the women. I knew if I wanted their support, I had to buy loads of alcohol.

Malume Sydney: (excited) "Oh, Hayi ke (well then), come on in, so we can have a drink."

Mamkhulu Brenda: "Where is Mandla? Is he not supposed to be here?"

Malume Sydney: "Oh, he is still at the rank. He'll be here soon once I text him."

So, basically he had us sweating outside for no good reason. That left me even more irritated than I was already.

Malume Sfiso: "Why ungashongo (didn't you say so)?"

Malume Sydney: "Hawu (Goodness), Sfiso, I'm also an uncle. I must look important otherwise no one will take me seriously. Come, Mandla will be here in no time."

I decided to humble myself and let him drink away, while we waited. I couldn't believe we waited about 2 hours before Malume Mandla came back, after listening to Malume Sydney's tedious jokes.

Malume Mandla: (firmly) "And then? Ni funani la (wha do you want here)?"

Malume Sfiso stood up and started addressing him.

Malume Sfiso: "Mandla, kunjani (how are you)?"

Malume Mandla: "I asked you a question. What are you doing here?"

Malume Sfiso: "We came with Bethuel. He wants to pay lobola for his bride, so he wants you to be involved in the process and came to ask you personally."

Malume Mandla: "I have nothing to say to you."

Malume Sfiso: "Hmm, okay then, Mandla. Rest assured; we will be out of your way. We did come all the way from Dundee to ask you and you saw it fit to chase us away like dogs. You will not let this boy pay for his father's sins. We shall be on our way then."

I was heartbroken, but I stood up and walked right behind Malume Sfiso, with Mamkhulu right behind us.

Malume Mandla: "Wait."

Malume Sfiso: "Yes?"

Malume Mandla: "I'd like to hear you out."

Malume Sfiso: "Just so you know, Mandla

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I'm only doing this for Bethuel, otherwise I wouldn't be begging you right now. The day you learn to treat people like actual human beings, you will have lost everything you own. Bethuel, come, let's sit."

Malume Mandla: "I'm all ears."

Malume Sfiso: "You may speak, Bethuel."

Beast: (clearing throat) "Malume, I've come all this way to let you know that I'd like to pay lobola for my bride, Hazel."

Malume Mandla: "So, you took all these years to come and see us? If it weren't for this, you wouldn't be here, right?"

Beast: "Believe me, uncle, I came here because I feel having you part of this process is important for me."

Malume Mandela: "What about your father? Have you told him?"

Beast: (clenching fist) "No. I haven't spoken to him in years."

Malume Mandela: "Well, I won't do this without him."

Beast: "Well then, I guess our business is concluded. Have a nice day furhter."

I stood up with all the intentions of walking away. He saw that I wasn't prepared to stop, so he stopped me.

Malume Mandla: "Okay, I'll help you."

Malume Sfiso: "That wasn't so hard, now was it?"

Malume Mandla: "I'll have to consult with your father first."

Malume Sfiso: (shaking head) "You know very well he gave up his right to be a father years ago. This boy practically raised his sisters and became a husband to his own mother. Your brother is in prison. What good will his input do?"

Malume Mandla: "I'll still have to speak to him. He is our elder brother and this concerns him."

Malume Sfiso: "Either way, just think of Bethuel. You are doing this for him - not for Solomon."

Malume Mandla walked away as he started dialing on his phone. He was very weak minded, though he didn't want to show it. He could never do anything without my father's approval - even though he was in prison.

Malume Sydney: (shouting) "I told them to wait for you, Bhuti, but they over powered me! Abezwa laba (they don't listen)!"

Malume Sfiso: "You're such a sell out wena. It's no wonder you'll never find a wife."

He just ignored us and carried on drinking, meanwhile I went outside to speak to my Hazel. I video called her and she answered almost immediately.

Hazel: "Baby."

She looked so cute rubbing her eyes.

Beast: (smiling) "Baby wami (my baby). Don't tell me you're still sleeping?"

Hazel: "Eish (oh), Mathilda and I had a late night talking and drinking a little bit."

Beast: "If I didn't know better, I'd say you feel a lot more comfortable living there than your current flat."

Hazel: "Yes, I wanted to speak to you about it. I mean, it is a drive away, but Mathilda has moved out of res and stays here permanently, so I thought I'd catch rides with her daily."

Beast: (sigh) "I wanted to surprise you, but I'd rather let the cat out of the bag now. I had a plan for you to get your license, because I want to buy you a car."

Hazel: (shocked) "Aowa (no), Beast. Do you have any idea how much I have in my bank account right now? You and Malachi never wanted me to spend a dime of the money you guys gave me. Ngapha (and then) it's the bursary giving me a hefty amount every month. You can't buy me car, Beast."

Beast: "So, basically, you're refusing me my right to husband duties?"

Hazel: "Ai (oh), how is it going there? Are you okay?"

Beast: (sigh) "I'm fine, I have come to visit my uncle and aunt here in KZN."

I hadn't even told her that I went for the lobola finalization.

Hazel: "Oh, that must be nice. They must be excited to see you."

Beast: "Yes, they are actually. Speaking of which, how are you feeling? I mean the pharmacist told me that the pills have some sort of side effects."

I saw her change her facial expression immediately.

Beast: "Hazel? What's wrong?"

Hazel: "I - "

I couldn't hear what she was saying because an incoming call from my father interrupting everything. I tried saying goodbye to my wife to be, but the network got cut off, so I figured I'd call her back later. I didn't want to answer his call, but I knew he was going to pester me, so I answered.

Beast: "Hello."

Solomon: "Finally, you decided to answer your father's call. Or is it only because you need something from me?"

Beast: "I don't need anything from you."

Solomon: "Whatever you need from my brothers, means that you need something from me."

Beast: (sigh) "Is that why you called me? To lecture me? Isn't prison supposed to be a rehabilitation centre for people like you?"

Solomon: "You're no different from me, Bethuel. If you don't watch it, you'll be back here in no time. You'll be sharing a cell with me."

Beast: "I don't have to listen to you. Goodbye."

I hung up and blocked his number before he could say anything further. I tried calling Hazel again, but the network didn't want to pick up. I decided that I'd try again later.

Hazel

My day was starting on a good note until Beas started asking me the morning after pills. To be honest, all I remember is me having them in my hands. I was about to take them when I went to the bedroom to cry, after that I couldn't recall where I had placed them. I found myself spacing out when Mathilda came to greet me.

Mathilda: "Good morning. What's wrong?"

Hazel: "Eish (Oh), Mathilda, I think I may have fucked up."

Mathilda: (frowning) "Why?"

Hazel: "Beast gave me morning after pills to take last night. I was in such a bad space, I must have forgotten to take them."

Mathilda: "Okay, don't panic. Was it the first time you guys had unprotected sex?"

Hazel: (shaking head) "No, We had sex a few days prior to yesterday, but it was only once, you know."

Mathilda: “Hazel, you of all people did Life Sciences at school. You know that you could be pregnant for all you know, right?”

Hazel: (panicking) “I can’t be pregnant, Mathilda. His family already hates me. Imagine if they found out I’m pregnant. They wouldn’t take it well and they would honestly think that I’m trying to trap him, you know.”

Mathilda: “Slow down. I have an aunt who works at the mall Pharmacy. Don’t panic, I’ll get her to bring us the pills.”

Hazel: "Are you sure? I really don't want to be a bother, really."

Mathilda: "Relax, it's what friends are for. But just know that they aren't 100% effective, and even if you were to be pregnant, Beast would never think that you're trying to trap him. He's an adult and he loves you. Remember that."

Hazel: "Thank you, Mathilda."

Mathilda: "I'll be right back. Let me go and call her."

2 Corinthians 5:17 - "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come."

“Life is what happens to us while we are making other plans.” — Allen Saunders

Hazel

Four weeks later...

It had been such a turbulent few weeks for Beast, as well as myself. I hadn't been myself ever since the morning after story. I had to lie to Beast and tell him that I took the pill, of which I only took the day after he gave me that one. What bothered me most was keeping such a thing from him, so I basically lied to the man I loved. It just wasn't right at all. I mean, I was safe, I thought because a morning after pill can be taken within 72 hours, but I was a little worried about the previous time we had sex without a condom. It didn't sit well with me at all.

I could barely look him in the eye and I was a little glad he hadn't come to visit to give me space for exams and all that. I had started eating a lot less, and I guess it was all the stress of finally having to accept that my brother was no longer with us. It was a painful journey, though. He kept telling me that he had a big surprise waiting for me when he would see me again, and I just thought it was Beast being Beast. I was just glad that we were finally going on Holiday and that exams were finally over. It was a rough patch, but we made it. He did say that we would speak about me moving out of the flat properly in person, and I had been spending a lot more time with Mathilda than with Kg and Otlile. I guess they felt I was a little too depressing for their vibe or something like that, but I didn't mind spending time with Mathilda. She got me and I got her. It was our very last day of the Semester, and we were just about to leave Campus.

Mathilda: "So, where to from here? Is Beast coming to fetch you?"

Hazel: "Instead of flying this time, he wants us to have a road trip, literally. So instead of driving for 14 hours straight, which is impossible, we're going to have a three day trip."

Mathilda: (Excited) "How I wish to meet someone as romantic as Beast when I start dating, you know."

Hazel: "Speaking of which, when do you think you'll be ready to date?"

Mathilda: (chuckling) "You won't believe it if I tell you that I'm a virgin."

She was right, I was in disbelief.

Hazel: (shocked) “No way. I mean, everyone thought you were dating Raymond at some point.”

Mathilda: “The truth is, I liked him for status at that time, but once he showed me that he wanted to get inside my pants, I immediately dismissed him. So, I have never found a guy I actually liked and one who liked me back, you know. If they didn’t like my personality, they liked the colour of my skin, so, I just didn’t want to subject myself to anything like that.”

Mathilda and I had so many similarities, I mean we were both bullied, although I was at the receiving end of her bullying for a long period of time, but we both didn’t look 100% black as most put it, and with that comes a whole lot of drama. Most people looked at us without understanding but there was nothing to

understand, really. We were just people. Yes, Mathilda's biological mother was coloured hence she looked the way she looked, and my father was white, which explained my skin colour, eye colour and my curly hair. Beast was the only person apart from my friends who accepted me and looked past my looks.

Hazel: "I hear you, hey. I believe that you will find the right man when the time is right. So, are you going home these holidays?"

Mathilda: (sigh) "No, my father will be gone on a business trip as usual, well, at least that is what he says. I was planning on visiting my mother for the entire holidays, but my step mother wants me to come visit for some reason. She seems rather anxious to see me and has been begging me for weeks."

Hazel: (surprised) “Well, perhaps she wants to have a relationship with you for once, hey?”

Mathilda: “I guess. I have felt so guilty about the way I have been treating her all these years, and all she has ever tried to do was have a relationship with me. My therapy sessions have helped a great deal and I was able to get closure and ask her for forgiveness. She was never angry at me, though. The problem has been my father all along. He just made my mom the bad person, whereas she left because he was abusing her.”

I’ve always said that black girls go through so much, at times parents cause us unnecessary pain and heartache.

Mathilda: “Anyway, let’s go grab something to eat before you leave. What do you say?”

Hazel: “I’d never say no to food. You know that.”

We got into her car and drove off to Eiekstad Mall, which was pretty much right around the corner of our Campus. It had been so long since we both blew off some proper steam, so what was initially a plan for a basic lunch and drinks, turned into major retail therapy. We ended up doing some shopping, and with all the money in my bank account, I didn’t feel bad in any way buying as much as I did of our Campus. It had been so long since we both blew off some proper steam. What had started off as a normal lunch date, turned into a major shopping spree. With all the money I had in my account, I felt like a millionaire. Beast gave me a monthly allowance, and then there was the Bursary as well, so I had quite a hefty amount to

spend. After our three-hour long shopping spree, we finally went to get some food.

We were famished and our stomachs were begging for food. We settled for Julian's Café and Bar, and I must say, the atmosphere was amazing. The menu was quite affordable as well and the drinks were versatile. Everyone who's ever eaten at a restaurant would know that ciders and beers there are absolutely expensive and that cocktails were cheaper. I wasn't very fond of all the different types of alcohol, but Mathilda said I should try Vodka and Redbull, and we started off with some Hooch bombs first, which were shooters. She and I never really drank much apart from being cooped up in her flat and talking until we passed out, but that day we really released a lot of stress and had fun while at it. While we were waiting on our food, which was just four pizzas.

She had just as much of an appetite as I had, and she hardly gained much, just like me. Unlike me, she still exercised and played Hockey once a week. She said that it was one of the ways she released stress and anxiety. I really needed to take her up on that offer, more especially since my supposed two best friends had become severe party animals and pretty much non-existent. The drinks were flowing while the food was being prepared for us, when Kg popped up out of nowhere, with a girl I had never seen before on her arm. By the look of things, she was dating that girl, but never told me about her.

Kg: (surprised) “Hey, Hazel! Hey, Mathilda! What a lovely surprise to see the two of you lunching together like good old besties!”

She looked completely different, she had extra piercings on her ears and one on her nose, and she had even gotten a few tattoos. I thought she was undergoing some sort of mid-life

crisis, but I chose not to say anything. Her statement came across as rather sarcastic, and thanks to the person Mathilda had become, she was not one to retaliate quickly, but I on the other hand, had developed some sort of anger antenna. I got angered quickly and very easily in almost every situation.

Mathilda: (smiling) “Hi, Kg.”

Hazel: (frowning) “Really, Kg? Was your statement necessary?”

Kg: “Hao (goodness), I’m just asking. I mean, you two are friends, aren’t you?”

Hazel: "Yes, we are. Your point is?"

Kg: "Oh, nothing really. I mean, it obviously didn't take you too long to find yourself a replacement for Otilie and I. I expected you to find someone better than your high school bully."

Mathilda was really calm, but I on the other hand was fuming.

Hazel: (angrily) "If there's nothing better for you to say to us, you can keep on walking."

Kg: "Okay, Hazel. I'm sorry, I just didn't mean what I said. You've become so sensitive, lately, you know. One would swear you're pregnant, but then, you and Beast have been bonking day in, day out, I wouldn't be surprised."

She just had to go there.

Mathilda: "Kg

for someone who is still considered a friend by Hazel, you sure are being quite nasty right now."

Kg: "I'm just saying. Gosh, perhaps I need therapy too since you two are just overly sensitive about everything - including the truth."

By then, I had just had it. I wanted to tell her where to get off, but Mathilda was really calm about the entire situation.

Mathilda: "It's best you leave."

Kg: "Okay, let me not interrupt your bestie date. Bye."

I was hyperventilating and shaking at the same time. That girl just went right under my skin in a matter of seconds.

Mathilda: "Do you see why I keep telling you to make therapy a regular thing? You shouldn't let people like her get to you like that."

Hazel: "You're right, I'm sorry. It's just that - I couldn't help it, you know."

Mathilda: (frowning) "The Hazel I know would have noticed how she was just trying to antagonize you. Maybe she is being petty because you are spending more of your time with me lately."

Hazel: "I actually prefer spending time with you than them, besides, I hardly see them anymore."

Mathilda: "Don't let them get to you. The food is here. Let's dig in."

We had ordered four pizzas; two were meaty and two were spicy, but for some odd reason I couldn't stand the smell of the spicy one. I got immediate heartburn just by the smell of it. Mathilda noticed my sudden frown.

Mathilda: "What's wrong?"

Hazel: "It's just that – this pizza is making me nauseated all of a sudden. I think I've even developed some heartburn just by looking at it."

Mathilda: (frowning) "You love spicy food. What happened now?"

Hazel: "I don't know, but all I know is that I won't be eating it."

Mathilda: "Okay then. You can have the two meaty ones, and I'll eat the spicy ones."

Hazel: "Are you sure?"

Mathilda: "Yes, it's no big deal."

We swapped our pizza's and ate. I ate them both without fail, even though I usually had a high appetite, I could hardly finish an entire pizza alone in one meal, but I finished two that day, and I was still hungry after that, which surprised Mathilda.

Mathilda: "You finished them both?"

Hazel: "Yes, can you believe I'm still not full?"

Mathilda: (frowning) "It happens. Shall we pay the bill and leave? Beast will flip if he finds you are not ready to leave."

Hazel: "Eish (oh), you know him too well."

We paid and went to the car. The entire time Mathilda kept glancing at me strangely but didn't elaborate further as to why. I didn't think much of it, so I let it be. She dropped me off and we said our goodbyes. Upon arrival at my flat, I found Otlile home, which was very strange. She looked surprised to see me home and she hid something in her bag as soon as she saw me. She even looked like she had been crying.

Hazel: (frowning) "Are you okay?"

Otlile: "What are you doing home so early?"

Hazel: "I'm always home. Are you alright?"

Otlile: (angrily) "Don't act like you care! I'm not Mathilda!"

She snapped at me for no reason and took her bag as she stormed to her bedroom. I became annoyed at both her and Kg for their stupid behaviour. We made a pact before we went to Stellenbosch, but it seemed as if they had already forgotten about that. They just cared more and more about themselves and less about those around them. I went into my room and called Beast.

Beast: "Hey, baby. Miss me already?"

Hazel: (sigh) "When are you getting here? Please tell me that you are already on your way."

Beast: "I'm actually around the corner. I flew and rented a car for us. Is everything alright?"

Hazel: "Yes, I'm fine. I just miss you."

Beast: "Your tone says a lot about someone who's excited to see me. Have you packed already?"

Hazel: "Eish (Oh)..."

Beast: "Please tell me you have packed."

Hazel: "I'm almost done."

Beast: "I'm about to park the car. Speak soon."

He hung up and I dragged my suitcase out of the closet and started packing. He was going to be very displeased about that. Minutes later, he walked in and I flew right into his

arms. I hadn't seen him in four weeks, and only then, did I realize just how much I had missed his touch and his scent.

Beast: (chuckling) "Now I can see that you have missed me."

It didn't take long for us to be all over each other. Before we knew it, we were kissing one another and our clothes were off. We got on top of the bed, he took out a condom from one of my drawers, put it on and we had amazing sex. It felt a lot different than all the other times, I couldn't even explain it. It was as if it was extra pleasurable and I was extra wet down there.

Beast: (breathing heavily) "Baby, moer (dammit) man! Why umnandi kanje (are you so tasty)?"

Hazel: (laughing) "Stop it, Bethuel. You'll make me shy."

Beast: "I'm serious. I don't know if you have gained weight or if you feel different. I mean, look at your breasts – they've grown a little bit."

Hazel: (frowning) "What are you saying? Are you saying I've become fat, Bethuel?"

Beast: "No, baby, you've become voluptuous nyana (a bit) and I absolutely love it."

Hazel: (irritated) "Mxm, you're just saying that because I'm angry now."

Beast: "I mean every word. Yini ungathi unoku'kwata nje lamalanga (why does it seem as if you get angry for no reason lately)?"

Hazel: "Ag, I don't know what you mean. Let me get dressed so I can finish packing."

Beast: "Mind if I open the window and smoke?"

Hazel: "I thought you quit."

Beast: "I will the day you say "I do".

I just let him be, but the moment he lit his cigarette, I couldn't stand the smell. It felt as if my entire intestines were turning upside down the moment he lit that cigarette.

Hazel: (frowning) "Beast, that smell..."

Beast: "What? This?"

He showed me the cigarette and I ran to the toilet immediately. All my lunch came right out and went down the toilet, all because of his bloody cigarette. He came rushing after me and knocked on the bathroom door.

Beast: (knocking) "Sthandwa sami (my love), is everything okay?"

Hazel: "Yes, I'll be right out."

He waited for me right outside the bathroom door and I could still smell some of the cigarette on him. It made me queasy.

Beast: (frowning) "uRight (are you alright)?"

Hazel: "Yes, it's just... your cigarette... the smell..."

Beast: "I always smoke it around you and you never have had a problem with it before. Are you sure you're not coming down with something?"

Hazel: "I'm fine. Don't worry about it. Let me finish packing."

He sat on the bed and hardly said much. He just looked at me the entire time I was packing, and he was starting to make me uncomfortable.

Hazel: "Are you going to tell me why you're staring at me like that?"

Beast: "That day, when I asked you if you took the pill. Did you take it?"

Hazel: "Of course, I did! What are you trying to imply? That I'd lie to you about taking the pill just to fall pregnant with your child, Bethuel?!"

Beast: "Hazel, can you lower your voice and calm down, please? I wasn't accusing you of anything. I simply asked you a question. Why are you getting so defensive?"

Hazel: "I just felt attacked, that's all."

Beast: "How long have you had these nausea and vomiting spells?"

Hazel: "I don't know... Today was the first time I ever vomited for no reason at all. I think I just need a detox, that's all. Besides, I had some Vodka and Redbull today, that might have been the cause to my reaction."

Beast: (nodding) "Okay. Are you ready to go?"

Hazel: "Let me just change into this jean, hold on a second."

I put the jean on the bed and took off the one I was wearing. I put on the one I had placed on the bed, but when I tried pulling it up from my thighs, it got stuck. It didn't want to go up any further. It was very unusual for me because I wasn't a weight gainer at all. I looked at myself in the mirror, and noticed that I had actually gained quite a few kilo's. The jean wouldn't go up, which left me so frustrated, that I started crying. I burst into tears as if I had lost something so dear to me.

Beast: (surprised) "Yini manje (what is it)? Why are you crying?"

Hazel: (crying) “This... My jean... It won’t fit me any more. You were right, I’m fat now. Look at me. What is this shit, Bethuel?”

Beast: “Hazel, come on, now. Gaining weight is part of life. You shouldn't’ cry over it.”

The more he said that, the more I cried. I just took off the pair of jeans and wore a pair of leggings instead, while crying. Beast looked at me in so much shock, he had no idea what to do or how to comfort me. Something in his look said to me that he knew something wasn’t right with me. I felt so over emotional, so hypersensitive and I had no idea why.

Beast: “I'll go put the bags in the car.”

He barely said a word to me after that. I pulled myself together, grabbed my hand bag and we were off. During the entire car ride, we were just listening to music in complete silence. It was as if we were both thinking of something really deep. He turned at a robot and stopped at a nearby shopping complex and switched off the car.

Hazel: "What are you buying?"

Beast: "When was the last time you had your period?"

Just like that, Beast dropped a bomb question on me. A million thoughts were running through my mind at that point, and a million more possibilities of what would happen should my thoughts be true. I tried to think as far as possible and as hard as I could, but I couldn't recall using my pads that months.

Beast: (raised eyebrows) "I asked you a question."

Hazel: "I... I can't recall."

Beast: (nodding) "Ngiyabuya (I'll be back)."

He left me in the car and I started panicking. I kept thinking of all the negatives, his family will most probably have thought that I did it intentionally, and what about him? He would have thought the same because I had misplaced the first morning after pill he had bought for me. So, I decided to dial a friend for some advice.

Mathilda: "Hey, are you gone already?"

Hazel: "Friend, you won't guess what just happened."

I explained to her what happened from the moment Beast arrived at the flat. The entire time she was listening attentively without interrupting me. And then finally, she spoke.

Mathilda: "Well, I wanted to ask you the very same question earlier on when you said that the pizza was making you nauseous."

Hazel: (shocked) "What? Am I that ignorant?"

Mathilda: "Well, I mean you have gained some weight, and I just thought that it was due to exam stress and with everything that's been happening in your life recently, but with all the mood swings, I did suspect it."

Hazel: "Shit."

Mathilda: "It is not the end of the world, Hazel."

Hazel: "No, you don't get it. Beast doesn't want children."

Mathilda: "It's not that, it is the fact that you're still young and chasing after your dream. He doesn't want to come in between you and your goals. He is a good guy, Hazel. Just be honest with him and hear him out as well."

Hazel: "Okay, I have got to go. He's coming back."

Mathilda: "Okay, talk soon."

We hung up and Beast got back into the car with a plastic bag. I could tell he had bought some pregnancy tests.

Beast: "Is there anything you need before we hit the road? We're going to be on the road for a few hours."

Hazel: (shaking head) "No."

Beast: "Alright then."

Off we went and yet again, we were listening to music without saying a word to one another. It felt so tense, one could cut through the tension with a butter knife even. We stopped by our first place of accommodation, a nice lodge not very far from Stellenbosch. We checked in and the moment we went into our room, Beast told me he would be right back. He took a while, so I assumed he was taking a smoke. He came back smelling like cigarettes, which confirmed my suspicions. He placed the plastic bag he had that afternoon on the bed and looked at me.

Beast: "Can you please take these?"

I opened the plastic bag and saw about three pregnancy tests fall out.

Hazel: "I'm not pregnant, Beast."

Beast: "There is only one way to find out."

I took them with to the bathroom and slammed the door right in his face. I was so annoyed that he would think that I was pregnant, but I was more annoyed at myself. I kept blaming myself, I mean what would that mean for our relationship? I couldn't even think straight and I started crying silently before even peeing on the damn sticks. My life was about to change whether the test came out positive or negative. Somehow, I sensed that things were never going to be the same again between Beast and I.

John 17:17 - "Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth."

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“Whether you think you can or think you can’t, you’re right..” –
Henry Ford

Hazel

I was a shitty mess even before I had taken the test. I found myself sitting on the toilet seat, crying while staring at the enclosed boxes. I tried my best not to be heard crying, but I guess I didn’t do such a good job at it. I heard Beast knocking on the bathroom door, subtly.

Beast: “Hazel, please open the door.”

Hazel: (softly) “It's open.”

Beast: (concerned) "Have you taken the test yet?"

Hazel: (shaking head) "No."

Beast: "Then why are you crying?"

Hazel: (shrugging shoulders) "Because... what if the outcome destroys our relationship?"

Beast: "Whatever the outcome, Hazel, I could never leave you. You're my world."

Hazel: "I'm scared..."

Beast: "It's better to be scared while knowing than being scared of the unknown."

He was right in a way, I suppose.

Beast: "Take the test. I'll be right here with you."

I nodded while I took a deep breath and opened the boxes slowly, while he was sitting right there watching me. It was as if I was delaying the entire process. Slowly but surely the boxes got opened one by one. I took off my leggings and started peeing on each one of them. I didn't even want to look at them before I was done, but judging by Beast's reaction as he looked at them, I already knew that my worst fears were confirmed.

Hazel: (anxiously) "What does it say?"

His silence was deafening. I saw his jaw tighten as he looked at me. It was as if he couldn't stomach facing me. I felt judged, hurt at that moment.

Hazel: (crying) "Beast, what does it say?"

Beast: (voice breaking) "It's positive."

I took them all one by one and I started feeling my warm tears burn my cheeks. I couldn't even look at Beast at that moment, I felt like he was judging me, like he thought it was all my fault. I just buried my face in my hands and started crying even more.

Beast: "Baby, you still have long way to go, goals to reach. We can try again in a few years once you're done graduating."

He started with that again and I couldn't take it.

Hazel: (shocked) "What are you saying, Beast? Are you saying you want to kill your first child? You want me to agree to kill your first child?"

Beast: "Hazel, it's not like that. I don't want you to resent me. You're only 19. Raising a child isn't child's play, and I don't want to disrupt your studies. Look, it is my fault - entirely my fault. I should have known better than to have unprotected sex with you. Please, don't make this any harder than it already is."

I couldn't believe my ears. He was so calm about, talking to me as if it was some sort of negotiation.

Hazel: "I'm not killing my child, Beast. I won't do it. We can afford it and we'll be getting married soon anyways, so why kill it?"

Beast: "Raising a child is about more than just money. I want you to have one when you're ready emotionally. You're the one that is going to go through all the physical and emotional changes. Do you really want a baby to stand in the way of your success right now?"

Hazel: (angrily) "I'm not killing my baby, Beast! I see what you're doing. You're blaming me, aren't you?"

Beast: "I just told you that I know it is completely my fault."

Hazel: "Give me one good reason why you want me to get rid of your own flesh and blood."

Beast: "My mother had me when she was still in school, Hazel. She had to leave everything and tend to me. She has never said it, but deep down I know she has a few regrets and having me at that age is one of them."

Hazel: "There you go again. Why do you have to bring your mother into this? She already hates me and you know it. She is the one who put you up to this, isn't she? She told you to tell me to abort, right?"

Beast: "I've never needed my mother's approval for anything in life - let alone what to do with my own child."

Hazel: "I can't believe what you're asking me to do. Please, give me some space."

Beast: "Hazel, I - "

Hazel: (interrupting) "Please!"

He took a good look at me and I saw some hurt in his eyes, but not even a few tears from him could comprehend the pain he caused me when he asked me to abort. I honestly thought he was going to be happy, although it happened at a rather unfavourable time, but I really thought that the baby could have been something auspicious for us. I guess I was the only one who had such thoughts amongst the two of us. I grew up knowing that children were a blessing from God and knowing very well how much my mother wanted to abort me, but failed to do it - was something that motivated me to do better. I believed that God had chosen me specifically to be the baby's mother for a reason. I didn't want to give into any potential luck. I mean, it was a baby for crying out loud! We created a life and all he thought about was killing it. That broke me so badly, that all I did was curl up and cry on the floor of that cold bathroom.

Beast

The moment Hazel went to the bathroom to vomit earlier on that day, my suspicions were confirmed. Malume Sfiso called me earlier on that week to tell me about a dream he had concerning me and asked me if Hazel was pregnant. I thought it was just one of those dreams, but all that happened that day made sense. I was a mess, emotionally. I felt like such a dick for making Hazel hurt like that, but the truth is I was ready to have a child - I just knew she wasn't ready. I didn't want her to blame me for that, I didn't want her to raise our child while putting her dreams on hold. She failed to understand that, because she was making a decision based purely on emotions. All I wanted us to live a happy life and plan everything of ours, without having to alter our lives around a sudden change. Of course it hurt me just suggesting that she abort my first child, but I was doing it for her. I went out to smoke, while I let the tears consume me. I was hurting like hell, my heart felt like it was broken into a million pieces although I was still stuck on my word. I just had no idea how to make her

see my point, but also, perhaps keeping the baby wouldn't have been such a bad idea. I decided to call the one sane person who understood me in my life.

Brenda: "Bhuti (brother), I hardly get calls from you at this time. Is everything okay?"

Beast: (teary) "No, it's not okay, and I think that I have just made it all worse."

Brenda: "What happened?"

I relayed the entire scenario to her while she listened attentively. I didn't even realize how much I was crying until I was done speaking.

Hazel: "That is quite a mouthful. So in all this, have you considered her reasons for wanting to keep the baby?"

Beast: "No."

Brenda: "Bethuel, that girl fell in love for the very first time in her life - with you. She had sex for the very first time in her life with you, and now, she is expecting her very first child - with

you. You honestly didn't think for a second that she would be hurt by the fact that her fiance wants her to abort their child?"

I didn't think of it that way to be honest.

Beast: "I didn't think of it like that."

Brenda: "You weren't thinking at all. Look here, Hazel has experienced so much trauma in her life, all because her mother didn't want her. You honestly think she would want to abort her own baby? Bethuel, you guys can afford a child, you guys can love and raise a child well enough for him or her to become better than the both of you. You are not your past and neither is she hers. Just think about it for a second before making hasty decisions. I can promise you that you two can come up with an

amicable solution and you guys might actually fall in love with this baby.”

She was speaking some sense into me, which I had hoped she would do.

Beast: “I don't know why you're so wise when you don't even have kids of your own.”

Brenda: (chuckling) “I am very wise, beyond my years.”

Beast: (sigh) "Thank you, I really appreciate your words. I just don't know what to do. She was so pissed at me."

Brenda: "You're her man, and she loves you. Relationships won't always be sunshine and roses. You'll figure something out."

Beast: "Thanks, sis. I owe you one."

Brenda: "You know you do. Oh, by the way, Phumza called me saying you don't want to answer her calls."

Beast: "She and Mama insulted my Hazel for no reason nje, and now she is asking me for money. She can miss me."

Brenda: "See? That's motivation enough to become a great father. Let me love and leave you. Go get your woman."

Beast: "Bye."

I hung up and finished the rest of my smoke then went back to the bedroom. Upon arrival, I found Hazel already in bed. I wasn't even gone that long, but I could tell that she was in a bad space - all because of me. That really wasn't my intention.

Beast: (softly) "Hazel, baby, can we talk?"

She didn't respond and pretended to be asleep, but when you know your wife, you can always tell when they are actually asleep or when they are just acting.

Beast: (sigh) "Baby wami (my baby), I'm really sorry. I didn't mean to sound so harsh. I only thought that I was putting you first, but I didn't realize I was hurting you. The last thing I wanted was to hurt you like that. I know how much it means to you, and I'd never force you to do something you don't agree with. We can keep the baby. I promise to be there for you whenever you need me, and I'll never let you go. When I proposed to you, I made a promise. I wanted to surprise you, but I might as well tell you anyway, I went to KZN to see my

uncles a few weeks ago. We have already sent a letter to your family in Limpopo, and we're awaiting their response. Now with the baby on the way, we can do this sooner than anticipated."

She kept quiet without responding, and of course, I deserved it. I just kissed her neck and let her be. I held her in my arms and dozed off.

Hazel

After my intense fight with Beast, I couldn't even do anything. I couldn't think of eating and I most definitely didn't want to talk to him, so I resorted to the best remedy ever created - sleeping. I lay on the bed and I must have cried myself to solid

sleep. I heard him walk in, but by then I was already sleepy. I heard him say whatever he wanted to say, but I was still angry at him, how I wish I had responded. I woke up at about 5am in the morning, and it was still dark outside and cold, since it was winter. I woke up because I felt an urgent need to urinate, but I kept delaying. When I went to the toilet, I was gob smacked to find what was happening to me. I couldn't believe it, it scared me so much that I just called out Beast's name.

Hazel: (shouting) "Beast! Beast!"

He was alarmed by my behaviour and came rushing.

Beast: (startled) "What's wrong? What is it?"

I looked down the toilet and just cried.

Hazel: (crying) "There's... blood. So much blood."

He came and checked in the toilet and he became so scared. I had never seen him that frightened before. He grabbed the nearest towel he could find and wrapped it around my waist. He picked me up and grabbed his keys and put me in the car. I had never seen him drive like such a maniac before. I could feel the blood still dripping from my insides, and all I could ever think was, "I killed my baby".

Beast: (petrified) "Baby, we'll get you to a hospital, and you'll be alright. I promise you. Our baby will be alright."

That was the very first time he had referred to the baby as "ours". I had no experience of miscarriages, but I knew deep within that I had lost our baby. I felt some sort of emptiness and mild cramping from my abdomen, and I just knew. It was only then, that I understood the literal meaning of "The lord giveth, and the Lord taketh."

Job 1:21 - " And he said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."

“Security is mostly a superstition. Life is either a daring adventure or nothing.” – Helen Keller

Beast

Throughout the entire drive, all I kept thinking was that I was going to lose my Hazel. I had never seen so much blood come out of anyone's body before while they were alive before. I was trembling in severe fear, while Hazel was quiet. I knew that I had fucked up, but never did I actually think that we'd lose our baby. We had literally just found out about the baby's existence a few hours prior. It hadn't even been a day and we didn't even get a chance to rejoice. My wife was in pain, and all I kept thinking to myself was, “What have I done?”

Hazel

I was quiet the entire car ride through. I just couldn't comprehend what had just happened to me, all I wanted to do was just crawl into a big hole and just stay there. I felt like it was my fault my baby had died before even existing. I never got to experience getting a sonar scan, hearing my baby's first heartbeat. I would have never gotten the experience of a baby shower. I felt like shit, I felt so numb, I just didn't hear anything and anyone around me. Beast was driving like a fucking maniac and he kept talking to me. I assumed he was also scared, but the pain I was feeling at that point, emotional pain could not allow me to focus on his feelings. The moment we arrived at the hospital and he called the ER team, tears ran down my face when he picked me up because I felt the blood come out of me still. I was placed on the stretcher, and he kept telling me that I'd be alright, but it didn't feel that way.

Beast: (crying) "Baby, you'll be okay. Mkami (my wife), our baby is going to be just fine."

Nurse: "Sir, please, you can't come along with us beyond this point. We'll update you on her status in a few minutes."

They wheeled me away and all I could do was cry.

Nurse: "How far along were you, miss? Did you take something for an abortion?"

I could not even respond, I was numb.

Nurse: "I need you to relax, okay? This is going to be a little cold."

She just put some gel on my stomach and started checking via sonagram.

Nurse: "Hmm, I'm afraid you have lost the baby. You were 6 weeks along. See here? The cervical entrance is already open and the remains of the fetus have already been expelled from the uterus. I'm so sorry for your loss, but I'm afraid I have to schedule you for a womb scrub as soon as possible to remove the left over remains."

Hazel: "Do what you have to do."

She left saying she had to go inform Beast on my status, but all I could think of was the guilt consuming me. Beast walked in a few minutes later, looking paler than the colour white itself.

Beast: (teary) "Sthandwa sami (my love), how are you feeling?"

I couldn't respond, even though I did try.

Beast: "I'm so sorry, baby. This is all my fault. First, I begged you to abort and now, the baby is gone. We lost our baby all

because of me. Please, forgive me, Hazel. I was so ready to accept the baby we created, that we created and formed as a product of our love. I never meant for us to go through so much hardship. I'm so sorry."

Hazel: (teary) "You have finally received your wish, Bethuel. Our baby is no more. You can be relieved now."

Beast: "Haze... Don't say that, please..."

Hazel: "I know, you blamed me. You thought that I intentionally fell pregnant because I forgot to take the morning after pills you bought for me. The truth is, I was in such a mess because of my mom that I misplaced them, and by the time I had to take

them, I had forgotten. When I remembered the following day, it was when you reminded me of them

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and so, Mathilda had gotten me her aunt who is a nurse to give me the pills. Little did I know it would be a little too late. I never wanted to trap you, Bethuel. I thought that when you proposed to me and asked for my hand in marriage, that you were willing to deal with every curveball life had to throw at us. Yet, you crumbled at the first sign of trouble. You thought of the easy way out, yet you failed to look beyond your reasons. I grew up neglected, because I was unwanted by my own mother. She wanted to abort me, you knew all this when you fell in love with me, yet you insisted that I abort our baby. You took care of your sisters your entire life, yet you didn't want to care for your own blood; the child you created from your own seed."

Beast: (crying) "Hazel, please. Don't be like that. I'm so sorry, and I admit that this was all my doing."

Hazel: (shaking head) "No, Beast. You refused to take responsibility yet you say you want to marry me. Do you have any idea how horrible I feel right now?"

Beast: (crying) "I can't comprehend, but I am so sorry, Hazel. Please, just give me a chance."

Hazel: "I'd like to be alone."

Beast: "Please, don't shut me out."

Hazel: "Please, leave."

Beast: "I - "

Hazel: (interrupting) "Please."

I looked at her, hoping she would say that it was all just a misunderstanding and that she wanted me to stay, but no, she insisted that I leave. She couldn't even stand to look at me. I was so convinced that I had killed our child, our first child. I walked out with a heavy heart and decided to call Malume Sfiso.

Malume Sfiso: "Mshana (Nephew)."

Beast: (crying) "Malume (Uncle)."

Malume Sfiso: "What happened? I've been having a very strange feeling about you all day. I even tried praying about it, but no answer."

Beast: (crying) "Malume (uncle), Hazel just had a miscarriage."

Malume Sfiso: "Dammit, that is the message they kept sending through to me. It was so unclear, my boy, which means that it was meant to be. It was out of our hands."

Beast: (crying) "What have I done wrong, Malume (uncle)?"

Malume Sfiso: "I'll pray about it, but she will need to get cleansed. The Makwetla's have responded to our proposal for marriage and a date has been set. We'll be going in three months from now. That would mean in September, it would be perfect for your birthday."

Beast: (teary) "Okay, I understand. She wants nothing to do with me right now, Malume. How do I even comfort her when she wants nothing to do with me?"

Malume Sfiso: "Give her time. Just like any other person, she also wants to be alone. She wants to process the pain alone. She too is human, Bethuel. You two are still bound to experience problems. So, you just hang in there and keep on praying. Pray more for her than yourself. She's a lot more feeble than I anticipated."

Beast: "I hear you, Malume. I'll try my best."

Malume Sfiso: "Hang in there, son. You're a lot stronger than you think."

I said my goodbyes and sat right outside the ward. I refused to go back to the lodge without Hazel, at least without her talking to me. I knew I had messed up, but I didn't want to leave her alone. I didn't mind the cold, all I wanted was to hear her voice, I wanted her to accept my token of comfort and to cry in my arms. I needed it.

Philippians 4:19 - " And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus."

“If you don’t like the road you’re walking, start paving another one.” – Dolly Parton

Beast

I decided not to go home, I camped right outside Hazel’s hospital room the entire night. I didn’t want to leave her sight, but I respected her wishes as she did state she wanted nothing to do with me. All I did was send her texts throughout the night, asking her if everything was okay and if she needed anything, but I’d see her online yet she wouldn’t respond to any of my texts. I felt so hurt, broken, as if I had lost my entire world. I couldn’t lose her like that – I refused to. By 4am the following morning, I had gone to her room. I said nothing, instead I slept on the couch in her room and watched her sleep. Before I dozed off to sleep again, I decided to pray. I slowly walked towards her bed, knelt right beside her and prayed. It felt to me as if it was a prayer that would determine my future – our future.

Beast: “Father God, I humble myself before you. First and foremost, I thank you for life. I thank you that I am able to bow

before you. Dear Lord, I ask that you please, please help Hazel and I through this heartbreaking chapter in our life. All I wanted was to give her a chance at her own life, to reach her own goals. It was never my intention to upset her or wish death upon my child. Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruits, as it is said in Proverbs 18:21. I never meant to say or wish anything bad upon my child – our child. A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger, as it is said in Proverbs 15:1. It was never my intention to upset Hazel to the point of her losing our child, our first child. From now on, I ask you Lord, Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips!, as it is said in Psalm 141: 3. I ask you to please, guide me and protect me. Help me so that I can protect my future wife right here. Help me so that I never make the same mistake ever again. I know, all this is my fault, I take full responsibility thereof. All I ask of you is to bless us with a happy life, a life that I have always desired. Matthew 21:22 says; “And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith.” I have finally found the woman of my dreams, Lord, please, do not take her away from me. I am not sure if I’d ever survive that. I pray in Jesus’ Mighty Name. Amen.”

I felt my face feeling rather hot, and that was when I realized that I had been crying for quite some time. I even had a slight migraine appearing. Nothing I felt could be compared to what Hazel was feeling at that point. I had failed her – dismally. I had failed her before I could even be her husband. Only time would tell if we were going to make it through that dark hole or not, but I had immense faith. Slowly, but surely I drifted off to sleep.

Hazel

I was sleeping, until I heard Beast walk in. I knew it was him because the nurses would have woken me up to check on my blood pressure and vitals. I pretended to be asleep because I just couldn't face him. Yes, when we first arrived at the hospital and we found out that I had lost the baby, I blamed him. I blamed him for everything; for making me so angry that I had to lose my baby, for wishing that I had decided on an abortion and then his dream finally came true. I was a real mess, emotionally to be honest. Physically, I wasn't in any pain, I just had mild stomach cramps that felt like the onset of period pains. I assumed he just came to sit with me, but he did the unexpected, well, it wasn't really unexpected because my Beast was a prayer warrior ever since I had met him. He became

worse when we started dating. He's the one who would wake me up at midnight so that we pray together. I felt him kneel next to me and his hands were on my bed, right next to my waist and he started praying.

The moment he did that, something moved within me. It is amazing how one can always feel the Holy Spirit at work. His words really touched me, and I couldn't bear the thought of seeing him crying like that. I heard his voice break, I heard him sniffing and it was terribly heartbreaking for me. I couldn't believe how selfish I was. Yes, I was in pain, and I felt as if I was leaning more towards my own feelings, instead of letting him in. Hearing him blame himself right in front of God really broke me, because I felt the same way – about myself. I blamed myself. Perhaps if I had taken that pill in time, we wouldn't have been in that mess. I wasn't sure if things were ever going to be the same ever again because Beast and I had never been through such a thing before. As they always say, only time would tell.

A few hours later, I woke up and found him sitting right next to me. He was very worried.

Beast: (faint smile) "Morning. How are you feeling?"

Hazel: "Morning. I'm a lot better. How are you?"

He looked so pale, with bloodshot eyes as if he hardly slept. That couch couldn't have been comfortable.

Beast: "I could be better, but I'm okay."

He was trying so hard to conceal his true feelings. I felt it was my opportunity to speak up and tell him how I felt.

Hazel: "Beast, I'd like to talk to you about something."

His phone rang, making me pause as a reaction to the interruption. He ignored it.

Beast: "Continue, mkami (my wife). I'm all ears."

Hazel: "I was saying that - "

The phone rang again, and it obviously meant it was an emergency since the person kept calling.

Hazel: "Answer it. It might be important."

Beast: "It's your mom. I'm sure it can wait."

Hazel: "No, really. Answer it. I'll still be here after the call."

Beast: "Are you sure?"

Hazel: (nodding) "Yes."

He answered it and indeed, it was an emergency.

Beast: "Hello."

Binah: (hysterical) “Yoh (oh)! Bethuel! Kgale sela ke founa (I've been calling for so long)!”

Beast: “Is everything okay?”

Binah: “Bella is in labor! We managed to get one of the taxis to take her to hospital. We're already here at Life Eugene Marais Hospital. They say that she was already too far to be transferred to a Government Hospital, so she is already in the delivery room.”

Beast: “Why didn't you just ask the driver to take her to Kalafong, mara (though), Sis'Bee?”

Binah: “I wasn't thinking

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besides, you know how government hospitals are – completely useless along with their staff. Look, you are about to be my Son-in-law, I can't have my daughter give birth at some pathetic hospital. Are you coming or not?”

Beast: "I can't right now, Hazel is in hospital - "

I stopped him right there by shaking my head. I didn't want him to tell her everything.

Binah: (shocked) "Hospital?! Why? What happened?"

Beast: "I'll explain later."

Binah: "Did you hit her?"

Beast: "Of course not. Look, I'll explain a little later. We're halfway in Pretoria, we're still on our way back home. I'll call you. Tell them we're on the way."

Binah: "Okay, but we'll need some money for the baby's things. We didn't buy anything."

Beast: "I'll send you some money."

He hung up the phone and I was not happy with the fact that she was already asking my man for money, for Bella's baby things. I mean, really? She spoke so much trash about him and yet he just took it like a punching bag.

Hazel: "You really don't have to help them, you know."

Beast: "I want to. One day, you'll thank me for this."

Hazel: "Okay, then. Get the doctor to discharge me so we can leave."

Beast: (frowning) "You're not well yet."

Hazel: "I'm fine."

Beast: "Are we going to finish the conversation we were busy with before the phone call?"

Hazel: (shaking head) “A little later.”

The truth is, I was a little hurt hearing that Bella was about to give birth. Life can be so cruel sometimes, I mean, there I was, faithful to God, I tried my best to be a good person, and yet she on the other hand was more than fucked up. She just conceived without fail and was most probably drinking her entire pregnancy. She hardly even went to for her antenatal visits at the clinic and yet she was about to give birth without fail. Why couldn't I be given the same chance? I didn't even get a chance to experience what pregnancy was like – and my baby was taken away from me. The doctor came and didn't want to discharge me, but I explained that we needed to go back to Pretoria. She discharged me, reluctantly. Beast truly insisted that I get driven out of the hospital in a wheelchair. I didn't want to protest, so I let him be. We got into the car, and we first stopped by the lodge to check out and he got our bags. We were on the road yet again. I thought he would drive back to the airport and get us the nearest flight, but he insisted on driving us back home. I wasn't complaining, and we weren't really saying much.

We stopped every now and again to get something to eat, and we ate in silence. We occasionally held hands and even though

we didn't say anything to one another, the love was still there, but something was just different. We finally made it back to Pretoria, at about 7pm. Poor Beast was on the road driving non-stop. I really needed to get my own license so I could assist him further with the driving every now and then. He wanted us to stop by the hospital together, and I didn't want to, but also, it would have been really unfair of me to let him go there without me. They were my family, which means they were my baggage and now, he was dragged into all of it. He saw my reluctance, and besides that, I was exhausted.

Beast: "Should I take you home? To my house to rest? I'll go check up on your mom and Bella."

Hazel: (shaking head) "No, it's alright. I'll go with you. It's not fair of me to let you go on your own."

Beast: "You must be exhausted."

Hazel: "I'll be okay. Let's go together."

He nodded as we drove along together. I dreaded seeing them, seeing Bella's baby. The moment we arrived, I decided to stay in the car. I just couldn't stomach it. I already knew what kind of insults were going to come out of my mother's mouth. Lord knew that I was still trying to process the pain.

Hazel: "You go right in, I'll wait for you here in the car."

Beast: "Okay, but it might take a while."

Hazel: "I'll be alright. He kissed my cheek and it felt to me as if it was done as a sign of guilt. He went in while I took my time to speak to Mathilda. She had been trying to get hold of me for a while. I decided to call her and she answered on the first ring.

Mathilda: "Hazel, thank goodness you finally answered. I've been trying to get hold of you for hours. Are you alright? Did you get home safely?"

Hazel: (sigh) "I - "

I couldn't even fake my emotions. I burst into tears.

Mathilda: "Oh, honey. What's wrong?"

Hazel: (crying) "I, I, I lost the baby, Mathilda."

Mathilda: "What? My goodness, I mean when did all this happen?"

Hazel: "Beast got me the pregnancy tests and then I took them last night. We had a bit of a fight about it and in the early hours of the morning, I woke up to some pain in my abdomen. So much blood and clots came out of me the moment I sat on that toilet seat. The doctors confirmed it."

Mathilda: "Haze, I'm so sorry. I really am. How are you feeling about it, really?"

Hazel: "Honestly, I have no idea. I feel so guilty, and I know Beast feels like absolute shit. Honestly, I don't know how to fix

this between us, Mathilda. I get the feeling that things will never be the same again.”

Mathilda: “Grief has that effect on people and their relationships, Hazel. You just need to allow yourselves to grieve. Hang in there and when the dust settles, I suggest therapy – for the both of you. It might do you guys well.”

Hazel: “Well, as if my problems aren't enough, we're at the hospital as we speak. Bella has given birth.”

Mathilda: “Oh, no. I can only imagine how that must feel like for you. Hang in there, honey. Your time is coming. I may not know what it feels like to lose a baby, babe, but all I know is that God has his reasons. You will have your own baby – a second chance. I believe so and I truly believe that you and Beast are destined for greatness. Your relationship will soar to greater heights. Every relationship has its problems and believe me when I say you both still have room to grow within it. I know, it sounds as if it is just the usual advice, but I have never seen a man love a woman the way he loves you. Hang in there and don't be afraid to be vulnerable around him. Express your feelings and Trust in God.”

Hazel: "Thank you, I really appreciate your words, Mathilda."

Mathilda: "If you ever need to talk, I'm here."

Hazel: "I really appreciate that."

Support comes in many forms, and I have always believed that when you find someone who supports you and loves you unconditionally, you should hang onto it no matter what.

John 14:13 – 14 - "Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it. "

“Your life only gets better when you get better.”- Brian Tracy

Beast

I was so stressed about leaving Hazel in the car all alone, but I just wanted to be there for her, at the same time I didn't want to have bad blood between her mother and I. I wanted to marry her, and I needed to lay out a good foundation. I wasn't intending on supporting them forever, just long enough until they got on their own two feet. The moment I walked into the hospital, I found Sis'Bee right in the foyer, waiting for me. She was so drunk, one could smell the alcohol on her breath from a mile away.

Binah: “Bethuel, you finally made it. Yoh, gape these people were giving me a hard time with the account.”

Beast: “Hi, Sis'Bee. You could have asked them to transfer her to kalafong immediately after the birth, couldn't you?”

Binah: “Hao (goodness), but I just explained to you over the phone. You could have told me if you didn't want to.”

Beast: “Sis'Bee, let's get one thing straight here before we proceed here for a minute. Sis'Bee, I'm about to be your son-in-law, not your husband, and most certainly not Bella's husband. I am willing to help out here and there, so that you can give Hazel peace of mind. I don't want you bothering her. She has enough on her plate as is. I'm giving you three months, three months to get back on your feet, find a job, and I will only help out with groceries. That goes for Bella as well. I am not here to sustain your lifestyles, I am here to build a home and family with Hazel.”

She was shocked, but I think she insulted me in a more subtle manner so that I could pay the bill.

Binah: (annoyed) “Bathong (goodness), Bethuel. You could have just said you don't want to help. Now you're making me feel like a charity case, you know.”

Beast: “It is up to you.”

Binah: "Fine. I hear you. I'll do as you say."

I went to reception and paid the account. Of course, they charged Bella R35000 for the birth, and an extra R15000 for the hospital stay. I couldn't let them charge her for yet another day. I didn't have money to waste like that.

Binah: "So, tell me, why was Hazel in the hospital?"

Beast: "It is not my place to tell, at least not right now. Can you please go get Bella ready for discharge?"

Binah: (shocked) "What? She needs to rest. She can't go home already."

Beast: "Sis'Bee, I am here to pay for the procedure and one day only. Bella has given birth, if the doctors deem her unfit to go home, she can be transferred to Kalafong."

Binah: "You know what that bitch will do to me if my daughter is taken there."

Beast: "How is it my problem?"

Binah: (angrily) "You see? This is why I keep saying you're no good for my daughter. You are just no good. You act rich, but you are just a broke gangster."

Beast: "Sis'Bee, this is the reason why Hazel had a miscarriage to begin with! You are too toxic to even realize that you are no good to her."

I realized I slipped when she looked at me shocked.

Binah: (shocked) "O reng (What did you just say)? Do you see? You see how you are no good for her? If it were someone else, she wouldn't have lost her baby!"

Beast: "Don't act like you care about her now. Please, don't do that. You have been nothing but toxic towards her ever since

she was born. You're really starting to frustrate me, so here's the deal. I'm leaving. Hazel has been through a lot and needs to sleep. Here's money for an Uber. You can order an Uber for once, instead of drinking. If you don't check out by tonight, you will be charged for an extra stay of which I am not going to pay for.”

Binah: (shouting) “I should have known you are just another asshole! You'll never be good enough for my daughter, Bethuel! Never!”

I was so over her. I was hurting, and depressed and heartbroken. She really pressed the wrong buttons. I couldn't cope with anything negative from her anymore. I gave her a few hundred bucks and walked out while she was cussing me out. I couldn't stand any of it any more. She was lucky enough I paid the hospital bill. I rushed to the car, to find Hazel, patiently waiting for me.

Beast: “Sorry I took so long. Are you alright?”

Hazel: (nodding) “Yes, where are they? Aren't they discharged?”

Beast: “I paid and she started insulting me, so I gave her money for an Uber and left her there.”

Hazel: “Okay, let's go home.”

I was so relieved that she still called my house “home”. She didn't want any food, so we just got to the house and she went straight to bed. The mood felt so foreign, I don't know. I just felt like I didn't want to bother her, but I also wanted to be close to her. She landed right on the bed and got into the sheets.

Beast: “May I come lie next to you?”

Hazel: (sigh) “I don't know if that's a good idea. I'd like to be alone for a while, if that's okay with you.”

My heart broke, but I just accepted it.

Beast: (teary) "Okay. I'll be in the lounge if you need me."

She didn't even respond. My heart was aching beyond any comparable emotion. I had no idea what to do or say, so I called Malume Sfiso.

Malume: "Bethuel, kunjani mfana wami (how are you my boy)?"

Beast: (crying) "I could be better, Malume."

Malume: "Bethuel, you need to be strong."

Beast: "How, Malume? She has lost our child and now she is pushing me away."

Malume: "Work on getting her cleansed. Her maternal family needs to do it for her as soon as possible."

Beast: “What about the lobola negotiations? How soon can we do it?”

Malume: “I don't know if she would agree, but we already received a response from the Makwetla family. They want us to proceed on 8 September.”

Beast: “That's my birthday, but it feels too far, Malume. Can't you ask for a nearer date?”

Malume: “I can, but we can't rush them, you know. I'll ask and get back to you.”

Beast: “Thank you.”

Malume: “Bethuel, don't forget to pray.”

Little did I know his words would mean something a whole lot deeper. I sat in the lounge and watched tv to keep my mind busy. I even resorted to staring at pictures Hazel and I had taken over the months. I rejoiced at how happy we were. She

was my world and I needed her to remain that. I couldn't bear her facing that pain alone – without me by her side. I needed to trust in the Lord, but as Malume said, something big was coming my way and I needed to be prepared. So, I needed to prepare for it and the only way for me to have done that was through Prayer.

Four weeks later...

Hazel

It had been a rather sombre few weeks. I had spent most of my time crying myself to sleep and pushing Beast away. I had no idea why I did that, but I guess it was because the guilt was consuming me so much, I didn't want him near me. Whenever he tried to touch me, I refused. We hadn't slept in the same bed ever since I had come back from the miscarriage. I was too broken and by the time I felt ready to mend things, it was rather too late. Beast had gotten himself so swamped with work, that I hardly saw him. I was still on Holiday, and had one more week left before returning to Stellenbosch. Beast had organized me someone from the Traffic department to get me a learner's licence and I had been busy with driving lessons

daily ever since then. It was a little difficult at first, but after a week, I had gotten the hang of it. Nonetheless, Beast and I still texted often, just not as much as much as we used to. My mother had been calling and texting me, but I had been ignoring her. Beast arranged a cleansing for me with my mother's family back in Polokwane, and even so, I expected it to be a little easier, but it just wasn't that easy. I still relied on James, my Uber driver for everything whenever Mathilda wasn't around. I finally moved in next door to Mathilda, and we had been having the best time. I was spending a lot of time with her, that either she would be sleeping over, or it would be the other way around. School was seriously murdering us, with new modules and a new Semester, we really had to try and balance life. I hardly had the time to socialize, I mean, I basically had no one to socialize with when Kg and Otlile just decided to be angry at me for moving out. I had to do it, and it turned out to be the best thing that had ever happened to me. Ever since my miscarriage, I'd been having weird dreams – dreams that didn't even make sense yet Beast was nowhere to be found in the dreams. I'd been feeling so depressed, so numb that I had slowly forgotten how to pray. I would pray whenever I tried, but I hardly woke up in the middle of the night like Beast taught me to pray. It was so bad, that spiritually, I felt a bit disconnected from God – from everything and everyone. To make matters worse I had hardly been dreaming of Malachi,

despite the fact that Beverly gave birth to a beautiful baby boy, Malachi's spitting image and named him Malachi Junior, but we all called him MJ. She promised to make time to come to South Africa, so that a ceremony would be done for the baby. Things seemed to be going well, but there was such a big, hollow part left in my heart. One Friday morning in July, I didn't have classes. I was just relaxing in bed, going through my Instagram and checking out the latest news, when I received an unexpected call from Beast. The last time I had checked he was in Cape Town for some business, I wasn't expecting him to finish so early.

Hazel: "Hey."

Beast: (excitedly) "Mkami (my love). Are you awake?"

Hazel: "Not really, I'm just lying in bed. What's up?"

Beast: (eagerly) "Can you come out, please?"

Hazel: "Are you here already? Beast, it's like 9am in the morning and you know how the weather is this side during winter."

Beast: "Please."

Hazel: "Have you lost your key?"

Beast: "I promise you, you won't regret it. Please

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come out."

I sighed and I was a bit irritated. I mean, he had his own key to my apartment - yet he chose to make me come out in a cold winter morning.

Hazel: "Alright."

He sounded so eager to see me. Somehow, the spark had slowly faded away, and my heart didn't spark up whenever he

spoke to me any more. It was concerning to me. I felt a bit lost in terms of our relationship. As I walked out, I didn't find him outside my flat, so I walked down the stairs and found him standing right outside a beautiful, red Renault Sandero, with a big red bow on it. He looked so happy to see me, as if he wasn't feeling cold.

Hazel: (frowning) "Beast, what's all this?"

He took out a pair of keys and waved them at me, keenly.

Beast: "This is your car, baby. Here are your keys."

I was a bit shocked, I mean he had done so much for me, but to buy me a car, that was a bit extreme.

Hazel: (shocked) "Beast, no. I mean, it must have cost you a fortune."

Beast: “Well, you wouldn't have taken a Mercedes from me, so I had to opt for this. Come on, get inside. Perhaps you might get a little bit more excited when you see the inside of it.”

I was a little bit excited – despite feeling so cold. I got into the driver's seat as instructed and immediately fell in love with the car. It smelled so beautiful, so brand new. The gorgeous red and black leather seats made it feel so comfortable and the rest of the interior made me love it even more. I was so happy that for once, he opted to be different than most men – well, as he always did. He bought me something completely different to a VW as most people bought for their first cars.

Beast: “So, do you like it?”

Hazel: “Like? Beast, I think, I think I'm about to fall in love with it.”

Beast: (chuckling) “As long as you don't love it more than me. Come on, now, let's take it for a spin.”

Hazel: (excitedly) “Okay. But, what about the bow?”

Beast: “It will go off on its own. Come on, my lady, the car is dying to meet its new owner.”

I was actually so excited. I was even checking the kilometres and noticed that it had only been driven for less than 1000km, which means he bought it and drove it to my place straight from the shop. While driving, he was so happy that he played our song, Ubuhle Bako by Ami Faku, immediately I knew that those things took time. We would eventually fall back into each other's arms again.

Beast: “You're getting better at this driving thing. The next time we go back home, you're driving.”

Hazel: “Yoh (oh)! I could never drive so long.”

Beast: “What do you take me for? I'd never let my wife drive for so long. You're too gorgeous to even lift a finger.”

We both laughed. It had been so long since we laughed like that. I thought we were going to take a short drive and drive back to my flat, but of course, Beast had other plans.

Beast: "Come, take a turn here to the Beach."

Hazel: (frowning) "In this weather, Beast? There's no way I'm getting out."

Beast: "I told you, you really think I don't take you seriously. I love you way too much to make you suffer like that."

He let me park right in the parking facing the Beach and asked me to leave the car idling. He quickly got out of the car and went to take a bunch of red roses with a picnic basket out of the boot. We adjusted our seats as he opened the basket for us.

Hazel: (smiling) "Beast, you really didn't have to. I honestly don't know what to say."

Beast: "Just say I love you too, Beast."

Hazel: (smiling) "Thank you, baby. Really, this is honestly the biggest gift I've ever received from anyone."

Beast: "I did it because I love you, Hazel. I know, the past few weeks haven't been that great at all, but I am willing to make things right, if you let me."

Hazel: (sigh) "I know, but the truth is, you're not to blame - "

Beast: "Please, let me finish. I have blamed myself for the miscarriage, so much that I just couldn't face you afterwards. I have been so ashamed to even face myself in the mirror, Hazel, but now I can see that the only thing that did was to drive you further away from me. All I want is for us to get back to the way we used to be. We are planning a future together and we should really try to fix whatever has been bothering us. I'd rather die than lose you, Hazel."

He was so teary-eyed, which caused me to cry as well.

Hazel: "I'm so sorry, Beast. I should have done better."

Beast: (shaking head) "No, you did nothing wrong. I promise you, I'll never let what happened to you – to us, happen again."

We kissed briefly and hugged. We then dug into our food and slowly but surely we started speaking to one another like the usual couple again. Little did I know that our problems had only begun. Beast's past was about to haunt him – big time.

Beast: "I was even thinking, that perhaps we should move the lobola negotiations to a nearer date. What do you think?"

Hazel: "I don't know, as long as your family won't mind, though. Which date did you have in mind?"

Beast: "I was thinking maybe mid-August?"

Hazel: “Okay, that is not so far away. I can do with that. You can't wait to marry me, can you?”

Beast: “Baby, if I had it my way, I'd elope with you and show you off to the world. That is how much I just cannot wait.”

Hazel: (smiling) “Well then, we have two more weeks then we'll officially be Mr. and Mrs. Sibiya.”

Beast: “Hazel Hannah Sibiya, I love the sound of that.”

The following day, Beast drove us to my mother's house in Polokwane. He wanted me to get the blessings I needed for my car and just to ensure that the negotiations would go really well. We had a rather long drive, but he didn't mind driving at all. Once we managed to stop by the mall, he went into the nearest bottle store to get some drinks for my uncles and Aunt Hunadi, while I went to the Mall toilet. I was a little pressed and I promised to meet him at the bottle store once I was done. He didn't like letting me go to the public restrooms alone, as he said they were dangerous and that anything could happen to me, but I didn't want him to hover over me like a crazy person.

Once I was done, I walked out and was stunned to have bumped into a man I had never seen before. He looked really young, much younger than Beast. I guess I wasn't looking where I was going and we bumped into one another. My bag fell and a few things fell out in the process.

Hazel: "Oh, I'm so sorry. I wasn't watching where I was going."

Man: (smiling) "It's really okay, I don't mind bumping into such a beautiful lady."

I blushed a little and I managed to get a good look at him. He was young, probably in his early 20's, he was much darker than Beast, tall as well but not very meaty. He was a bit thin, but he had sex appeal needless to say and he smelled really nice. He looked neat and was dressed properly and draped in Versace.

Hazel: "Really, I'm sorry."

He extended his hand as I was about to leave him.

Man: (smiling) "I'm Brandon, but they call me - "

Before he could finish his sentence, Beast was right behind him.

Beast: (firmly) "Ghadaffi, if you know what's good for you – you'd let go of my woman."

I hadn't even realized that he had my hand in his. I quickly let go of his hand and looked down in shame. I felt so embarrassed.

Hazel: "Beast, baby, I... I accidentally bumped into him - "

Ghadaffi: (interrupting) "Oh, so this must be Hazel? The Hazel everyone is raving about in Pheli? My goodness, you're a lot more beautiful than they described you."

Beast didn't seem to like him one bit and it seemed as if they knew one another on a more personal level.

Beast: (angrily) "I'm warning you, Ghadaffi. This is my territory, you know very well that Norah is your wife. Stop running after other people's women. You of all people should know what I do to little boys like you."

Ghadaffi: "Hey, man, chill. I was just admiring. From what I know you're still a boyfriend. If I were him, honey, I'd have wifed you up a long time ago. You're too cute to be walking around with a ring that has no meaning. See you around, Beast. My father says hi, by the way."

He took one more look at me, angering Beast and he walked away. I hardly saw Beast getting really agitated by people, but that Ghadaffi boy really seemed to get on his nerves. He wasn't the same after they met.

Hazel: "Who was that?"

Beast: "No one."

Hazel: "Are you sure? You really look irritated."

Beast: (snapping) “He's no one, okay?!”

Hazel: “Okay.”

Beast: “I'm sorry. I didn't mean to snap at you. He's just – someone I never want you to cross paths with ever again. He is the son of a man that I just don't want to do business with ever again.”

I just nodded as we walked back to the car. I didn't want to irritate him any more than he was. He noticed how quiet I was right after he snapped at me and he tried his best to get my mood back to normal. I truly didn't want to talk about him much, but something was really off about that guy. I was yet to find out what he and Beast had in mind that ticked Beast off so much. The past has a very funny way of creeping up on people, in most cases, they say that your ways will follow you – even when you feel that you have repented at times. Most of the time, you have to do time for the crime.

Isaiah 43:18 - ““Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old.”

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“The pessimist sees difficulty in every opportunity. The optimist sees opportunity in every difficulty.” – Winston Churchill

Hazel

After a rather long drive, we finally arrived in Ga-Mogalakwena. As always, my mother's family was so happy to see me. My uncles were all there – along with our Great Uncle Frans. Aunt Hunadi and Sinah were the ones who were patiently waiting for us outside, and the moment they saw the car, they called everyone else to come outside.

Hunadi: (excitedly) “Ba fihlile (They are here)! Oh, ngwana wa sesi (my sister's child)! Your grandmother would have been so proud of you! You have found yourself a good man!”

She started chanting clan praises while Sinah was ululating. Everyone came out – even the neighbours. It was really nice to see people happy for us, but of course, I could tell that the neighbours wanted to see what was actually

happening. Bethuel was so happy, he was right beside me, with his arm around my waist. He was all over me as if he hadn't just insulted some blast from the past a few moments earlier. We were welcomed into the yard and the first thing we had to do was go behind and let the ancestors know that I had bought a car, well, my boyfriend had bought it for me but because it was mine and I had to drive it, I had to inform them. Apparently I had to inform them about all the major milestones in my life, even though they could see everything that was going on. They said that it was our way of keeping a bond and keeping them in our lives, making sure that they didn't feel left out or forgotten by us.

Aunt Hunadi blessed the car, and of course, Aunt Celia was not there, as expected. Aunt Portia and Abel managed to come as they were invited by the Makwetla's, from there onwards, it was party galore. Drinks and food were all over and everyone was having the time of their lives. My family had become so fond of Beast, that even when the men were drinking alone, he would go sit with them. He had become a part of the family. I didn't even understand what exactly it was about him that they loved so much, I mean one would have thought it was because he had money and wasn't afraid to spend, but Aunt Portia shed

some light regarding that to me. She saw how much I kept looking at him in wonder.

Portia: (smiling) “Let me guess, you're asking yourself how you managed to bag a man like him, right?”

Hazel: (blushing) “Something like that. It's just that, they are so fond of him.”

Portia: “Who wouldn't be so fond of a man who has chosen to adore their daughter with so much love, and is not afraid to show her off to the world? Bethuel has chosen to love you and care for you – despite where you come from. He is one of a kind and it honestly takes a lot of character from someone to be loved by a spouse's entire family the way he is loved.”

Hazel: “I suppose you're right, Mmane (aunty).”

Portia: “Marriage is tough, Hazel, but it shouldn't be tough to the point where you are abused and misused. Bethuel loves you too much to do that to you. I'm so sorry for what you have

gone through, but I believe that God's mercy and grace are upon the two of you.”

Hazel: “Thank you. I believe so too.”

Hunadi: “Hazel, can you please ask Bethuel to buy me another box of wine? Gape ena ya tsefa (this one is so delicious).”

Portia: “Hunadi, I'll go with her, if you don't mind.”

Hazel: “Beast won't like that.”

Portia: “Ridiculous. He should know that you're an adult and you're quite capable of taking care of yourself.”

I quickly called him and told him what I wanted me to do.

Hazel: “Baby, Mmane (aunty) Hunadi wants some more wine. I'm taking a stroll with Aunt Portia to the tavern.”

Beast: (frowning) "Hold on, let me come with you guys."

Hazel: "Don't be silly, enjoy yourself with my uncles and Abel. I'll be back soon."

Beast: (reluctantly) "Okay, but at least keep your phone nearby in case you don't feel safe."

I was actually shocked that he even agreed.

Hazel: "Okay, I will."

He took out some money and gave me some.

Beast: "Here. Take some money. Add some more on whatever everyone is drinking."

Hazel: "I do have money, you know."

Beast: “Yes, and it isn't meant for you to spend it on other people. Your money is your money and my money is your money.”

I chuckled as I gave him a brief kiss and went to the car with Aunt Portia. The tavern was literally about 5 minutes away, I guess we were too lazy to walk. Besides, she just wanted to get a good feel of the car.

Portia: “This car is so beautiful. You're so blessed, baby girl. I just wish that God blesses you with many more. This world is full of evil people.”

She was right about that last part. Once we went out, she led the way since she knew the place and started ordering. I really hated taverns to be honest. I didn't have good memories of them. Everyone was staring at me and you know how men always stare at women in a shebeen. Aunt Portia ensured I was right close to her and no one came near me. They respected her a lot. While I was loading alcohol in the car, I heard a familiar voice.

Ghadaffi: (chuckling) "If I didn't know any better, I'd say you were following me."

Hazel: "Excuse me?"

Ghadaffi: "You don't remember me?"

I shook my head.

Ghadaffi: "Ouch. I'm Brandon, Ghadaffi, the guy you met earlier on today when you were with your boyfriend."

Oh, it was that guy who made Beast so uncomfortable.

Hazel: "Oh

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I see. It's fiance by the way."

Ghadaffi: (laughing) “Fiance? There's no such word in African culture. For as long as he hasn't paid any lobola for you – he remains your boyfriend and you remain unmarried.”

He was so condescending, though. I didn't even need to explain anything to him, but I was curious as to why Beast was so uncomfortable around him.

Hazel: (frowning) “Hmm, you seem to know quite a lot. What's your deal anyway? How do you and my fiance know one another?”

Ghadaffi: “That's for him to tell you, I mean you of all people should know he has quite a few skeletons in the closet.”

I was instantly annoyed by his tone – yet he seemed to think that he was charming me.

Portia: “Hazel, this is the last of the alcohol. We can go now.”

Aunt Portia seemed rather dismissive of Brandon, which meant she also knew him.

Ghadaffi: (smiling) "Mam'Portia, we meet again."

Portia: "Ja (yes), Brandon. O kae papago (where's your father)?"

Ghadaffi: "I don't know, I'm not his keeper."

That was a bit rude.

Portia: (clicking tongue) "Hazel, a re sepele (let's go)."

I got into my car, yet he was so adamant to make sure that I saw him. I was about to start my car, when he came right my window.

Ghadaffi: "At least give me your numbers, Hazel. I'd really like to talk to you."

Portia: (annoyed) “Wena (hey you)! Don't you ever get enough of sticking it into other people's wives?! I wonder what Norah would say about your behaviour, Brandon!”

Ghadaffi: “Hao (goodness), Mam'Portia. I just want her number, I don't want to get her pregnant.”

Portia: (irritated) “Voetsek (piss off), wena (you), you disrespectful thing!”

I was about to start the car, when I saw Beast right in front us. I knew right there and then that shit was about to hit the fan – very fast.

Beast: (angrily) “Don't you get tired of following other women around, Ghadaffi?”

Ghadaffi: (chuckling) “Following you around? I can't help it if fate wants me to meet your girl. Like I said, she's not your wife.”

Beast got so angry that he grabbed him by his shirt and banged him against the car, leaving Aunt Portia and I a little shocked.

Beast: “You sure like testing people's limits, don't you, fucker? How many times do I have to tell you to stay the fuck away from her?!”

Ghadaffi: “Chill, man, I meant no harm.”

Beast: “You do mean harm when you start talking to my fucking wife! Don't make me disrespect her by beating you up right in front of her! I don't roll like that. As for you, why don't you run to back to daddy and that wife he chose for you? Leave Hazel the fuck alone and I swear, the next time, I won't be so nice.”

Ghadaffi: “Relax, dude. I wouldn't want to end up like Raymond.”

Right there and then, something just didn't feel right. I saw Beast's face change instantly.

Beast: “What the fuck did you just say?!”

Ghadaffi: “Nothing, look, I'm sorry.”

While Beast was about to let him go, I heard yet another voice, but I had never really met the man.

Dragon: “Beast, we finally meet again. Pity, we could have met under different circumstances.”

Beast: (firmly) “Dragon. What are you doing here?”

Dragon: “You're not the only one with family in Ga-Mogalakwena. We came to visit family. Why don't you let go of my son before I blow your brains out?”

Beast: “I'm not scared of you, Dragon. You should know by now.”

Dragon: (chuckling) “Well, you should know by now that I never leave any stone unturned. You fucked me over, and now, you're going to pay for it.”

Beast: “Hazel, go back home. I'll meet you there.”

Dragon: “Be careful, sweetheart. He's not the man you think he is.”

I drove off without thinking twice. I didn't like the fact that they both wanted to embarrass Beast in front of Aunt Portia like that. I mean, imagine if they knew he was a gangster before he became a legit businessman? I didn't care, I mean it didn't bother me, but I didn't want them to look at him differently or start treating him differently because of that. It was from that day onwards, that Bethuel's past kept creeping in on us, slowly, and turned both our worlds upside down. A new way of living was slowly introduced to me, while he slowly faded from the rest of the world.

Romans 8:5 - “For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit.”

“The man who has confidence in himself gains the confidence of others.” – Hasidic Proverb

Beast

My encounter with Ghadaffi and his motherfucker of a father left me shaking to say the least. I honestly thought I had rid myself of Dragon the day Malachi and I decided to part ways with him for eternity. I couldn't help but shake the feeling that he had come to seek revenge on me. I mean, Ghadaffi was legit following me almost everywhere that day, and I refused to believe that he was just visiting his family. A coincidence? I thought not. Perhaps he was the past that had come to haunt me, as I was told by Malume Sfiso, even Malachi had warned me before his death. I felt a little lucky at the time when being told all that, but once I saw how real it was about to be, I became petrified.

Usually, I wouldn't have been shaken, but everything involving Hazel made me increasingly alert and moreso afraid. I did not appreciate Ghadaffi's sudden interest in Hazel, knowing very well we were engaged. Everyone knew, and as far as I was

concerned, he lived in Jo'burg and hated the township. I refused to let a small boy like him intimidate me, but when he mentioned Raymond, something within me died. He said his name like he knew him personally. Also, no one knew what I had done to Raymond – except Hazel, Malachi, Malume Sfiso and Sporo. I knew that Sporo would never rat me out – despite everything I had done for him. He would have never betrayed me like that – never.

If he had, I'd have killed him. I didn't trust anyone beyond that part any more, so I had to keep my own eyes and ears open. I honestly wasn't afraid to go to prison. I mean, I did commit the crime, but what good would our marriage have been had I been imprisoned? What kind of husband would I have been while behind bars? Hazel was young, childless and and exceptionally beautiful. She didn't have anything holding her back nor did she have anything forcing her to wait for me. I also wouldn't have expected so much of her. That would have been completely selfish of me. She was my world, and facing the reality of potentially losing her, brought me so much anxiety. I had to do whatever it took to keep myself out of prison. I was scared of nothing and no – one, but God and losing my Hazel. That was the latest problem I had that was giving me sleepless nights, leaving me sweating in my own sleep if I had

even fallen asleep. Keeping the faith seemed futile, but I had to keep trying.

Brandon Ghadaffi Mashile

My name is Brandon Mashile, AKA Ghadaffi. I am the first and only son of Godfrey Dragon Mashile. I was born and bred in Atteridgeville, but all thanks to my successful father, I grew up in the Suburbs, in Pretoria East. He made me the man I had become and without him, I wouldn't have gotten to where I was. I had achieved a lot for someone who was only 27 at the time. Yes, I was educated; I had attended prestigious schools my entire life, and I had graduated with a Degree in Chartered Accounting from Wits University, a few years prior. I was a reputable member in my community, family and also, I had become a member of the Wits Alumni. Everyone who knew me knew the kind of person I was; I wasn't the best looking guy, but I was rich and I had immense class. I had been married for about three years, but it was an arranged marriage and I didn't love her. She herself knew that when she married me. I didn't compromise my happiness for anyone. The moment I laid my eyes on Hazel, I knew she had to be mine. Yes, the fact that she was Beast's fiancée, was of course a bonus. I mean, yes, I was married to Norah, but I didn't choose her – my parents chose

her for me. I only married her because my mother kept nagging me to do so, while my father insisted because she was a virgin and that I wasn't getting any younger. Hazel was something different, man, she was so light, her green eyes were so alluring, I could tell that they were indeed telling a story. The fact that Malachi was gifted and was her brother meant that she would have contributed immensely towards my life and my businesses. She was lady luck and I needed her on my side. After my unpleasant encounter with beast, I knew I had him right where I wanted him. My father and I walked back to his family home just across the road from the tavern. He poured us both a drink, while I was still love-stricken; I couldn't stop thinking about Hazel and her beautiful, milky skin.

Dragon: "Brandon, will you take the damn glass before it falls to the ground?"

Ghadaffi: "Oh, sorry, Papa."

Dragon: "Don't tell me you're still thinking of that girl."

Ghadaffi: "Eish (oh), Papa, I think I'm in love."

Dragon: "Ska ngafela (don't mess with me), Brandon."

Ghadaffi: "Papa, ke (I'm) serious."

Dragon: "You're married."

Ghadaffi: "I don't love her
I've told you countless times."

Dragon: (sigh) "You cannot hurt Norah like that. I made a promise to her father- even though he thought you were no good for her. Do you have any idea how much 30 cows cost now?!"

Ghadaffi: "Come on, Papa. You always get your way. I mean, you can blame it on her. It's been 3 years already and she hasn't given me any children."

Dragon: "Patience is a virtue."

Ghadaffi: "besides, this is the perfect opportunity for you to get back at Beast. The upside is that Hazel's brother was a seer."

Dragon: "So?"

Ghadaffi: "So, she'll be valuable to my life and she could help us with the business."

Dragon: "How is that? Her brother was a seer – not her."

Ghadaffi: "She's highly favoured – so, she'll bring luck to me as long as I love and treat her well. I mean look at Beast, how on earth does he have all these booming businesses? He's not even educated. It must be something to do with that girl's ancestors."

Dragon: "I don't know, but it would be really great making that fucker pay."

Ghadaffi: "See? I get the girl, you get him to pay for Raymond's death. It's a win-win. Double tragedy for him."

Dragon: "Perhaps you're right. Although, you'll need a good strategy to get her to fall for you. She's head over heels."

Ghadaffi: "Come on, Dad. Have you seen me? My money speaks for me."

Dragon: (clicking tongue) "Mxm, it will take more than just your money to get her to fall for you. He most probably took her virginity. It will be a miracle for her to leave him."

Ghadaffi: "Fine. Just don't make me wait too long."

Dragon: "I cannot wait to make him suffer for killing my nephew. Him stealing my money was just a tip of the iceberg. He will regret ever messing with me."

Hazel

Ever since that Ghadaffi guy bumped into me at the tavern, Beast's mood was off. He was interacting with my uncles and all, but I could tell his mind was afar. It left a huge damper on y mood too, because I kept trying to think of a million possible scenarios in my head.

Portia: "Are you okay?"

Hazel: "Yes, I'm fine."

Portia: "Don't worry yourself about him. He's just being a man."

Hazel: (frowning) "I don't follow."

Portia: "He's still a bit upset about Brandon's interest in you. Men are jealous beings, you know. He'll get over it."

Hazel: "I guess you're right."

Portia: "Why do I get the feeling you're worried about something else?"

Hazel: (sigh) "What would you do if I told you that Beast was into shady dealings before we became an item? Like, he was a gangster or something of the sort?"

Portia: "Nothing, I mean who am I to judge? I was married to a man who ended up raping a child I adopted and loved. He loves you and he would never endanger your life – at least not intentionally. I am all for love, honey. People go through so much worse, and never get to experience love in the process."

Aunt Portia was right. I guess I was just over thinking. I decided to let Beast be until I headed for bed, hoping he would follow suit. We were going to leave the following morning, and I was surprised he wasn't tired enough or eager to sleep after the long drive from Stellenbosch. The Beast I knew, was going to follow me to bed almost immediately after I had gone. He

came to bed an hour after me and I could tell something was weighing heavily on him.

Hazel: “baby, what's the matter? You've been off ever since that Ghadaffi guy.”

Beast: (deep sigh) “Promise me one thing, Hazel.”

He called me by my name. It was serious business.

Hazel: “Sure.”

Beast: “Promise me that should anything happen to me, you'd move on and live your life.”

I was so flabbergasted, that I thought perhaps I hadn't heard him correctly or that I was probably still drunk. What was he trying to tell me exactly?

Hazel: “(anxious) “Beast, what on earth are you talking about?”

Beast: (sigh) "I need to tell you something. It's been eating me up for a long while now."

The knot in my throat started growing, restricting my throat.

Hazel: "Are you dying?"

Beast: (shaking head) "No, but... A few months before Malachi died, he told me he was going to die."

As soon as he said that, he looked as if he had a huge weight lifted off his shoulders. I was in such a deep-seated state of shock, that my mind was not registering what I was being told. I had expected the worst news, actually. No one expects good news after hearing "I have something to tell you."

Hazel: "I don't follow."

Beast: “Malachi had a vision of himself. He saw himself die a few months prior to his death. Initially, he was supposed to die right in front of Beverly, but he couldn't leave her with such a traumatic memory, so he took a walk right before it was time and that's how he got hit by the car.”

I felt my palpitations sky rocketing. Not because I was angry, because I was anything but. I felt so sorry for him that he felt so afraid to tell me. What kind of a girlfriend was I that he felt he couldn't confide in me and tell me the truth?

Hazel: “Why are you telling me this now?”

Beast: “Because I can no longer keep this a secret. I felt so guilty for not telling you, but he begged me not to. He made me promise. So, should I die or get arrested or something were to happen to me, promise me that you'll take all the assets I have written in your name and forget about me. Promise me you'll move on with your life. I owe you that much.”

Why was he talking in riddles about death and imprisonment? What on earth was going on with Beast? He

was confessing and forcing me to promise him something I could never do at the same time.

Hazel: “Beast, it musn't have been easy living with that guilt, but I can only imagine living each day waiting for the expected news of your best friend's death. I am not angry at you if that's what you were hoping for. You were honouring his wishes and you did your best in assisting me, while going through the most. Had I known, I'd have been even more of a mess than I am right now. What you're asking of me is down-right impossible. Why on earth would I give up on you, Beast? When you've never given me reason to do so? When you've never given up on me even when you most probably should have?”

Beast: (teary) “You deserve a life, a full-time, hands-on husband. Should anything happen to me, please, do not be afraid to release yourself of all my baggage. You deserve a life.”

Hazel: “So do you, Beast. No, I'm not promising you that. I promise to fight for you, because that's what we're supposed to do for one another. I love you, Beast, and I refuse to do anything of that nature. I've never known a love like

yours. You're my world and I'll be there – no matter what happens.”

He sobbed while I caressed him from behind. It felt a little relieving knowing that he was feeling overwhelmed about the secret he kept about Malachi's death. I didn't know what was wrong actually, but it sure broke my heart seeing him so vulnerable. There's just something about a big man breaking down that just tears one's heart into a thousand pieces, ripping it apart from one's inner flesh. I somehow knew it had everything to do with that Ghadaffi guy and his father. I just couldn't figure out exactly what it was that upset him so badly to even say goodbye to me when I didn't even know what was happening. Only time would tell, if only I had that much time – of which I didn't. That was the last intimate conversation I had had with my Beast before shit hit the bloody fan.

Proverbs 16:9 - “The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps.”

Two weeks later...

Hazel

It had been yet another hectic two weeks, and things were really good between Beast and I. I hadn't seen him upset ever since that weekend in Ga-Mogalakwena. We were back to our old self, it was as if that immensely, intimate conversation had stripped him naked of all his insecurities and flaws and we were all good from there onwards. We were still in love, and planning our wedding in perfect peace. We were filled with so much excitement. I had been avoiding my mother for so long, that I felt I needed to talk to her before my lobola negotiations because I knew she was going to make a scene if I had kept ignoring her until then. Every time I had to go back home, Beast would book a flight for me and have my car shipped to Jo'burg and delivered to me in Pretoria. It was such a lengthy and costly process, but he didn't seem to mind. He was a little busy with business deals everywhere in the country. He was even planning on opening another Club Beast in Cape Town, hence his unavailability. I loved the fact that he always strived to do better, to be better, so I wasn't complaining. Once I

arrived in Pretoria, I drove to Atteridgeville to see Bella and my mother first instead of going straight to Zamebsi. I wasn't looking forward to it, but it had to be done. The moment I arrived, the yard looked like it hadn't been swept in a very long time, the paint on the walls around the outside of the house was fading really fast and everything inside looked like it was barely hanging on. I checked to spot anything out of the ordinary, and of course, all my furniture from my room was gone, and there were tenants in my room and Bella's room. I knocked a few times, only to get my mother's annoyed response. The house was quite filthy, and it was now consumed by the loud cries of a newborn baby. Well, she was about two months old by then and she was named Jenny, short for Jennifer. I had no idea why such an English name, but she was named Isabella. We all had English names come to think of it. We hadn't seen or heard from the father ever since she was born.

Hazel: "Dumela (hello), Mama."

She was so surprised to see me, but what made me even more nervous was that she was happy to see me. She stood up and even hugged me – rendering me speechless.

Hazel: "Wow, you're so happy to see me. Is everything okay?"

Binah: (Hao (Goodness), Hazel, can't a mother be happy to see her own child? Yes, everything is fine. How are things with you? I've been trying to call you."

Hazel: "Yes, I've been busy. Sorry about that."

Binah: "It's alright. I'd offer you something to eat or drink, but the cupboards are empty. This little one takes all our money, don't, cute, little Jenny? And we had to sell your furniture to make ends meet and rent out your room. I'm sorry, but I tried to call you."

She still had those gas lighting tendencies in her tone, but I felt bad and sorry for her even then. I looked at that baby and she was just adorable. She gave me bitter-sweet thoughts. My mother must have noticed how I had been staring at her.

Binah: "Cute, isn't she?"

My mother was so affectionate towards Jenny, it was obviously expected since she was the daughter of my mother's favourite.

Binah: "I would let you hold her, but I wouldn't want to open up fresh wounds since the miscarriage and all, you know."

Just when I was starting to see her in another light, she just had to go there.

Hazel: "Well, I'm leaving. It was nice to see you. I'll leave some money for groceries."

I said that before she started asking.

Binah: "If that won't be too much trouble for you."

Hazel: "How much will you need?"

Binah: “Well...”

She added ridiculous things to her grocery list, along with some baby items. Slowly, but surely I was becoming the bread winner.

Hazel: “How about I transfer you R5000. Will that be enough to cover everything?”

I saw the smile widen on her face.

Binah: (excitedly) “Of course. More than enough, my dear. You're so kind.”

Hazel: “Okay then. I'll see you.”

Binah: “Maybe you could come by for some dinner later on?”

The last thing I needed was Bella's cooking, and my mother throwing shade at my relationship with Beast. My mom could

cook really great food, although we hadn't had dinner together for as long as I could remember. The only time we did that was during a funeral. She hated Christmas, and hated New Year's even more. Birthdays were out of the question, unless it was hers or Bella's.

Hazel: "I'll see. I'm a little tired."

Binah: "Well, alright then. This is still your home, you know. Even after you get married, just know that you can always come back, okay?"

The conversation was oddly comforting.

Hazel: "Okay. Bye."

I walked out and found Bella getting out of a VW City Golf. She was in the front seat, and some of her friends looked like they had been drinking. She approached me with a broad smile wearing formal attire. It looked like her work uniform.

Bella: "Hey, sis. Long time. E reng (how's) Cape Town?"

Hazel: "E sharp (It's fine), just cold. How are you doing? You look nice."

Conversing with my sister had always been painfully awkward, because I knew she was going to be rude to me one way or another. Or at least, that's what I expected hence I avoided talking to her at all times.

Bella: "Ag, I'm fine. I have a job now. It's not much, but I have to hustle for my Jenny. I work at the Pick n' Pay mom used to work at."

Hazel: "That's great."

Bella: (nervously) "Anyway, why are you leaving so soon? It doesn't look like you've been here for a while."

Hazel: "I have a few errands to run."

I lied, obviously. I wanted to get away from them. I had no idea how to even hold a conversation with the both of them in the same room as me without any conflict.

Bella: "Oh, okay. Well, I hope to see you real soon."

Hazel: "I gave Mama some money. Please, use it wisely."

She became instantly excited.

Bella: "Thanks, sis. See you around then."

I still couldn't get to her sudden friendliness. In all my 19 years of life, Bella had been nothing but rude to me. She never failed to let me know how much of a reject I was and just how my mother would never love me. She always made it a point to tell me just how she had a father while Malachi and I didn't have one. It was always such painful words and actions that created fatal, emotional wounds, that would end up being life-long scars. I had gone through so much progress with Dr. Zwide, but

my family was still a very touchy subject. I hadn't really healed from them. It was nice to see that she did have a job, although it felt like she wasn't telling me the entire truth. She owed me nothing, either way.

I left and went to the place I called home, Beast's house. It felt so empty without him, yet his scent was still consuming the house. I decided to keep myself busy by trying out a new recipe. Those were the after effects of having too much money in my bank account, and me wanting to match up to Beast's cooking. He was so good at it, I was envious of his talent. After I was done, I decided to enjoy my meal with a nice glass of red wine. I was half way through my Netflix Series, when a call from my mother came through. I contemplated answering it, but I did eventually – after her continuous attempts.

Hazel: “Hello.”

Binah: (relieved) “Hazel, ngwanaka (my child). O (are you) busy?”

She was very polite.

Hazel: "I'm just relaxing in the house. Why?"

Binah: "Oh, I thought you'd love to have a warm meal with your mom and sister. Besides, it's been quite a while, hasn't it?"

I really wasn't up for it, I mean what on earth were we going to talk about? We had nothing in common.

Hazel: "I don't know, I mean it's a bit windy outside. It also looks like it is about to rain."

Binah: "Heater e teng (We have a heater). Kopa o tle ngwanaka, toe (Please come my child, please)? Perhaps we can talk a little about the wedding."

It wasn't even going to be a fully-fledged wedding as yet, though, but I figured she was trying to make amends or something. Beast did ask of me not to piss her off or create a further enemy out of her before the negotiations. I still needed her blessing even if it was going to be half-hearted.

Hazel: "Okay."

Binah: "Kea leboga (thank you), my baby. I'll see you soon."

We ended the call while I slightly dragged my feet. I honestly didn't feel like anyone's company, but Beast's. He wasn't going to be home until the coming Monday. He hated it when I drove at night, and since he was busy, I figured I shouldn't tell him about my impromptu visit back home. I drove off and once I was there, I was a bit alarmed to find a car I hadn't see before, right outside the house. It had been so long since my mother had any visitors

which made me wonder who could have been visiting her after 6pm, driving a luxury car such as a Porsche Cayenne. I dragged my feet even more because I just had a feeling that whomever it was, was someone I'd be displeased about. Indeed, right after knocking, Bella opened the door with a big Savanna in her hand, dressed rather inappropriately for guests. She was wearing shorts and a crop top. It was still winder, so that baffled me.

Bella: (smiling) "Hi, sis. Come on in."

I heard unfamiliar male voices and I was indeed stunned to find them dining with my mother, so casually.

Binah: (smiling) "Moratuwa (My love), you finally made it."

Ghadaffi: "Hello, Hazel. It's so nice to finally see you again."

My goodness, that guy was just not pleasing the eye at all, but he was dressed in such an expensive-looking suit and his cologne was absorbed by the entire house. They looked like a family setup, which made me quite uneasy. Bella was so calm around them, I mean, Dragon must have probably been my mother's age or a bit younger. So, why on earth was she dining with them dressed like that? And how on earth did my mother know those two men because I didn't recall ever seeing them coming to our house when we had a shebeen.

Hazel: (surprised) "Did I miss anything? What's the occasion?"

Binah: (chuckling) “No, honey. This is Mr. Mashile and his son Brandon. Isn't he handsome?”

I was lost for a moment there. It seemed as if my mother was trying to play match-maker. I was engaged, which was something she had forgotten about.

Dragon: “I'm sorry, we shouldn't have just invited ourselves without letting you know. We were just in the neighbourhood, and we thought we should pop by.”

Ghadaffi: “I mean, Sis'Bee has always made the best stew in Pheli.”

The four of them laughed together so loudly, and Jenny got a little frightened and started crying. Beast picked her up without hassle and she calmed down immediately. Something was really off about that part. I just couldn't pin point it yet.

Binah: “Please, sit.”

I sat down next to Bella, overflowing with reluctance. She offered me a Savanna from the cooler box which was right next to the table, which I politely declined.

Binah: “See? Mokhonyana wa ka o mo nwesa dilo tsa maemo (my son-in-law makes her drink really fancy things). She doesn't even know the taste of Savanna any more.”

Once again, they started laughing, but I just didn't find her joke funny at all.

Ghadaffi: “Hazel, I hear you are studying psychology.”

Hazel: “Psychiatry, actually.”

Brandon: “Well, I mean I've always thought of it as the same thing. There is not much of a difference, really. I studied Chartered Accountancy, I have a masters in it, actually.”

Who asked him? He seemed like a very condescending and annoying prick.

Hazel: "I see, but it isn't the same thing, though."

Ghadaffi: (chuckling) "I've heard that a lot. Enlighten me."

So cocky.

Hazel: "A psychiatrist is also qualified to administer and prescribe medication to the patient, unlike a psychologist."

Ghadaffi: (laughing) "Is that it? That's the only difference?"

Disdainful much?

Hazel: "Pretty much."

Ghadaffi: (chuckling) "Well, okay then. I don't see how paying someone to talk about your feelings is considered a job nowadays, but that's what one gets with liberals and feminists."

They all laughed, once again and at that point I had become deeply annoyed. So, I was invited so that they could make a joke out of everything of mine.

Binah: "I've always wanted her to be a doctor, you know? A real one. But nonetheless, at least they'll still call her Doctor."

My mother was now adding fuel to the fire. That was ridiculing at its worst.

Hazel: "I'm sorry, perhaps I missed something here. What do you do apart from organizing people's finances and playing with numbers all day? I mean, what do you do to make a difference in people's lives?"

Brandon: "Oh, well, apart from that, I'm a business man. My goal in life is to build an empire for my children one day. Other people's wellness doesn't concern me."

Hazel: “I see. So, basically, I was invited to this dinner to be ridiculed and to be insulted for my career choices, is that it?”

Dragon: “Hazel, please, calm down. I'm sure Brandon didn't mean it like that.”

Binah: “Yes, and I was only joking, honey, really.”

Hazel: “Joke about anything else – but a person's choices. See, Mr. Mashile, this is why people come to people like me; it is because people like you, your father and my mother feel the need to destroy people mentally and emotionally while you see nothing wrong with it!”

I was boiling.

Binah: “Forgive her, I mean ever since the miscarriage, she hasn't been herself.”

She just had to go there yet again.

Ghadaffi: "Oh, I'm so sorry. I had no idea you lost a child."

Hazel: "Really, Mama? You're the absolute worst."

I just picked up my bag and stormed out of there without a word further. All I heard was her pleading with me to stop. Once I got into the car, she stopped me.

Binah: "Hazel, I'm sorry. I mean I thought it wasn't a secret."

Hazel: (fuming) "Mama, since when is someone losing a child a dinner topic?!"

Binah: "I'm sorry, I wasn't thinking."

Hazel: "Well, you're absolutely right about that!"

Binah: “Look, I just wanted you to meet the Prestigious Mashile's. They're good people. They do a lot for the community as well – more especially Brandon.”

Hazel: “What is the real reason for me to meet them, Mama?”

Binah: “When will you see that Beast is not the one for you, Hazel? I mean he used to work for Dragon before he repented, and now, look at his son. He is perfect for you; he is educated and his money is clean.”

Right there and then did she just blurt out the real reason why I was invited for dinner that evening.

Hazel: “Oh, so you saw it fit to try and pawn me to the next bidder when Beast is about to pay lobola for me?”

Binah: “I'm not trying to pawn you, Hazel. I'm just trying to make you see the truth. Beast is no good for you. What will it take for you to realize that?”

Well, the real Binah Makwetla finally came out. It took her longer than I had expected, actually.

Hazel: "Mama weh (goodness, Mama). It's bad enough you took his money and you let him take care of you and Bella and her child. How dare you speak about him like that?"

Binah: "All I'm saying is that you are about to make the biggest mistake in your life. Brandon is good for you."

I wouldn't have been surprised if I found out that she was actually paid to sweet talk me, because she had nothing bad to say about either of them. I then remembered that Dragon guy.

Hazel: "Oh, Dragon is the gangster that Beast and Malachi were working for, right? Yet, you didn't seem to care about him exploiting them while they were young, did you? Now, how dare you sit and look me right in the face, and try to convince me that his patronizing son is good for me?!"

Binah: "Hazel, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to upset you."

As she was trying to explain herself to me, Ghadaffi and his father walked out. Something just wasn't right. Why was I suddenly being bulldozed into finding Brandon attractive?

Ghadaffi: "Hazel, I'm so sorry. I'd like to apologize for my behaviour tonight. It was uncalled for. Please, forgive me."

There was nothing to even talk about with him. He was nothing of mine and I owed him nothing. I just closed my car door so forcefully, and I just didn't want anything to do with them any more. I drove off in high speed, thinking about the entire situation. All of a sudden, my mother knew the Mashile's? She had no desire to even meet up with Ma'Sibiya or any other members of Beast's family – yet she saw it fit to do that to me? I was uneasy about the entire thing. I went straight home and even when Beast called me later on that evening, I had no heart to tell him what my mother had done to me. I knew he was going to have a fit, so I kept the entire night from him. Something big was brewing, and I had no idea – until it finally happened. The year was nowhere near over, yet so much had already happened. My entire life had turned into turmoil.

Psalm 119:105 - "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."

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The truth is you don't know what is going to happen tomorrow.
Life is a crazy ride, and nothing is guaranteed.

Eminem

Hazel

They always say that the most unexpected things happen during a person's highlights in life; whether it is your happiest or your saddest moments – the most unexpected moments usually happen during that time. After yet another hectic two weeks, it was finally time for the negotiations. Beast ensured that we see each other less, as he wanted to heighten the mood for the next time we saw one another – which was on Negotiation day. I was honestly so excited and I had hardly slept a wink prior to that. I couldn't even enlist any assistance from Otlile and Kg, since they had gone cold on me. Mathilda was right by my side ever since, and I hadn't seen nor heard from Ghadaffi or Dragon ever since that night. Although, whenever I had gone to church, he would be there – both of them would. I wasn't surprised to see he was married even. What did I expect from my mother? She didn't even try to get a good guy to play match-maker with. Beast had been so excited,

he literally ordered flowers for me each and every single day for the two weeks before the big day and had them delivered to my flat. He was still a hopeless romantic.

I hadn't met his other two sisters yet, although I had been talking to Brenda on the phone. She and Beast were really close. She had accepted me even before meeting me. She was always busy and me being in Stellenbosch made the distance even bigger between us, and meeting up was already harder than before. Mathilda offered to go with me to Ga-Mogalakwena, and she was very supportive. My mother and Bella had to go with me as well, and I wasn't pleased, but it had to be done. We arrived the night before, and everyone was there – even Celia. I suppose she wanted to see if Binah's daughter was actually going to get married.

The atmosphere was really great; although I just had this weird feeling in the pit of my stomach. I just couldn't get rid of it. I had a dream the night before; a dream I had forgotten about quite some time ago. The very same dream where everyone was attacking me, yet Beast was nowhere to be found. Except this time; Beast was standing right across me in a shadow form, while Malachi, Mam'Rose, my mother's maternal family were all standing before me. I was hysterical in the dream; because

the more I tried calling after Beast, the further he disappeared. There was someone else beside me; a male I couldn't recognize. His face was hidden but he was right next to me. I didn't understand the dream at all, so I knelt down and prayed. Although I didn't receive an answer or anything in that regard, I decided not to dwell on it much. I was in the room I was always allocated in my grandmother's house, when my mother walked in. She had obviously had some to drink, but oddly she never let Jenny out of her sight. She always catered for that baby's needs.

Binah: "Hazel, I came to see if you needed anything."

Hazel: "Thank you, Mama, but I'm fine."

Binah: "Oh, okay. It's never too late, you know."

I stared at her in wonder.

Binah: "I mean, to change your mind. It is never too late. You can still do it and no one will judge you – not even me."

Hazel: (annoyed) “Do you really have to ruin my mood like this?”

Binah: “Aowa (no), I didn't mean to. All I am saying is that I have a feeling something really funny is going to happen today, so I just think it would have been best to leave him before embarrassing yourself. Let me leave you.”

So much for trying to be supportive. I couldn't help but find myself in tears, when Mathilda walked in.

Mathilda: “Oh, no, no, no, honey. We don't do that – not today. How can you cry and mess up all that make-up

Advertisement

Hazel?”

Hazel: (crying) “I'm sorry, it's just that... My mother - “

Mathilda: “Don't do that to yourself. Do not allow her to shed any more of her toxic nonsense on you. Today is your day, so you don't do that.”

She was right, though, but it hurt. Bella didn't even bother to check on me that day. She just woke up and went straight to the local tavern. I knew that her sudden change in behaviour was all fake. I had spoken to Beast all morning, and I couldn't wait for him to arrive. He was not one to be late, so I was sure that he would have made it on time that day.

About two hours later, I started getting worried. Beast was never one to leave me hanging, unless he had a really good reason to. He always called first to let me know if he would be late, but that morning; strange things started to happen right after my mother's brief insulting conversation with me. It was already 11am, and Beast's last seen was about two hours prior, which was out of character. I tried calling him, but his phone rang unanswered – another red flag. Beast never ignored my calls – even if he had been in a meeting, he would always text me to let me know he was busy and that he couldn't talk. I just had that funny feeling within my stomach slowly creep up on me. I felt as if my throat was closing up, while I was being consumed with nausea at the same time. To make matters worse, it seemed as if my mother was really enjoying that. She couldn't wait to say the famous words “I told you so”.

Something wasn't right, I could feel it in my gut.

Binah: “Hazel, did you even call Beast? I mean he most probably forgot that he has to come and get married today.”

Really? I kept quiet while she was trying so hard to hide the fact that she was gloating in my sorrow.

Binah: “Oh, alright. E re ke le tlogele (let me leave you then).”

Mathilda: “I'm sure he was just caught up or something, Hazel. I mean, he must have a really good reason as to why he isn't here.”

I tried speaking, but words failed me. So many thoughts were going on in my head. I just couldn't believe what was happening to me. We waited, and waited and waited. By the time it was 2pm, I had ruined all my make-up and I was hysterically crying – in silence. It was hell on earth, my heart felt like it was swelling up with each minute that went by, awaiting explosion.

Everyone kept coming in and out to check if I was either okay, or if Beast was coming and if I had heard anything from him yet. I honestly thought he had been killed or something. I was in total disbelief. Aunt Hunadi, Mathilda and Aunt Portia tried their best to comfort me, but not even their presence or words could do anything to make me feel better at that point. When you are slowly falling into a deep pit of misery, you end up believing nearly every possible scenario – even the most unbelievable one. I started believing that perhaps Beast chose not to marry me at the last minute or that he started regretting his choices. “Perhaps he did run away – from me”, I thought to myself. I couldn't even eat or drink anything. The only thing

that kept reminding me that I was still alive and that it wasn't a dream, was my spit that would occasionally wet my restricted throat every now and then. It felt as if my own heart struggled to pump anything, and that if I had the choice, I'd have died right there and then. I felt humiliated, heart-broken and completely petrified. Little did I know what awaited me. A long, dark road was ahead of me without my Beast. Learning to live and survive without him felt like learning to adjust to a whole new life. It's always better and easier to heal when you have all the answers before you – even when you're not ready to accept them. When you have no answers at all to the questions you keep asking yourself, life feels like one, dark and unending road.

Isaiah 40:31 - “But they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.”

“I can’t change the direction of the wind, but I can adjust my sails to always reach my destination.” – Jimmy Dean

Hazel

Minutes became hours and hours finally turned into an entire day. Imagine that. I had been stood up at my own negotiations. His family never pitched up and neither did he. I had ultimately gathered enough courage to get out of the bedroom and wait for my man in the lounge. I was that confident. I thought he was going to arrive, but he never did. The food ended up being eaten by the family, along with the alcohol that was bought. Of course, Celia couldn't wait to gloat because she still had it in for my mother. Aunt Hunadi had grown so attached to me and as much as she despised my mother, she didn't make a mockery of my situation. Aunt Portia was also nice enough to stay behind and comfort me without saying much, just by being there and occasionally brushing my back. Mathilda was so hands-on, she was literally serving everyone around. I think she actually enjoyed doing that, or perhaps she had her eye on someone who was there, but I was too miserable to notice. My mother was not the

affectionate type, well, at least not towards me, but she became affectionate whenever someone attacked her children to spite her. At least she could do that part right.

Celia: (chuckling) “Ja, neh. Ke tsibile (I knew it). I wasted all my petrol by coming to a non-existent wedding. Well, too bad, Binah, you now know that you're doomed.”

Binah: (annoyed) “For all we know he could be lying in a ditch somewhere. Crime is all over, I mean this is South Africa after all. As for doomed, I'm not too sure about that. I birthed not one, but three children and I am a grandmother now, what about you?”

Yep, the lowest joke of all time. I was a bit heart-broken on her behalf, but Celia kind of deserved it. She just kept quiet and walked away.

Binah: “Hazel, my baby. I hope after this you will be able to see that I only care about you. I'm not perfect, but I can smell trouble when I see it.”

I tried ignoring her and then in came her two brothers, Uncle Matome and Uncle Lesiba.

Lesiba: “How are you holding up, motlogo (niece)?”

Matome: “When I get hold of that bastard, I swear, I'll kill him with my bare hands for doing that to my sister's child!”

Lesiba: “Ema nyana le wena (wait a minute, though). For all we know he could be dead, hijacked or in the hospital. Let's not jump the gun until we know for sure what happened.”

Matome: “Wa bona le wena (as you can see), his own family didn't even have the guts to call or anything like that. So, that concludes it. They played with our daughter's feelings, therefore, they need to pay for it.”

Binah: “I've been saying that the boy was no good for my daughter.”

Lesiba: “You are in no position to talk, Binah. Instead of fixing things, you let history repeat itself. When will you let us perform a ceremony for Bella and her daughter? You haven't introduced her to our ancestors and we still don't know who the father of that child is. You can barely tell which race the child is.”

Binah: (angrily) “Hazel is white, but you never complained.”

Lesiba: “You're missing my point. At least we know her father is white, but now you refuse to tell us who the father of that child is, Binah. Right now, I'm too frustrated on Hazel's behalf to even bother with my disappointment in you.”

Uncle Lesiba could shut my mother up without even shouting at her. One would swear that he was older than my mother, just by the manner in which he commanded respect.

Lesiba: “Hazel, why don't you go take a nap? I'll let you know if there are any changes.”

I just nodded and got up.

Lesiba: "Mathilda, Sinah, go with her. You two have worked hard enough."

They went to the bedroom with me along with a bottle of wine. I couldn't eat, I couldn't drink anything and I battled sleeping. I refused to let them fuss over me, but instead I asked them to change the topic and drink. I managed to dive deep into my thoughts while they were conversing. I kept staring at my phone, hoping a message or phone call would come through, but nothing. I was humiliated, ashamed and mostly confused and angry. Beast would have never done that to me, but I wasn't too sure any more. Slowly, I drifted off to sleep. I found myself awake in the wee hours of the morning. My phone still had no messages, while there was no news about anyone fitting Beast's description going missing. My heart was empty, my soul was bleeding. I was mourning a marriage that had not even begun. I had no idea how I was going to face everyone the following day. I kept dozing off until it was about 10am the following day. I didn't want to get up, to be honest and luckily, no one interrupted my sleep until that time. I was woken up by a stern knock and commotion from outside the house. Mathilda walked in, hysterically.

Hazel: (surprised) "What is it, Mathilda? Is it Beast? Has he come?"

Mathilda: (shaking head) "It's his family."

I rushed outside to find my mother along with Malome (Uncle) Matome, shouting their lungs out. It seemed as if they were screaming insults at someone. The moment I walked out and saw Brenda, I knew that those were Beast's family. For a moment there I breathed out a sigh of relief, because I had thought that Beast was with them, but he wasn't there.

Malume Sfiso: "Please, if you let us in and explain."

Binah: (shouting) "No! The moment I laid my eyes on your son, I knew he would hurt my daughter!"

Uncle Matome: "Your son has done enough damage. Please, leave before I do something I'll most probably regret."

Brenda seemed rather relieved to see me.

Brenda: "Oh, thank goodness, Hazel. May we come in and talk to you?"

I couldn't wait that long.

Hazel: "Where is he?"

Uncle Matome: (shouting) "Don't give them the satisfaction, Hazel!"

Uncle Lesiba: "Calm down, will you?"

Brenda: "That's the reason why we only came now. He... We don't know where he is."

Binah: (shouting) "They're lying! Ba ya ka, ba (they're lying, these ones)!"

Malume Sfiso: “The truth is, we waited on him just like you. We were talking to him and the next thing, his phone was off. We've been trying to contact him ever since.”

I recall Malume Sfiso because I had seen a few pictures of him from Beast's phone. From time to time, he had told me that he was a seer.

Hazel: “Malome, surely you know where he is. I mean, you are a seer.”

Malume Sfiso: (shaking head) “No, unfortunately, the ancestors don't want me to see that part. All I know is that he is still alive.”

That right there just broke me. I started crying, silently.

Brenda: “I was hoping that we could talk and figure out a way to find him.”

I couldn't say anything to anyone. I was too broken. My Beast was gone and I had no idea why. Perhaps it was my fault; perhaps I had indeed reached my expiry date. All I knew was that I didn't receive answers to the questions that were bombarding my mind. Brenda pleaded to talk to me, but the further I walked away, the more her voice became echoed.

Malome Matome: “You heard her. Now, leave old man, along with your crew before I make you!”

Malume Sfiso: “Hmm, I wish you were as protective as you are now with your daughter than you are with your niece.”

Malome Matome: (shocked) “I don't know what you are talking about!”

Malume Sfiso: “You'll know the day the truth stares you dead in the face.”

Malome Matome was still cursing at Malume Sfiso, but I got the feeling he knew what he meant.

Malume Sfiso: “We'll be on our way now, but rest assured. My nephew and your niece will be reunited again. It is the ancestors' will. Hazel, be strong.”

Just like that, they were on their way. I battled depression and anxiety all over again from that day on.

One week later...

A week later, I had already lost a few kilo's. Yes, I was still back at school and without Beast doing everything for me, I had to leave my car behind at his house and travel via Uber to the airport. At least with Mathilda there in Stellenbosch, I managed to keep my head above water. My studies were surviving, as I couldn't fathom losing my bursary. I had stopped going to therapy for a while, and in the mean time, I was slowly drowning myself in pills as a coping mechanism. I hated talking about Beast, because I didn't want to bore people around me. Brenda had tried contacting me, but I ended up ignoring her efforts as I felt she was just putting salt into the wound, although she was trying to console me. I just felt as if whenever I tried to forget about Beast, she was slowly

reminding me about him. It didn't take her long to post him all over social media, and he was declared missing. Her posts were trending and of course, his mother and other sisters were blaming me for his disappearance. How? I had no idea. It didn't take Ma Sibiya too long to contact me and insult me, saying that had it not been for me, her son would have been back home. I could bare cope and she just wanted to make me feel like complete shit every chance she got. So, I blocked her everywhere.

My mother was very supportive, which really worried me at first, but I started appreciating it the moment shit got real. She called me every chance she got, and stopped talking shit about Beast for a while. Oddly, Ghadaffi also started texting and calling me. I had no idea where he got hold of my number, but I figured my mother had given it to him. I hardly answered his calls, because he was just someone I barely knew. I honestly felt as if he was taking advantage of the situation, and even Mathilda didn't vibe with him much, though she hadn't met him as yet. He would check up on me every chance he got. I thought it was a really nice gesture, although I wasn't interested in getting to know anyone new. I recall that awful day, I was sitting in my flat, all alone with a bottle of wine before me. I was watching Netflix

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and it just reminded me of him all over again. Before I knew it, my phone rang and it was a number I couldn't recall.

Hazel: (nervously) "Hello?"

Caller: "Hazel."

My heart nearly fell right out of my body. I felt as if I was going to pass out right there. I kept quiet for a moment, hoping that it was a dream.

Caller: "Hazel, are you there?"

Hazel: (shakily) "B... Beast... is that you?"

Caller: "Yes."

He sounded so down. I mean his voice was exactly the same, but he didn't sound like the Beast I knew. He didn't sound happy to hear from me.

Hazel: (teary) "Beast... Where are you? What happened to you? Are you okay?"

Caller: "I'm fine. Look, I'm sorry about the negotiations, but I had to do it. It's actually better this way."

Hazel: (shocked) "What are you talking about? What have I - "

He interrupted me, something he never did – ever.

Caller: "It's over. You and I can't be together any more. Asking you to marry me was a mistake."

I felt as if I was about to die.

Hazel: (flabbergasted) "I... I don't understand."

Caller: "Forget about me and everything we have done. This is goodbye."

Hazel: "Beast, wait!"

He hung up before I could plead for an explanation. My heart was racing, causing me to pant uncontrollably. I couldn't believe it. I felt my throat closing in on me. I tried dialling the number back, but it kept ringing unanswered. Five attempts later, it switched to voicemail. I felt like I was losing my mind, terribly. I found myself wailing while screaming at the same time. It was as if I was stabbed right in the gut and the gun kept twisting inside of me. I think Mathilda must have heard me screaming, because she rushed into my flat hysterically concerned.

Mathilda: (worried) "What's wrong? What happened?"

Hazel: "I... He... He called..."

Mathilda: "Hold on a second, let me get you a glass of water."

She gave me a glass of water to calm me down and I started speaking again. I told her everything he said and with every word I uttered, it felt like the stab wounds were being repeated all over again. She wasn't very convinced.

Mathilda: "This doesn't seem right, Hazel. It is not very convincing. I mean, why on earth would Beast just dump you without reason? Why would he even just not pitch up at the negotiations when he was so excited? I mean, the Beast I know, would most probably have done it face to face, if he really didn't want you any more. Running away seems rather cowardice of him. I don't know, but I'm not buying it. Are you even sure it was him?"

Hazel: "It sounded like him, I mean all this behaviour is sudden, but he did say he wanted nothing to do with me."

Mathilda: (shaking head) "I don't know, I mean his social media isn't even active any more. He last posted a picture of you two together a few hours before the negotiations were supposed to occur."

I had a funny feeling as soon as she mentioned his social media, so I quickly logged into Instagram to find his account, only to get the shock of my life.

Mathilda: "What is it?"

Hazel: (teary) "He... He deleted all our pictures together, Mathilda."

She quickly scrolled through his account and indeed it was true. My pictures were no longer on his account, and he had deleted all our pictures together.

Hazel: "It was going to be something better had he just deleted his account, but to go as far as deleting my pictures, Mathilda?! He has really found someone else. What is wrong with me, Mathilda? Am I that unloveable?"

Mathilda: “No, babe, not at all. You are beautiful in every way imaginable and Beast loves you. I'm sure there's an explanation to all this.”

Hazel: “I'm done. If he wants out like this – then so be it. I won't subject myself to such humiliation any more.”

Life is just unpredictable; if life were simple enough, we would all know our enemies – they would all confess to us before even hurting us. Our enemies come in many forms, and the devil can disguise himself as literally anything. I had no idea what awaited me, but I was too heart-broken to explore any other reason except for what was staring me in the face. Moving on is never easy, but if that is the only choice you're faced with – you will either do it, or give up.

Two months later...

It had been a rather daunting two months. I had to spend most of my time studying, and I dreaded going back home. I avoided that at all costs, I mean I didn't have a place to call home any more. I had found out that Beast's club had been sold by his

lawyer, who was nowhere to be found. His mother basically took his house for herself, and sold it as well. She also took my car without my knowledge – despite it being in my name. I found out the hard way; all my clothes and belongings were thrown into black garbage bags and thrown outside my mother's gate. She wanted nothing to do with me. I couldn't even mourn my relationship properly, and she already had everything planned out. My car was sold by her, of course, even though it was fraudulent. I had no idea how she did it since it was bought in cash. I wasn't happy about it, but I let her be. My mother begged me to fight her, but I just couldn't. I didn't want her to actually believe I was after his money. She already had such thoughts, so I didn't want to entertain them. Of course, a few people in Pheli had turned me into the laughing stock. They were even posting about Beast's supposed downfall, and I just refused to entertain anything like that. I slowly told myself that I'd move on with my life, even though I kept having the very same dream nearly every night. I started praying, but I was rather inconsistent in that regard. It had been nearly three months ever since I had seen Beast, and my life felt awfully different. Our first year was officially over, and I had to go home. I didn't want to, but with Mathilda leaving, I had nothing left for me in Stellenbosch. I took a flight back home and my mother was ecstatic to see me. It was a week before Christmas, and I actually found her decorating the

entire yard and house with all sorts of decorations. She had even bought a Christmas tree – something she had never done in all my years on earth. Bella was out as always, while her daughter had started to crawl.

Hazel: (surprised) “Hello, Mama.”

Binah: “Oh, Hazel. It is so nice to see you. How was your flight?”

Hazel: “It was fine.”

Binah: “Come, let's sit down for a moment.”

She held me by hand and sat down with me.

Binah: “How are you really doing?”

Hazel: (shrugging) “I'm trying, to be honest.”

Binah: “Well, try is the best. Things have been a little different here ever since you were gone. Ma Sibiya started spreading rumours about you, so I taught her a little lesson.”

Hazel: (surprised) “Bathong (goodness), Mama. You really shouldn't have.”

Binah: “What should I have done? Let her insult my daughter like that? Not for as long as I'm on this earth!”

I was impressed with her stance, I mean she hadn't been that nice to me since one of her customers had tried to rape me in her Shebeen. I was a bit surprised where she had gotten the money for decorations, when the house was still in rags. The paint on the walls was completely diminished by then, the kitchen cupboards were broken and barely hanging onto dear life, while the ceiling was almost completely tarnished. Not to mention the couches and some of the furninture.

Binah: “I see you are looking around. It has been a while since you actually looked at your home. Don't worry, Bella has a job

and has been saving, you know. I'd like to invite my family over for Christmas this year, if you don't mind."

That was something I never thought she would have ever agreed to. She was slowly changing, although I wasn't too sure as to how long it would have lasted.

Hazel: "Why would I mind?"

Binah: "You're my daughter, I care about your opinion and feelings."

Just as I thought she had shocked me, she dropped another bomb on me.

Binah: "Oh, we let the tenant who was occupying your room go. I figured you still need the room now that you are no longer staying in Zambesi."

Great. I thought I had to go look for furniture again, but the bombs kept coming.

Binah: "I know, you're probably worried about the furniture since we had to sell yours that time, but your room has been fully furnished now."

So, she didn't have money to revamp and fix the house, but she had money to refurnish my room?

Hazel: (surprised) "Where did you get all that money?"

Binah: "I made a plan."

Her answer made me a little uncomfortable. Something told me she was lying to me, especially when she couldn't look me in the eye as she said that, but I let her be. I had enough on my plate as was.

Hazel: "Okay then."

Binah: "Here are your keys. You can go take a look."

I looked at Jenny and she was such a sweet child. As I was about to leave the house, she clung on my leg and signalled for me to pick her up. I wasn't too sure I was even good with babies. I had literally never held any child.

Binah: (smiling) “Mo kuke (pick her up). Children can sense when an adult needs some comforting, you know.”

I was hesitant, but the more I tried to figure out a way to ignore her, the more she started crying. So, I held her and she immediately smiled and hugged me. I was so nervous, which seems crazy, but I truly was.

Binah: (chuckling) “She likes you. You can go with her to your room if you like, while I finish up here before cooking.”

I nodded while Jenny occasionally played with my hair. Perhaps she was going to be a good distraction. She was such a jolly baby and by then, a tear escaped my eye thinking that I would have been 8 months pregnant by then. She wiped my tear away and gently kissed my cheek. Children are just something

else. I opened my room and I was filled with immediate awe. It smelled freshly painted, with everything I had and more in it. It was newly furnished; from a brand new bed to a brand new four-door fridge. There was no way that my mother would have been able to afford all that. Something didn't seem right. I mean, the house was in rags, yet my room looked better than it had before. I asked myself who had done all that? I couldn't really think of any one. I must say, I really appreciated the bed. It was almost as comfortable as Beast's and it was just as big. I had a big smart tv, and the fridge was also loaded with food and vegetables, along with some snacks and dishes and cutlery in the cupboards. Jenny noticed a few sweets, so I gave her one. I placed her on the couch alongside of me and she sat there, clinging onto me in perfect silence.

For some reason she really gave me peace of mind and added serenity to my soul. I didn't know what it was, but I guess babies had a natural calming effect on adults. I didn't want to think of Beast at all, as my heart was still bleeding, although it was bleeding a little less with each day that passed me by. I didn't like what was happening and nothing made any sense, but I chose to slowly start trusting God again. Everyone has a downfall every now and then and I'm pretty sure that even pastors stop praying every now and then, more especially when

they go through hardships. It is not easy remaining diligent and steadfast in prayer as the Bible says.

Being human is a lot harder than what most people think. Slowly but surely, I was weaning myself off Beast, although I hadn't deleted any of our pictures together from my phone nor my social media accounts. As we were nearing Christmas, I got the time to reflect on the past year; and I must say the road to recovery seemed rather bleak. I had started off the year with blossoming love; a love I never even knew existed; a perfect love, I lost my brother in the process and gained a nephew; I lost my baby; I nearly got married, but lost my fiancée in the process. I've had to re-learn how to be alone all over again, but I had faith. A faithful road can be rather steep, but with due diligence, once can overcome just about anything.

2 Corinthians 5:7 - "For we walk by faith, not by sight."

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“I can’t change the direction of the wind, but I can adjust my sails to always reach my destination.” – Jimmy Dean

Hazel

After watching tv for a short while, Jenny decided to doze off. By then, it was about 6pm, and Bella still hadn't come back yet from work. My mother called me in to come and have dinner. I was mesmerized by the ambrosial smell that came from the kitchen. My mother was a good cook – amongst all the bad qualities she had.

Hazel: “Hmm, it smells delicious.”

She quickly came and took Jenny from me.

Binah: “Oh, man. I'm sorry you had to watch her the entire time. I got so caught up with the cooking and everything else.”

Hazel: "It's alright. She's not bothersome at all."

She had made her famous beef stew with creamed cheesy spinach, creamy butternut and carrot dumplings, and Panacotta for dessert which was in the fridge. I couldn't even recall the last time she had made such a wonderful dish. It was a winter dish, but she seemed to have made it straight from the heart, as if it meant something big to her.

Binah: "I'd like us to wait for Bella to get here, if you don't mind. I mean, today is a special day."

Hazel: (frowning) "How so?"

Binah: "I get to have dinner with both my children. Is it such a bad thing?"

Hazel: "No, it's just... You've never done this."

Binah: "I'd like to change and start on a clean slate. I mean, surely I was not the best of mothers."

You're right, you were the worst, so I thought.

Binah: "But, I'd like to try and become a good mother while God still has given me a few years to live. I am not the best person in the world, Hazel, but I do love you. As hard as it may seem, I love you, and I will spend the rest of my life trying to prove it to you."

You know that weird feeling in your gut that hits you when someone lies or when you think they're lying? Well, I got that feeling. I just nodded, even though it was very pleasant to hear those words coming straight from her mouth, I struggled believing them. My mouth was salivating for the food and my stomach was growling impatiently while awaiting Bella's arrival. She greeted us, and when she had to greet me, I saw something displeasing in her eyes. She just frowned a little, but quickly smiled at me. I knew then that she was still bitter or angry at me for whatever it was that I had done to her, of which I still had no knowledge of. She never liked me, let alone loved me. So, I just dismissed it as her being herself. She was trying her level best to walk as straight as she could, but one could see from a mile away that she had been drinking. I wondered if she

was truly working as she said she was. For the very first time, I saw some animosity between my mother and Bella. I honestly couldn't believe my eyes, nor my ears.

Binah: (irritably) “And then, wena (you)? Did I not tell you that we'd be having dinner with your sister tonight? Did I not ask you to be early?”

Bella: “Ah, askies (sorry), Mamzo (mom). I honestly lost track of time. I mean, you of all people know how long stock taking lasts.”

Binah: “Stock taking ya grocera (of groceries) or stock taking ya bjala (of booze)?”

She was shouting but not too loud as to not wake the baby. I had never seen those two fight for anything at all before.

Bella: (irritated) “Geez, mama. I just said I'm sorry. Yes, Caro and I had a few drinks after work, but nothing hectic. You drink yourself, don't you?”

Binah: “O thoma go ntlwaela masepa (you're starting to be full of shit) now, Bella! Who the fuck do you think you are?! I take care of your child all day – the least you can do is respect my wishes. Your sister made it all the way from Cape Town, and she's still healing from her break-up, but you don't see her drinking her soul away instead of spending time with her family!”

Bella: “Fine. I'm sorry. Let me go change.”

Binah: “No, you sit right there. We're about to eat. I won't argue with you about this ever again, do you hear me?”

Bella: “Yes.”

She was annoyed; I could tell. Something wasn't right, I mean since when was I the one in the right? Bella was told absolute shit right in front of me, and I was left speechless. She even asked that we held hands and prayed. Bella was so reluctant to hold my hand, that her hand felt stone cold. As soon as she heard “Amen”, she removed her hand from mine in a

heartbeat. My mother continued updating me about the neighbours and what had happened while I was gone, I found it absolutely fascinating that I had never been able to hold down a conversation with her before. She was funny and I then believed what Malachi had said to me before; that my mother was a good person who had just gotten messed up by people, circumstances and life itself. We were drinking some wine; not the cheap wine she was used to

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but Chardonnay; Rupert and Rothschild's Baronne Chardonnay to be exact. I was shocked; so shocked that I had to ask.

Hazel: "Eh, banna (goodness), Mama. Since when do you know of Chardonnay?"

She laughed instead of being offended as before.

Binah: (laughing) "Hazel, I used to be a very hot and stylish girl, you know. Phela I got here, fresh from Ga-Mogalakwena, and I became a city girl when I met your father. He introduced me to things and places I knew nothing about. I ate three sometimes five course meals on a daily basis. I used to drink everything

from Riesling, Pinot Grigio, Sauvignon Blanc, Cabernet Sauvignon, Pinot Noir, Syrah, Zinfande. Whenever we went to eat out at restaurants, he always took me to Italian restaurants, most of the time. We'd eat a lot of Caprese Salad with Pesto Sauce, Panzenella, Bruschetta, Focaccia Bread – you name it! He was such a classy man – not to mention romantic.”

I couldn't help but laugh in amusement.

Hazel: “You have never spoken about my father.”

Binah: “That's because I used to dwell in all the hatred I had for him. The truth is, he loved Kasi (township) life so much, that he always came this side to escape his family. I really loved him and he adored Malachi so much. I had finally found the man of my dreams in Phil.”

So, his name was really Phil. I didn't even know why I was surprised because I had googled him before.

Binah: “He gave me ample opportunity to rewrite my matric and go to school, but I was so hung up on the slay queen life, that I just took a different turn. I honestly think that's the reason why he chose to go with his father's wishes and marry a white woman.”

Well, at least we were getting somewhere. She was actually opening up to me about my father.

Hazel: “What about me? I mean, did he know you were pregnant with me?”

Binah: (nodding) “Yes, and he was over the moon. He started behaving rather oddly and when I finally found out the truth, I didn't even give him a chance to explain. His father came to my house and threatened me. I sold that house and moved here. Phil had bought me a house but his father wanted me to have no ties and no part in their family whatsoever. He gave me millions to leave and never be found again. He didn't even want you to exist, but I couldn't abort you – I refused. So, I moved to this part of Atteridgeville and that was the end of Phil and I.”

It was a moving story, and I could tell how broken she still was, but I wasn't too sure about the part where she refused to abort me, because Mam'Rose did tell me that she tried to abort me when she was 8 months old, but I survived by the grace of God and my ancestors. Bella was anything but pleased about our conversation. I guess she was already used to getting all the attention.

Bella: (annoyed) "Excuse me."

She upped and left, but my mother still continued.

Binah: "I know, you most probably blame me for everything in your life, but in truth, if Phil actually wanted to be a part of your life, he would have been by now. I mean, sure, he has tried to redeem himself somewhere. I wouldn't be surprised if he is the mysterious donor who has been paying your school fees along with Malachi's. I mean, I am pretty sure he is the one paying your fees right now, along with the 10k per month spending money and rent money you receive."

The last part alarmed me a little bit because I had never told her that. She knew I was getting money from the bursary, but I never told her how much. She startled me because she knew so much.

Hazel: (surprised) "How do you even know that?"

Binah: "Hmm?"

Hazel: "The money. How do you know how much I get for spending money?"

Binah: (alarmed) "Oh, uh, you once told me. Don't you remember?"

Hazel: "No, I never told you."

Binah: (dismissive) "Ag, you told me a while ago, you most probably just forgot. Come, let me dish up on the dessert. Bella doesn't seem like she'll be having any since she is in a foul mood, so more for us."

She dismissed it and I decided not to make an issue out of it. Little by little, our relationship grew, while Bella drifted further apart from my mother and started being more rebellious than she was.

Ephesians 6:16 - "In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one."

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Healing is a matter of time, but it is sometimes also a matter of opportunity. – Hippocrates

Hazel

Jeremiah 17:14 says; “Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved, for you are my praise.” That's the verse that spoke to me throughout my entire conversation with my mother. We gelled, for the first time in my entire existence. I was on the journey to healing and I was starting to love it. I never knew how much my mother and I had in mind, until the December holidays. Nonetheless, she honestly managed to help me get my mind of Beast. I mean, my mind was already made up; he had dumped me – over the phone to add to my problems. It was rather weird, but every piece of evidence pointed to it. I slowly started renovating the house, by repainting the inner and outer walls, I upgraded a few furniture items and fixed the pavement and gate. It actually started to look more like a real home. Bella was hardly home, and by then Jenny had already become so fond of me. It was really odd, but cute. I was loving her already; I had started bathing and feeding her and we even had some play time.

I had no one to visit or go out with, since well Otlile and Kg decided to write me off on their own accord. Mathilda wasn't around and it was family time. She had started spending time with her mother, so I didn't want to impose. My mother had taught me how to bake – one of the skills I lacked. I could cook, but I didn't match up to her. When I bought extra ingredients, she showed me how to make food the way Beast would make it. My heart would occasionally bleed whenever small things reminded me of him. It was really awful being so conflicted. One moment I'd be angry at him and the next I'd be near tears thinking about what was and what could have been, but it was all his fault. Nowhere near my mind had it registered that it could have been foul play. I would call his phone from time to time and listen to the voice mail. His voicemail would always state: “Hi, this is Bethuel Sibiya, Hazel's husband, please leave a message.” That would just bring me to tears, but just a day before Christmas, his voicemail had been deleted. His number was non-existent and his social media had been completely deleted. All those pictures and videos of us – our memories; completely wiped away. I remember crying so much that I woke up with swollen eyes on Christmas morning. I could hardly stomach anything on Christmas eve, because of the stabbing pain in my gut. It is so amazing just how connected the heart is to the soul; when your heart is tired – your soul

becomes tired; when you are heartbroken – your soul becomes broken too. That is how I felt at that time. I felt like a junkie who had a relapse during a pending recovery. Beast felt like my addiction; I started thinking about him all over again; I felt like I couldn't live without him any more. I started stalking his sisters and his mother all over social media. I felt like a true bitch for blowing Brenda off like that when she tried explaining to me that Beast's disappearance was highly unusual. I started slowly believing it. I mean; he literally was nowhere to be found. It was so upsetting to me that I actually thought the guy would have done that to me. So, I decided to test the waters, I decided to add Brenda on Facebook as a friend and waited for her response, impatiently. It was the longest wait of my life. Christmas morning came, and she still hadn't responded to my request, although I had stalked her on Messenger only to see she had been online. I let her be, while I kept logging back in to see if she had accepted my response. I know, Facebook would have alerted me, but I just kept popping in. While I was busy hovering over my phone, my mother knocked on my door – sternly.

Binah: (knocking) “Hazel! Are you dressed already? We're running late.”

Hazel: "Dressed for what, Mama?"

Binah: "Heh bathong (my goodness)! For church, young lady. Have you forgotten that it's Christmas?"

It was a new tradition for us, I guess. I always went to church with Mam'Rose.

Hazel: "Eish (oh), Mama, I don't think I'll be able to make it."

Binah: "No, Hazel. My mother always taught me that God solves all our problems. I'll meet you outside in 15 minutes. One thing we don't do in this house is leave God hanging."

I dragged my feet and got up because I knew that she would have come back to drive me mad until I got up. I took a five minute shower, literally. I just put on a simple dress with sandals. I didn't even bother to fix my hair, since it was curly any way. My eyes looked so swollen and red, which

contributed to me looking like shit. I got out and found her about to come back to my room.

Binah: “Amper ke go lata (I nearly went back to fetch you)! Come on, the driver is waiting for us.”

She had literally gotten one of the Kombi's to stop by and drive us straight to the church. Bella was quiet and looked at me in such disgust. I was already used to her attitude. She had Jenny in her arms and as soon as she saw me, she raised her arms for me to pick her up. I smiled back at her excited self, and just when I was about to pick her up, Bella pulled her away from me. That gesture right there broke me. I decided to let her be – despite the baby crying so helplessly for me to pick her up.

Binah: “Bathong (goodness), Bella! E fa Hazel ngwana (give the baby to Hazel)! Can't you see Jenny wants to be in her arms?”

Bella: (angrily) “Hazel a dire ngwana o leng wa gae (Let Hazel make her own baby)! Oh, wait, I forgot. You already lost yours!”

You know that really awful feeling you get within you; right in your heart as if you are being stabbed and the object is being turned relentlessly to cause you more pain? That moment when your brain and your heart work together; they become broken together and force the tears out of you automatically. That's how I felt at that moment. I just kept quiet and tried so hard to keep my tears in check. I refused to give her the pleasure of seeing me cry all because of her. Swallowing my saliva felt like I was coercing my vigorously barren throat to accommodate it. My mother could tell how broken I was; it was the very first time I had seen her care about Bella's behaviour towards me – besides that night we ate our first, sane dinner together.

Binah: (angrily) “Bella, you will not speak to your sister that way! I might have raised her in a different way – but you have no right to speak to her like that! You're blood, for fuck's sake!”

Bella: “I will not spare her feelings by being mute. I'll speak my mind.”

My mother did the unthinkable. She was next to me, which was exactly two feet away from Bella, but she slapped her so hard, that I was in absolute shock. Bella was even more astonished than I was. She held onto her cheek for dear life, and it was actually the first time I had seen her slap Bella; actually lay a hand on her.

Bella: (shocked) "What was that for?"

Binah: "As I have said; today is Christmas, my mother died around this time. That is a painful memory enough. I don't have to deal with your shit. If you don't want to be here – you can suck it up after church. My family is coming soon and I don't need your bullshit. Hazel has been nothing, but nice to you ever since she came for the holidays. She has fed us, despite you having a job. She has bathed and spent time with your child – something you clearly fail at. She has even clothed her; so how dare you spit that shit in her face? If I see you behave in any way that is not appropriate towards her during the church service, I will be going to jail today for murdering one of my daughters. I will skin you alive, Bella, believe me. Ask Hazel what I did to Big man for what he was about to do to her. Don't fucking test me."

Just like that, she took the last sip of her beer which she had been hiding in a plastic bag, leaving the both of us speechless. All that happened while Jenny was still crying her lungs out and the driver minding his own business.

Binah: "Give that child to Hazel before I lose my mind."

Bella gave Jenny to me and she immediately calmed down. I was so uncomfortable, I felt as if Bella was ready to beat me to a pulp, but she was only behaving because of my mother. When we finally got to the church, Bella was the first one to get out. I followed and my mom was the last one. I heard her speak to the driver, just as I was about to pay him.

Binah: "Here, this is for your effort and petrol."

The driver thanked her after receiving the money and left.

Hazel: "Mama, I was going to pay him, you know."

Binah: (shaking head) “You already do so much, Hazel. It's truly nothing.”

We walked side by side together into the church yard, while Bella was already mingling with some of her friends. I could see all eyes on us, and it made me a bit unsettled. Of course, Ma'Sibiya and her friends were dying to have the opportunity to tell me shit in front of everyone, while Sylvia, Moses's widow was dressed to impress and had her Nurse attitude on. She gave my mother the look of utter disgust, but Binah Makwetla was on a roll. She got up that morning and put on her “don't give a fuck” attitude. She looked so good, for the first time in years, she had make up on, and had a beautiful, black, lacey dress I had never seen her wear before. It was a Prada dress to add to that. She had Lou button shoes on with a Gucci handbag, and her hair was just as rich as mine, so she tied it up in a neat bun and she looked amazing. Her body was still the same old body, curvy with a thin waist and hardly any breast. I honestly wished I was like her, but instead, I was a little sporty. I had hoped to sprout later on in life. She walked in confidently, when Ma'Sibiya started with her shit – she wasn't even given the chance.

Ma'Sibiya: “Look at her; the township drunk walking beside her whore of a daughter. They are the reason my son had disappeared.”

My mother stopped to look at her and her friends.

Binah: (smiling widely) “Good morning, Bazalwane (good people). Another Christmas and yet more bitter than you were last year. See, it is pointless to come to church and claim to praise God, but your heart is full of evil, envy and extreme detestation. My daughter and I owe you all absolutely nothing. Yes, I have my fault and she surely has hers, but you don't see us hiding behind the Bible, now do you? So, if this little tasteless hobby of yours makes you feel better about your useless, boring lives, I suggest you keep my name and both my daughters' names out of your vile mouths, okay?”

It seemed as if Ma'Sibiya was hoping to add fuel to the fire, but Binah Makwetla was on her case.

Ma'Sibiya: (chuckling) “Look at her – just look at her. Where did you even get that Prada dress? Ko Marabi (At Marabastad)?”

She laughed while one of them attempted to laugh right along with her when my mother took out the big guns. By then half the people outside could hear her and were listening.

Binah: (chuckling) “Hehe, Sarah Sibiya, a se wena o ka bolelang (you're a fine one to talk). Have you forgotten where you come from? A dusty old town in KZN and then your gangster husband left you for someone prettier, smarter and more educated? I mean, that man must have gone through so much for him to leave you bare with four children to go be a father to four other children that weren't even his blood line. Man, my pussy has never tasted so horrible. And wena (you) Martha, you're one to laugh. Didn't your husband leave you for your 70 year old neighbour? Should I keep going?”

They were all stunned while the other two briefly shook their heads.

Binah: "I thought so."

She turned around and saw Sylvia looking at her in the same disgust, but with a tinge of fear.

Binah: "Sylvia, how nice to see you again. Are you still hung up over that cheater husband of yours? I mean, wow man, you sure have a lot of time. He hardly slept home, he came to me – every single night. Yes, I don't regret it, and yes, you burnt my face for him, but well, I am still Binah Makwetla. Get a life, sis. Get a life, invite God into your life and be happy."

Just like that, we made our entrance into the church. No one ever dared to even look our direction while in church. She was so happy, for the very first time in a long time. She was smiling as if she hadn't even insulted anyone a few minutes before. Something was radiating within her, I couldn't pin point it, though. Bella came to sit beside me because someone was already seated next to my mother. I could smell the cigarette on her, and the hatred was even worse. I refused to be clouded by such negativity while in church. The service was about to start when Dragon and Ghadaffi came to us. I was quite

surprised when I saw Dragon alongside his wife and Ghadaffi alongside his. Dragon held his wife's hand, while Ghadaffi didn't even bother to look at his wife. It was odd, because she was so beautiful. They greeted us, and Bella adjusted her clothes for a short while. I could tell she was into one of them – I wasn't sure whom at that point.

Ghadaffi: “Hazel, you look lovely today.”

I had no idea how to respond, when his wife was right there. He didn't even bother to introduce her.

Norah: (smiling uncomfortably) :”Hi, I'm Norah. I've heard so much about you.”

I could tell she was a bit uncomfortable, but I shook her hand. Ghadaffi was so dismissive towards her.

Ghadaffi: “Norah, go get us a place to sit.”

Norah: "It was lovely meeting you, Hazel. I hope to see you soon."

She really meant that last statement. I had no idea why she seemed so eager to meet me. It sounded more than just the cliché people used whenever they met each other for the very first time. She left after saying goodbye to my mother and Bella. She seemed to know them both quite well. I had no idea what the relationship was between my mother and those people as yet, but I was soon to find out.

Ghadaffi: "Hazel, I was hoping that we'd have Christmas lunch together, as a family."

I was appalled. What family?

Binah: (unsettled) "Uhm, my family is coming over. Perhaps another time?"

Ghadaffi: "Well, then, we shall join you guys."

Binah: “What about your wife?”

Ghadaffi: “What about her?”

That conversation was so awkward; firstly because no one between Dragon and his wife tried to stop it, and secondly, because my mother's behaviour seemed rather offish. I thought she was fond of Dragon, I mean the last time we had spoken about him, she couldn't stop praising him.

Binah: (laughing nervously) “Oh, I thought that – perhaps you had your own plans, you know – as a family.”

Dragon's wife Melita was really something. She didn't seem to like me at all. She looked like a real Stepford wife, with jewellery galore and ridiculously high heels. I had no idea how she even walked in them with such a big structure at her age. I mean, I knew a lot of women who carried heels well, but never did I think that even at their age, they could walk around with a pencil heel so perfectly. I mean, fuck, she was better than me.

Melita: “Brandon, surely they have their own plans, I mean, her mother just told you.”

She referred to my mother as “her mother” instead of Binah. A red flag.

Ghadaffi: “So? We always join them. So, Mama Bee? Am I invited?”

He didn't seem to give my mother a chance in any way.

Binah: “Sure.”

Ghadaffi: “Good, see you then, Hazel.”

He completely dismissed Bella's presence, which left her more annoyed than she was before. They walked away, while I looked at my mother. She was on edge every time Ghadaffi looked our way. What on earth was the matter? The pastor came eventually and after we sang a few songs, he started with his enlightening sermon.

Pastor: "I know, a lot of people always talk about Jesus whenever it is Christmas time, but I'd like to talk about something else for a change; how Christmas brings us all together. Yes, the story of Jesus is supposed to bring unity within families. Think about this story for a second; a man once grew up in a loving home and despite everything his parents had done for him; clothing and feeding him and giving him the best education – they decided that he was to choose a specific career path; one that they wanted FOR him. They both wanted him to be a lawyer, but he wanted to be a musician. The parents were so dead set against it, that they gave him an ultimatum; either go to varsity to study law and they'd pay all the fees or be a musician and they'd completely disown him. Of course, being the strong-willed young man he was, he chose to follow his heart. Indeed, they disowned him. He was their only child; they removed him from all their accounts and all the inheritance. Life was hard for him; he couldn't find a job and he had to be homeless. He ended up trying his luck in music, but he turned to the wrong life; he started selling drugs as a way to make quick money, but ended up making the biggest mistake most drug dealers make – he got high on his own supply. He was in and out of prison; and in and out of rehabilitation centres, and not once did his family go to visit him while he was there – not even for Christmas. Then, one

day, his mother came to visit him in prison. She looked so old, though she wasn't that old at the time. Of course the boy was so happy to see her, but she had come with a request – his father needed a kidney transplant and of course, him being their only child, he was the only match. The father only had a month to live. So, in exchange for his kidney, they'd get him released from prison. He agreed, thinking that that would bring him closer to the family he lost, and give him a second chance.

So, he got released as promised, and he gave his father the kidney. Even after the transplant, he had hoped that his father would change, but he wanted nothing to do with him. The young man sobbed, and cried and started speaking from his heart.

He said; “Father, I have longed to hear your voice whenever I was sunken in a deep, dark hole, but then I remembered Romans 5:8 - “But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

I have called you numerous times whenever I was in a bad space, hung up on drugs or arrested, but not once did you answer my call. I nearly died so many times, but then I heard

God; Romans 3:23 - "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

I have had ample opportunity to change and be the son you have wanted me to be. I even studied law in prison, but not once did you acknowledge that. I did that for you – to make you happy; to make you love me, but then God reminded me; Hebrews 13:8 - "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever."

You have let me down countless in life, but I still remained hopeful. You have asked for a kidney – a part of me and I chose to give it to you – willingly, but you chose to deceive me. I thought you would love me, but Psalm 86:15 - "But you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness."

I have been faithful and diligent in prayer. I thank God for showing me the light. Yes, you might have the kidney I gave you and I wish you nothing but the best in life. I can never be good enough for you and that is okay, because I am more than enough for God. For Jeremiah 31:3 says; "The Lord appeared to him from far away. I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you."

Just then, the young man walked out and decided to live his own life, but a few hours later, he found out his father died. I know, you all are wondering why I chose to give you such a boring and heartbreaking sermon on a day like this? Well, some of you walk around carrying so much baggage and heartache, but I am reminding you today, that it is never too late to change. It is never too late to turn to God and ask for forgiveness. 2 Corinthians 12:9 says; “But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.” I urge you to forgive yourselves, forgive your loved ones. At times, nothing you do for them will ever be good enough, but God is good enough – you are good enough. This life is short, my people, so live each day as if it were your last.”

I was moved by that entire sermon, my mother was touched. I could tell because she had tears in her eyes, because it spoke to her. Bella wasn't even moved at all, her eyes kept playing towards the Mashile family. Little did I know that the pastor's story would end up being a lot similar to mine.

Zephaniah 3:17 - “The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing.”

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“Always forgive your enemies – nothing annoys them so much.”

Oscar Wilde

Hazel

The sermon was so lovely; I actually felt the pastor's words moving me from within. I could say the same about my mother, but I wasn't too sure about Bella. If I didn't know any better, I'd say she was obsessed with the Mashile's. Something big was brewing there, but I wasn't about to find out. I knew my place and that meant me minding my own. I honestly thought that our conversation with that family was over, but the moment we got up after the church service – even my mother was rushing to go out. We found ourselves right outside the church, but of course, they offered us a lift. Unfortunately for us, Dragon was driving with Melita, while Ghadaffi was driving with his wife Norah. We couldn't even hide behind the space issue, so we had to get a lift. The three of us could fit very well in one car, but Bella offered to go go with Dragon and his wife. I figured she wanted to get away from my mother and I, but it felt like she had other reasons beyond that. My mother and I got into Ghadaffi's car, and I

couldn't help but feel like he was hovering me. I felt so embarrassed, as if I had done something wrong. I got the feeling his wife knew; she knew that the guy was into me some how, but she was overcompensating. I just wasn't too sure about the entire setting, but their marriage looked loveless. What did I know about love? I was dumped on my lobola negotiations day; no warning and no reason whatsoever. So, I was just in a shitty mess, emotionally. My heart was barely hanging onto a thread. I couldn't help but try and understand my mother's sudden change in behaviour towards Ghadaffi. How does one move from praising a person 24/7 to being completely uncomfortable around them? Something was brewing and it wasn't pretty.

Ghadaffi: "So, Hazel, how was your first year at Varsity?"

Well, I wasn't too sure how to respond to that since he basically undermined my career choice the other day.

Hazel: "It was rough, but okay."

I expected his usual, cocky self to answer me, but I got to see a different side to Ghadaffi.

Ghadaffi: "I know the feeling. Varsity can be so rough, more especially the first year. I mean, even more when you don't have money. Your mother told me you got a bursary, you must be one smart lady."

I was shocked, so shocked I had no idea how to respond. My mother's persistence had faded completely.

Hazel: (nervously) "Uh, well, yes. I don't know, though, I'm just a hard worker. I mean, you did say that Psychology isn't real medicine, right?"

I did that intentionally to show him that I didn't like being ridiculed and once again, he amused me.

Ghadaffi: "About that, I'm really sorry. I've been trying to apologize for so long, I mean, I wasn't raised like that. Your career choice is really scarce amongst black women in this

country. Honestly, after our conversation that evening, I read up on mental health and realized so many people need therapy in this world.”

Wow, what a huge, sudden change.

Hazel: “Yes...”

Norah: “Oh, I think that you studying psychology is a lovely choice, Hazel. I mean, I for one feel that I could do with therapy every once in a while.”

Ghadaffi: (dismissive) “Norah, don't you have someone to talk to on Instagram or something? I'm having an important conversation here.”

My mother was so uncomfortable, it was really shocking. I felt so bad for Norah, no man should ever speak to a woman like that. I felt instantly annoyed when he tried making conversation with me. I could tell how hurt Norah was, that made me appreciate the love I got to know from Beast. He

treated me like gold. That was some kind of love I'd have a hard time finding again. I couldn't wait to get to the house and once we had arrived, we found Mama's family already there. Mama didn't even wait for Ghadaffi to say anything, but she opened the door herself and walked out. I did the same and followed her.

Malome Lesiba: "Binah, wa be wa fihla (you finally made it)."

Binah: "So sorry, brother, I was at church. You know, Mama taught me well."

Okay, she was exaggerating, but I let her shine. They were so happy to see us. Even Great Uncle Frans was there, Aunt Hunadi with Sinah and her son, it was basically the entire family. Despite seeing such a wonderful family affair, Ghadaffi and Dragon just didn't get the message. I honestly thought they'd excuse us, but they stayed instead. As bored as I was, I put Jenny to sleep and started helping Mama cook. She insisted on cooking for us all, and Ghadaffi went out with his father. I assumed he was out to get some air or something, but he came back with tons of booze for my relatives. As shocked as I was, I couldn't help but be reminded of Beast's actions.

Beast was the one who used to buy my family alcohol and tend to them without fail. I ignored that, while Norah joined us instead of her mother in law. Melita just didn't want to join us women for some reason, but we were most probably not her scene. She was the only one clinging onto her husband, while the rest of us were busy in the kitchen, cooking and drinking together. Bella was also amongst us, which was also very odd. She kept drinking in silence while playing on her phone. We didn't mind her presence, really. Every now and then, Ghadaffi would come to the house to ask if I was okay. Isn't that what a man asks his WIFE? I didn't respond, and then he would look at my mother, who would then respond on my behalf apparently. I saw how broken Norah was, she was trying so hard not to cry. I had to do something. I had no idea where I got the courage from, but I had to do something.

Hazel: "Mama, my booze is finished. I'm going to get some more."

Binah: "Hao (goodness), you are drinking Savanna, there's plenty here."

Hazel: "Yes. But I feel like something else. Norah, do you mind accompanying me?"

She was more than delighted to do so.

Norah: "Oh, yes, absolutely."

Hunadi: "Bring some more wine, please."

I nodded while I walked out with Norah. I could tell Ghadaffi wasn't too pleased to see me walking outside with his wife. He came running.

Ghadaffi: "And then? Where are you two headed?"

Norah seemed a little too scared to respond which didn't seem normal at all.

Hazel: "We're going to buy some alcohol. We're running low."

Ghadaffi: "Oh, there's no need for that. I'll go."

Hazel: "No, we're fine. We need the walk any way."

Ghadaffi: "Oh, come on."

Hazel: "I said, we're fine!"

He looked rather surprised to see a woman respond to him like that. I didn't receive any bullshit from a man who loved me, so why on earth would I have tolerated any bullshit of any kind from any other man? He looked at me and tried to control his own rage.

Ghadaffi: "Okay, if you guys struggle, you can call me."

I just ignored him while Norah nodded while facing down. The moment we walked out the gate, I saw tears of a broken woman running down her cheek.

Hazel: "What's wrong? Is everything okay?"

Oddly, I could relate to her. Most probably because she wasn't that much older than me, about 23 years old or so.

Norah: (teary) "I... I'm fine. I'm just having a rough day, I guess."

Hazel: "I know you and I don't know each other at all and you don't have to tell me. But I just feel like you're going through a lot. I hope you'll be okay in time."

Norah: "Thank you. I just felt a little overwhelmed."

Hazel: "Well, then, this walk is perfect to take your mind off things, right?"

Norah: "Absolutely."

Well, she didn't tell me what her problem was, but I figured it had to do with Ghadaffi. He wasn't a good husband, I could just tell. Or maybe they were just the normal married couple with the usual marriage problems. We took a rather long walk to the bottle store, though it wasn't too far. I figured she needed some air. She told me all about herself, a young, beautiful and ambitious girl from KZN. She studied Biometrics, which meant she was smart. What I couldn't understand was what she was doing with a dick head like Brandon, at such a tender age? I mean she had just graduated. Honestly, I felt her parents didn't do her justice. It turned out they had been married for three years. That made me reflect briefly on what had happened between Beast and I. I mean, was it a blessing in disguise that he upped and left? Or was I going to end up just like Norah three or four years down the line? Once we got to the nearest tavern, she changed her mind about what she initially wanted to drink. She was drinking wine all along, but she said she wanted to change to Savanna. I didn't mind, I mean the girl wanted to drink so I gave her the opportunity. By the time we went back, Ghadaffi was already pacing up and down by the gate, looking rather frustrated.

Ghadaffi: (angrily) “Why were you guys taking so fucking long?!”

I despised his tone and arrogance, just when I was about to give him a chance to redeem himself. I honestly thought that I had judged him unaccordingly. Norah looked so afraid of him, it was alarming. Another red flag.

Norah: (panicking) “Oh, we went to get some more drinks... Like we told you before we left.”

Ghadaffi: (hyperventilating) “Can I speak to you in private, please, Norah?”

That was another red flag. What did he want to say to her that I wasn't supposed to hear? She was so reluctant to even leave my side. She clung onto my jean without him noticing. I had to do something. Firstly, the guy wasn't even invited to our family lunch, and there he was making me amongst his wife uncomfortable.

Hazel: "You can speak to her after she is done helping out. We're about to dish up."

Ghadaffi: "I just need a moment with my wife."

He was showing signs of aggression. He had narcissistic tendencies; we read up about it in one of our modules. I wasn't about to give him the satisfaction of abusing his wife in front of the entire family – even those who weren't part of his.

Hazel: "Like I said
you can speak to her later."

He tried disputing, but I was one step ahead of him. He nearly grabbed her forcefully, but I pushed her right before me and we went into the yard, leaving him frustrated outside the gate. Something clearly wasn't right within their marriage.

Norah: (whispering relieved) "Thank you."

That woman was probably married under duress or something, I mean why else would she have been so afraid of her own husband of three years? We got back into the kitchen, and my mother was nearly done with the dessert. Luckily, Hilda and Sinah were helping out. They got along – well, at least I thought so. I didn't hear Aunt Hilda shouting or insulting my mother once from the moment she came back. When I looked around, I didn't see Bella.

Hazel: “Bella o kae (where is Bella)?”

Hilda: “Oh, she quickly went out. Most probably to see a boyfriend or something. She didn't say where she was going.”

I shrugged, she wasn't trying to be part of our circle in any way. Norah didn't waste any time, she opened that Savanna bottle in the speed of light and started downing it like her life depended on it.

Hilda: (shocked) “Slow down, Princess. Do you want to black out before lunch time?”

Norah: “Oh, sorry. I was just thirsty.”

Hilda: “If I didn't know better, I'd say o nale mathata (you have problems). That man of yours - “

I quickly changed the subject. I wasn't about to let Norah bare her marriage problems on the table like that with a bunch of strangers.

Hazel: “Can we start serving the people outside already?”

Binah: “Oh, rather put the food outside on the table, we can dish up – buffet style.”

Anything to get them to stop asking Norah questions. Each time I walked out of the house to put a dish on top of the table, Ghadaffi tried to come close to me. I simply ignored all of his efforts. After placing all the food on the table, they all started to dish up. I could see Melita looking around searching for her

husband. Ghadaffi noticed that I was giving him the cold shoulder, so he simply just walked away.

Melita: “Brandon, have you seen your father? He left an hour ago saying he was going to answer a call.”

Ghadaffi: “Well, then, there you go. There's your answer, why are you asking me? He's your husband.”

Spoiled much? She looked around and noticed she had no one to ask but me. There was something about that woman; she had spiteful tendencies, but I was ready for her. I had no idea why she crawled under my skin like that.

Melita: (frowning) “Ngwanyana (girly), have you seen my husband?”

Hazel: “No.”

Just then, Bella walked into the yard with her top slightly unbuttoned, and lo and behold, literally a few seconds later,

Dragon walked in looking slightly unusual. Something was brewing amongst those two because Bella was even smiling. She looked rather sweaty.

Melita: "Where have you been?"

Dragon: "Oh, I had some business to take care of over the phone."

She looked at him from top to toe and could smell the guilt all over him.

Melita: "Zip your pants before your dick falls out."

That alone gave away the entire situation. So, Bella was actually sleeping with Dragon? Is that why we didn't know the father of her child? That was something else. Melita gave me one look, but I chose to mind my own business and we all came out to eat. Norah sat right next to me before Ghadaffi could claim his spot next to her chair, and she didn't let go of her

bottle. My eyes were perhaps deceiving me, but she had a full bottle right next to her.

Sinah: (whispering) “She's on her third bottle already.”

Third bottle in 15 minutes? That was a cry for help. Most victims of any kind of abuse always wait for such situations before they can express themselves, they find themselves so trapped, that the only way for people to help them is to see the true colours of their perpetrators, and that is if they were “too drunk to remember” what they did or said. I let her be. We prayed and I could smell the tension between Dragon and Melita, even though she tried so hard to hide it. She couldn't help but look at Bella with so much loathing, while Bella was unbothered.

Malome Lesiba: “So, motlogolo (niece), any news on Bethuel?”

I highly doubt he was trying to ruin the mood, to be honest. He was the sane out amongst his other siblings.

Malome Matome: “Mo tlogele (leave her), she doesn't want to talk about him. Besides, he's done. Old news.”

Hazel: “No, Malome (uncle), I haven't heard anything yet.”

Malome Lesiba: “Well, for what it is worth, he will be found and he will have to explain himself to you once he is back.”

Malome Matome: “You speak as if you know he is alive or something.”

And then, I heard the unexpected.

Norah: “Oh, yes, he might be alive. This world is full of devils, you know.”

What surprised me was that the Mashile's were so shocked, and Ghadaffi was even more worried about what would come out of her mouth first.

Ghadaffi: "Norah, I think you have had enough to drink now."

Norah: "Oh, I don't think so. Beast, neh (hey). Beast, Beast, Beast. That guy truly loved you, shame. I wish I could experience that kind of love. Pity, evil people also love you."

Okay, she was onto something while her in-laws were acting like it was the alcohol talking.

Melita: "Brandon, kgala motho wa gago (stop your woman)."

Ghadaffi: "I think it is time for me to take you home, Norah."

I could see how he was desperately hoping she would not embarrass him in public.

Norah: (shouting) "No! I can't live a lie any more."

Ghadaffi got up immediately and forcefully grabbed her. That was when the entire situation ensued between them. Norah

fought back and they were in a scuffle, all this while the beer was in her hand.

Norah: (shouting) "Let go of me!"

Dragon: "Ghadaffi, let's carry her to the car. We need to leave – NOW!"

That was an order from his father to him, while Norah was trying so hard to resist. She was a very petite lady, but I guess alcohol gives everyone energy and strength. She did the unthinkable; she threw the left over alcohol that was in the bottle at Ghadaffi's face, and that was when he had had enough. He picked her up and placed her on his shoulder, while she was screaming. Her plate of food landed onto the ground.

Ghadaffi: "I'm so sorry, Bagolo (elders). My wife has had a little too much to drink today. Please, forgive us. We shall be on our way."

Malome Lesiba: “Aowa (no), we understand.”

They walked out while Melita didn't greet us goodbye. What a strange family. Why was Norah speaking of Beast as if she knew him – personally? Could it have been the booze talking? My family went about their day as if that just didn't happen. How could we entertain that? They were not exactly our family, were they? My mind drifted off slowly, I mean, I always believed in more than just coincidence. Norah was there for a reason, she said what she said – for a reason. I'd later find out exactly why.

Norah

My name is Norah Khumalo, the wife of prominent lawyer, businessman and drug lord Brandon “Ghadaffi” Mashile. I honestly had no idea why I even agreed to marry Brandon three years ago; but if I hadn't married him – my father would have disowned me. I come from a poor family; my parents were rural from the moment they were born and were still rural when I was growing up. Brandon and his father had come to KZN at one time and that is how he spotted me at the taxi rank. He gave me a lift home and met my parents. He was

intrigued by me – more especially the fact that I was so smart and eloquently spoken, yet I had come from such a poor background.

I had no idea what my parents spoke to Brandon about, but I soon learnt when I headed to Jo'burg to live with him and start Varsity there, that my own father had married me off. I mean, I was basically the sacrificial lamb in exchange for a lavish lifestyle. My parents have never been short of anything ever since. They moved out of the rural areas and into the suburbs, along with my five siblings. I guess some of us are meant to save our families. I got married to Brandon three years ago and I recently graduated from Wits. Life was never the same again after we got married. I don't even know what it feels like to have an orgasm as many women would say, I hardly have any friends and I am basically a slave in my own home. I have tried to speak to my family about it, but all they ever say to me is that I owe Brandon my life; without him – I wouldn't have such a lavish life. I am constantly being blamed for not carrying an heir, but it just hasn't happened.

The moment I laid eyes on Hazel, I knew that she was the girl Brandon was so obsessed about. He couldn't stop talking about her – even to me. Little did I know what his plans were with

her. I wasn't happy any more; I wanted to die and to die peacefully. I didn't want to leave this world with any animosity or grudges. Brandon and his father had no idea that I overheard every little thing about what they did with Beast. I couldn't stand it any more; seeing him looking at her like that; salivating over her. It broke me because I was a virgin, I offered myself to him and he had never looked at me like that – despite me trying everything in the book. He had cheated on me before, but I had always forgiven him. His obsession over Hazel drove me to the edge. The moment he threw me into the car like I was some sack of potatoes, he started shouting at me.

Ghadaffi: (angrily) “What the fuck are you trying to do, Norah?! Are you trying to ruin me?! Is this how my wife should behave?! I took you out of the gutter and this is how you fucking repay me?!”

He was driving like a maniac, and I felt my head spinning while my stomach was turning. I couldn't help it, before I knew it, I vomited right there. That was enough to send him straight over the edge.

Ghadaffi: (shouting) “What the fuck?! Do you know how expensive this car is?!”

Norah: “You remind me every time. How can I possibly forget?”

Ghadaffi: (frustrated) “You think you're funny, don't you? I should have dealt with you from the get go. I'll show you what I do to dogs like you.”

He pulled over on the side of the road. It was so dark and I could barely see. All I could smell was my vomit. He pulled me out so roughly out of the car, and wasted no time. He punched me so hard on my face, I felt as if it would fall off. My head became overwhelmed with an instant migraine. After the first punch came another one, and another, until I landed onto the ground. I could see a bright light flashing before me, and out came Dragon and Melita.

Dragon: (shouting) “Brandon, stop it!”

Melita: “Are you trying to kill her?! What the fuck are we going to tell her parents if you do?”

Seriously? Is that all I was worth to them? Brandon kept kicking me so badly, I could feel my soul nearly leaving my body. I was hurt, I could not move. His father stopped him and slapped him a few times, most probably to get some sense into him. I was numb, my entire body felt wet as if I were bleeding every where. Melita helped me up and put me in their car, she drove me off to the very same house where I experienced abuse over and over again. My entire body was on fire, I felt as if my face was about to explode. The little hope I had in me was hoping that she'd be a loving mother-in-law for once, but she proved me wrong yet again.

Melita: (shouting) “You see what you've done?! All this is your fault! You shouldn't have eavesdropped on their conversation in the first place! What is it you're trying to do, Norah? Are you really trying to sabotage this family?! How can you go around spilling our secrets to that albino?!”

I said nothing, while I tried to block out all her insults. The more I tried, the more echoed her voice seemed. I felt so much

pain in my abdomen. I couldn't even stomach it. I mean, I knew he beat me to a pulp, but that pain was worse than period pains. Once we finally arrived at the house, and I managed to step out of the car, I felt warm fluid dripping down my leg. I looked down and saw so much blood flowing like a bloody river. I knew that it wasn't my intestines reacting to the beatings. My worst fear had happened to me. I just looked up and saw Melita freak out, while Ghadaffi could barely speak.

Dragon: (shouting) "Don't just stand there! Call Dr. Max!"

And just like that, I dropped to the ground.

James 4:17 - "So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin."

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“A boomerang returns back to the person that throws it.” -
Vera Nazarian

Norah

I couldn't move much, by the time I opened my eyes. I found myself on my bedroom bed, and the bedroom had been turned into a hospital ward. I was plugged onto a machine, hooked on a drip and was busy undergoing a blood transfusion. I could hear mumbled voices and my vision was a bit blurry, but by the time I had fully regained consciousness, I could hear them clearly.

Dr. Max: “I'm sorry, I'm afraid your wife has suffered a miscarriage.”

Ghadaffi: “Fuck.”

Dragon: “May I ask what the reason for it is?”

Ghadaffi: “Well, apart from stress, the blows she received on her stomach were too severe. Basically, a beating killed that baby.”

I felt as if my heart was torn mercilessly into two pieces, but nothing had prepared me for the next bit I was about to hear.

Melita: (crying) “Oh, no. What have you done, Brandon?!”

Dragon: “Let's think about this for a moment. We can still fix this.”

Ghadaffi: “The only way to fix it all is to get rid of her.”

Melita: (shocked) “What are you saying? Are you saying you want to kill her?”

Ghadaffi: “Yes, mother. That's exactly what I'm saying.”

Dragon: “Brandon, you can't possibly expect us to do that.”

Ghadaffi: “Why not? You've done far worse. Besides, Dr. Max will be the one doing it – not you.”

Dragon: “Why?”

Ghadaffi: “She's useless. Three years of marriage and now when she finally got the chance to give me a child – she took it for granted. She lost my child, and I don't love her any more.”

Melita: “Is this because of that Albino?”

Ghadaffi: “She's not an Albino, Ma. I love her.”

Dragon: “Melita, the boy has told you many times. Why can't you get that through your head?”

Melita: (angrily) “Of course you'd agree with him! You do more for him than you would for Fortunate! Besides, I guess father and son want to fuck sisters.”

Dragon: “Now is not the time. Don't act like you have always cared about Norah. She's miserable. We're basically helping her out of her own misery.”

Melita: “Count me out. When her parents come to get explanations from us – I want no part in this.”

I could hear them arguing a little further from me. By then, they were out of my bedroom. I knew that my time was nearly up, so I had to do what I had to do. At least after doing so, I'd die peacefully.

Hazel

The rest of the day went well, more especially after Ghadaffi left, but I still couldn't shake the feeling that Norah was in trouble. I didn't even have the poor girl's number, but what she said unsettled me. I was deep in thought and I suppose my mother noticed.

Binah: "Hazel, are you okay, my baby?"

Hazel: (shaking head) "No, I can't shake the feeling that something is really wrong with Norah, like she's in trouble or something."

Binah: "Don't you worry yourself about other people's marriages. It won't end well. You'll end up looking like the enemy."

Hazel: "Yes, but Mam'Rose always said that if there's smoke, there's most definitely fire. I can't shake that feeling off."

Binah: "Sometimes feelings are just feelings."

Hazel: "And especially what she said about Beast - "

She interrupted me. She was very dismissive about me entertaining that topic.

Binah: (interjecting) “Look, she was drunk. She didn't even know Beast, I mean everyone saw your love all over social media. I guess she was referring to what she has seen. It's honestly not that deep.”

She left me pondering my mind just like that. Something was not right, I could feel it. I tried searching her on Insta and Facebook, only to find some very disturbing posts. In most pictures, Ghadaffi looked rather uninterested, and the only pictures they took together were of their wedding day and of formal functions. The recent posts alarmed me. “This life is not for the faint-hearted....”; “Should I die, please remember the good side of me and rejoice, don't cry...” I couldn't shake the feeling that they all seemed a bit suicidal. While I was scrolling for more hints, a call came through from an unfamiliar number.

Hazel: “Hello?”

Norah: “Hazel, it's me.”

Hazel: “Norah? Is that you? Are you okay? Why are you whispering?”

Norah: "I can't talk for long, so please just listen."

My heart started beating faster.

Hazel: "Okay."

Norah: "Ghadaffi doesn't love me – he's never loved me. All he wants is you – he's wanted you from the moment you've met. Believe me, he will try anything to get you to love him, Hazel. I know, he's not even that good looking and yet everyone kept asking me why I was with him. I know, you don't love him, but you'll love him without being given the choice to choose. He doesn't want to be better than Beast – he wants to be Beast."

She was speaking in riddles I didn't understand.

Hazel: "Norah, I don't get what you're saying."

Norah: “Beast, you need to know what they have done with Beast.”

My heart started palpitating faster. I knew that whatever she was about to tell me was something I wasn't going to like. She was about to say something when I heard people shouting.

Ghadaffi: (shouting) “What the fuck are you doing?!”

Before I knew it, the phone line went dead. I tried calling her again and it had gone straight to voicemail. I could feel it within my gut that Norah was in deep trouble, but I couldn't save her. I slept with a heavy heart, I even tried to pray for her. She was a troubled stranger that tried to save my life, but even then I had no idea what she was saving me from exactly, other than Brandon. I lay in my bed while Sinah was sleeping peacefully next to me, when I browsed through my phone, Brenda had finally accepted my friend request on Facebook. I was quite happy, but I had no idea what to say to her. It wasn't even long after she had accepted my request, that she texted me through Messenger.

Brenda: "Hey. Long time, no see. Are you well?"

Hazel: "I've been better, what about you?"

Brenda: "I could say the same. I see you sent me a friend request. Have you come to your senses yet?"

Okay, that was a bit rude – even for Brenda.

Hazel: "I... I'm sorry for everything, Brenda. I honestly didn't mean to give up on your brother like that, but in all honesty – I know that you were right. Something must have happened to him. He wouldn't just up and leave me like that."

Brenda: "And you only realized this now?"

Hazel: "No..."

Brenda: "Listen, forget about him. I mean, he did say that should anything happen to him you should forget about him, right?"

Wow.

Hazel: "Brenda, I thought - "

Brenda: "I only accepted your request to make my point clear. You have nothing left to live for if you are going to worry about Beast. Let him go and live your life. I wish you nothing but the best. Goodbye."

I was about to respond, but she quickly blocked me thereafter. Who does that, though? I knew she was hurt, but I didn't think that she would have been so rude to me. I guess I deserved it, but my heart bled. Rejection was something I was already used to in life, but I didn't expect it from her. I chose to protect my peace and stay away from the entire Sibiya family. That was the only way I could heal from Beast. If no one was saying anything, and he simply vanished from social media, then perhaps he

wanted it that way – though I could feel it within me that he was still alive.

A few weeks later...

It had been quite a tumultuous few weeks; the Makwetla family chose to spend the entire week from Christmas to New Year's with us and it was blissful. Even though Celia worked nearby, at Kalafong Hospital, she refused to come spend the holidays with us. She claimed she had commitments, so we let her be. I'd never seen my mother so happy before. She was literally overjoyed to be around her family. Nothing gave her greater pleasure than getting along with Aunt Hunadi. They were together every minute of each day, and they were even laughing and drinking together. It was really good seeing that side of her. Bella was always nowhere to be found. She claimed she was going to work each day and despite her wearing her uniform daily – she came back drunk each and every day.

Jenny was growing so fast, and the uncles were pestering her to tell them who the father was so that they could discuss damages, but she refused. She blatantly told them that she wasn't damaged in any way. They wanted to do a ceremony for

her, to introduce her to our ancestors, and she refused – despite my mother having no problem with that. Those weeks leading up to the new year were also a bit shitty because the day after Norah gave me that weird phone call, we heard that she had committed suicide after jumping off her bedroom balcony. We even heard that she left no note, nothing to console her loved ones for her choice. I highly doubted that it was suicide, but remembering all her Instagram posts, I started believing it. My heart was torn, but I wished her well in the spiritual world. Of course, Ghadaffi wasted no time in burying her, as he buried her on the 29th of December. It was a bit dramatic, when her parents wanted to bury her back home in KZN and he blatantly refused.

The days leading up to and including the funeral, were something straight out of a movie. Nothing came together; food would just go off despite having bought fresh on that particular day, people started falling ill and apparently Norah's corpse was bleeding in the morgue fridge despite her being frozen. I remember when we went there for a night vigil the night before her funeral, Ghadaffi's car caught fire out of nowhere, luckily no one was inside. When Norah's coffin was about to be lowered, it wouldn't go down. It took them about half an hour to get her coffin into the ground. Aunt Hilda said

that Norah was trying to send a message and that her soul didn't depart freely. Well, we wouldn't have known since only she knew the truth – apart from those who were there and who weren't saying a single word.

I spent New Year's so depressed to say the least, I didn't want to leave my room, most probably because it was Malachi's birthday. I missed him dearly and remembered how much he would always spoil me on his birthday. Not a day went by that I didn't think of him. I might have lost touch with my spiritual side, but I felt like lighting a candle all day that day and praying. When midnight struck, I lit the candle and prayed. I prayed for peace, prosperity and good health, I prayed for Beast to come back and I specifically asked Malachi to bring Beast back, since well they were friends. After that, I left the candle on and slept. I was amazed to dream of him, after a long while of not dreaming about him. He told me how proud he was of me and that I was only human, that I was bound to make mistakes. One thing he reiterated to me was that I should never stop praying. When I asked him about Beast; if he was safe and if he would come back to me, all he did was smile. I don't know what that was for or what the sign meant, but smiling has always been good, right? Weeks passed and February eventually came, I had to go back to Stellenbosch. I was excited to see Mathilda again,

but not so excited to go back to my books. I had gone to semi-fledged breadwinner mode; I was buying groceries, and all Jenny's necessities since Bella decided not to do any of that any more. No one really forced me, I guess I thought it came naturally and before I knew it – I was the actual breadwinner. So, from my spending money which I received every month from my bursary, I'd send my mother some money, about R3000 on average. It wasn't that much of a pocket dive since I barely spent any of the money they sent me the previous year along with the money Beast had been giving me during those few months. It was good to see Mathilda so happy since she and her mother had mended things. Her mother was slowly getting back on her feet. When I told her about all the drama about Norah and Ghadaffi, she was shocked.

Mathilda: “This Ghadaffi guy doesn't sound right, Hazel. I think you should stay away from him. I get the feeling he knows more about Beast than we all do.”

Hazel: “You're absolutely right. I'll do so.”

Mathilda: “Anyway, school is school. We should go to bed early because we have an early morning class.”

She had a point, my time table was so shitty; most classes were great because Mathilda and I attended most of them together, but one other class had a different time slot because I ventured into Psychiatry. That meant I had to take the campus bus and then get an Uber back to the flat, since Mathilda couldn't always wait for me to finish and I didn't expect her to. Well

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I couldn't rely on Mathilda forever. I even tried calling James, the Uber driver that Beast had assigned to me while I was at varsity, only to find that he wasn't working there any more. He hadn't been working there ever since the tragic day of my negotiations. I didn't suspect a thing, I mean perhaps he quit because Beast paid him really well, or maybe he was one of his workers, posing as an Uber driver. But no, my life couldn't have been that interesting, right? So, the following morning came and we did get up and ready for school. I went with Mathilda, and we met one of our new lecturers. Most of the 2nd year lecturers were from the previous year, so it wasn't that hard to adjust, but something caught my attention with this new lecturer. He was quite young, actually, about 27 or so, and Mathilda had a weird glow to her that I had never seen before. She was actually blushing. I could tell she had a liking to that lecturer. Well, she too deserved someone who'd be into her.

She only had two lectures that day while I had three. It sucked because the second one ended at 2pm, while my third lecture was only going to start at 4pm. That meant I had two hours to waste.

Mathilda: "I could wait for you at the library or something."

Hazel: "No need, babe. I can't expect that from you. Go, we'll meet up later."

We said our goodbyes and I was left alone. I had gotten so used to having Mathilda as my only friend, that I couldn't even think of striking a conversation with anyone else. I still had my anxiety issues, so I wasn't ready to trust an Uber to take me around, now that James was gone. So, I decided to roam around Campus. I was quite stunned to see someone I least expected.

Ghadaffi: "Hazel, hi."

Hazel: (Surprised) "Ghadaffi? What are you doing here?"

Ghadaffi: (chuckling) "In case you haven't noticed, I'm a part-time lecturer."

Hazel: "Oh, I thought you lectured at Wits."

Ghadaffi: "Yes, but I occasionally come here too. You can never spread your wings too wide, right?"

Hazel: "I guess so."

Ghadaffi: "So, where are you headed off to?"

Hazel: "I'm actually waiting for my next lecture. It's only in two hours."

Ghadaffi: "Well then, I guess it would be the perfect chance for lunch, right?"

I then remembered Mathilda's words, but at the same time, I was going to be bored waiting for an entire two hours.

Hazel: "I don't think that's a good idea."

Ghadaffi: "Why not?"

Hazel: "Well, because you are a widower firstly and secondly, I don't think your prominent friends would appreciate you roaming around with me."

Ghadaffi: "Hazel, it's just lunch. It's the easiest way to kill two hours. What do you say?"

I had such a strong urge to say no, but for some odd reason I just couldn't say no. It was as if my heart was saying no, but my mouth couldn't utter the words.

Hazel: "Okay."

Ghadaffi: (smiling) “Great. Shall we?”

I remembered that his Mercedes had burnt mysteriously before his wife's funeral, but I wasn't too surprised to see he had bought a new car, a Mercedes Maybach. I knew he was loaded, but so was Beast – maybe not as loaded as Ghadaffi was, but Beast was my King. Any guy that would want me, had so much to step up to. He opened the door for me, which surprised me a bit. I didn't figure him to be someone chivalrous.

Ghadaffi: “Well then, what kind of music would you like to listen to while we're on our drive?”

The mall was literally just around the corner of campus.

Hazel: “Anything is fine with me.”

How I missed Beast. He then shocked me by playing me Beast and I's favourite song – uBuhle Bakho by Ami Faku. That really moved something within me, that I shed an involuntary tear. It reminded me of all the drives I'd take with Beast.

Ghadaffi: "I'm sorry if I'm upsetting you. Is everything okay?"

Hazel: "Oh, sorry. This song reminds me of someone. Please drive."

Ghadaffi: "Okay then."

He drove off and I listened to the song attentively. I already knew the lyrics by heart, but that day, I got to learn why it was so significant to Beast and why he made me fall in love with it. Yes, he did explain to me once upon a time that he wanted me to know how beautiful I was – both inside and out and that is why he loved to play me the song. In turn, I got to learn how beautiful he was, both inside and outside. He was such an angel in human form and for him to just up and leave me like that? It didn't make sense to me the more I thought about it. Once we arrived at the mall, I was about to open my own door, but Ghadaffi refused.

Ghadaffi: "No, love. I can't let you open your own door while you are in my car. Allow me."

He quickly got out and opened my door. The more he did those things, the more I just remembered Beast. We walked alongside one another and he asked me to choose a restaurant for us to go to. I didn't consider it a date at all, I mean it was purely coincidental, so I didn't even want to entertain any thoughts he might have had about us being on a date.

Hazel: "I honestly don't mind any place. We're passing time, remember?"

He chose one of the Italian restaurants around there. Beast would always make me choose – unless he was surprising me. I truly wasn't in the mood to eat fancy shit in broad daylight while heartbroken over my boyfriend, or was he my ex? What surprised me was that the moment we walked in, he told the waiter that he had made a reservation for two and we were taken to our own, reserved table. He pulled my chair for me and went to sit in his, and oddly, he sat right next to me. Beast and I always sat next to one another whenever we went out, even when we were eating at his house, because he just always wanted to touch and often kiss me. He literally had his hands all over me every chance he got, we even took pictures each and every time. I didn't like Ghadaffi sitting next to me, I mean we barely knew one another.

Hazel: "Do you mind sitting across me? It's just that I'm not very comfortable with you sitting next to me."

Ghadaffi: "Oh, my apologies. Of course."

He was so polite and proceeded to move. We ordered our drinks, and I settled for juice, while he settled for a glass of wine. I was not in the mood to drink alcohol with a stranger. I barely knew Ghadaffi, and I honestly didn't want to have lunch with him, but something within me hooked me. I couldn't explain it even if someone had asked me why I went out to eat with him.

Ghadaffi: "I have actually been praying for this moment, Hazel. The truth is, I really have no one to talk to. Ever since my wife died, I have just felt so – alone."

I had no idea why he felt comfortable enough to tell me all that.

Hazel: "Oh, I see."

Ghadaffi: "I mean, you lost your fiancée, and you of all people know what it's like to lose a loved one so dear to you. You understand the pain."

I got so worked up about that.

Hazel: "Beast is not dead, if that's what you mean."

Ghadaffi: "No, I didn't say that. It's just that..."

The guy started crying, which was really odd. He was showing serious signs of manipulation of some sort, but I just couldn't help but feel sorry for him.

Ghadaffi: (teary) "Losing a partner is the worst thing ever, and losing them while their family thinks you murdered them is even worse."

Well, I actually understood that part of the conversation because Beast's family sort of blamed me for his disappearance. I secretly thought that they perhaps knew where he was, and just didn't want to tell me. Or that perhaps he had moved on with his new woman or something like that, but all in all, I could surprisingly relate to Ghadaffi's pain.

Hazel: "I get you, honestly. I mean, Beast's family has totally orchestrated me. It is not as if they liked me to begin with, well expect a few members of his paternal side and his sister, Brenda, but ever since his stunt, they all hate me as if I created the mess."

Ghadaffi: "You want my not-so-good advice? Learn to let him go, slowly. I mean, the guy was all over you and he loved you. He was literally willing to marry you and spend the rest of his life with you, but he chose not to. Worst part, he chose to leave you hanging without any explanation. I mean, if I were you, I'd be mega pissed."

Well, I wasn't pleased to hear his thoughts about my relationship – something completely private and not his business. I wanted to get even, which wasn't right, really.

Hazel: “Well, since you know so much about my relationship, what happened between you and Norah? I mean, why did she kill herself? What did you do to her that was so impossible to live with? She called me the night she died, you know?”

He looked so surprised.

Ghadaffi: (surprised) “She called you? How? I mean, what did she say?”

I didn't want to tell him just how much I knew, so I lied.

Hazel: “Nothing hectic, she just told me how much she wished we had met earlier on in life.”

Ghadaffi: “I see. Look, Hazel, I know you have judged me over my past appearances and you didn't like me one bit. You most probably don't like me now. I haven't been the best husband to Norah, and I admit, I might have been emotionally abusive. Her failing to fall pregnant made me feel less of a man; I felt like a

failure, as if I couldn't conceive and that made her feel inadequate as a wife. She was depressed, I'll admit that, which explains her outburst at your family Christmas lunch."

His speech was almost making sense, but something within me couldn't believe it – yet, there was another part that wanted to believe him, which was weird.

Hazel: "I see."

Ghadaffi: "I'm not asking for much, all I'm asking for is friendship."

Norah's words kept playing in my head, the more I spent time with Ghadaffi. It was as if I believed her – yet something from Ghadaffi's side brought me closer. Whenever I wanted to say no, I failed to do so. I don't know if I was under a curse of some sort, but I just couldn't refuse. We spoke about everything and anything. Could it have been all part of his plan to court me?

2 John 1:11 - "For whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works."

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“Men are not punished for their sins, but by them” - Elbert Hubbard

Two months later...

Hazel

It had been such a busy few months. I've been adjusting quite well to a new routine, and I finally managed to get something to do during that two hour wait of my Psychiatry module. I would go to the library, sometimes with Mathilda, at times she'd leave and go back to the flat to cook for us. I even made a few friends at the library and Campus Computer Lab. Ghadaffi and I have been in contact often, and I honestly didn't know what to make of that relationship. My heart wasn't in it, but I could never ignore his calls or texts – no matter what time he contacted me. I hadn't told Mathilda about him yet, I actually hadn't told anyone yet – except my mother. Every time we spoke of him on the phone, she would tell me to be patient and give him a chance – despite my reservations about him.

I couldn't understand why she so nonchalant about him. I was planning on going home for the March holidays, despite it only being a one week holiday. Second year studies were dealing with me. I had a flight scheduled, and Mathilda was supposed to drive me to Cape Town Airport, but it seemed as if Ghadaffi had other plans.. I was in the process of packing my clothes, when I heard a stern knock on my door.

Hazel: "Who is it?"

Ghadaffi: "It's me, Brandon."

I got the shock of my life right there. I mean, we had been "seeing" one another for a few months yet I hadn't shown him where I stayed. Perhaps someone told him; someone like my mother? I went to open the door and indeed it was him. He had a bunch of yellow roses in his hands. That's what Beast used to do; he hardly bought me red roses, because he enjoyed being eccentric and different. There was Ghadaffi, standing right outside my door, dressed casually – not in a suit for the very first time I had seen him. I couldn't see the resemblance of Beast in him because he was thinner than him, a lot thinner.

Ghadaffi: (smiling) "Hi."

Hazel: (smiling awkwardly) "Hello."

Ghadaffi: "May I come in?"

Hazel: "Uh, sure."

Ghadaffi: "These are for you. Yellow represents new beginnings, you know?"

Hazel: "Thank you. How did you know where I live?"

Ghadaffi: "You told me during a conversation we had not so long ago."

I recalled everything we talked about, and nowhere did I tell him that.

Hazel: "Oh, okay."

See? I knew he was lying, but I couldn't confront him – even though I wanted to. I could think of all the negatives about him and say them to myself, but the moment he was near me, I couldn't voice them out.

Ghadaffi: "Well, since it is your first day of the March holidays, I thought I'd drive you back to Pretoria."

Was that deja vu or what?

Hazel: "Drive me back? Why?"

Ghadaffi: "Well, because... I simply want to get to know you better."

Hazel: "It's just that... I've already booked a flight back home."

Ghadaffi: "I apologize for not letting you know before hand that I was coming here. The thing is, Hazel... I've grown very fond of you, and all I want is to be given a chance to prove that to you. Is that so wrong of me?"

Hazel: (shaking head) "No."

In my mind, I was saying yes, but the words that came out of my mind were the total opposite. I was in deep shit with Ghadaffi, I just hadn't realized it yet.

Ghadaffi: (excitedly) "It's settled then. You and I are driving back to Pretoria."

I heard Mathilda speaking as she was about to come to my flat.

Mathilda: (loudly) "Hazel, I'm ready! Are you done with - "

She couldn't even finish her sentence when she saw this tall, dark man inside my apartment and I was holding a bunch of

roses in my hands. Shit, she most probably thought that I was hiding a new boyfriend from here. It just didn't look well at all.

Hazel: (nervously) “Mathilda, friend this is - “

Ghadaffi wasted no time and decided to interject, much to my annoyance, but did he even notice?

Ghadaffi: (extending his hand) “Hi, I'm Brandon Mashile, Hazel's new boyfriend, but you can call me Ghadaffi.”

I was so shocked that I literally had to stare at him in rage. Did he actually introduce himself to my best friend as my boyfriend?!

Mathilda: “Oh, Hazel didn't tell me about you. Are you sure you're her boyfriend?”

She was being her sassy old self and didn't even shake his hand.

Hazel: "Excuse me for a moment, Brandon. I'll be right back."

I pulled Mathilda out of the flat and we went to hers. The moment I closed the door, she wasted no time and started expressing her feelings.

Mathilda: (angrily) "Ghadaffi?! The Ghadaffi, Hazel?! Are you out of your mind?!"

Hazel: "I didn't even know he was coming – let alone driving me back home."

Mathilda: "Are you hearing yourself right now? The guy introduced himself to me as your boyfriend."

Hazel: "Well, he's not."

Mathilda: "What is he then? Because it seems like he is not even aware that he's not your boyfriend."

Hazel: "I don't know what he is yet. I don't know, Mathilda, all this is so – complicated. I find it so hard to explain at times."

Mathilda: "Okay, then. Let him drive you home as he says, but if I were you, I'd be very careful around him. We'll talk once you get back home. I truly think you need some spiritual help. Maybe a clairvoyant or a Sangoma or something. This doesn't seem right. I have a very bad feeling about him."

Hazel: "Fine, I'll do whatever it is you want me to do, just don't say that in front of him, please."

Mathilda: (curious) "Why? Will he beat you up if I do?"

Hazel: "Don't be ridiculous."

Mathilda: "I don't trust that guy, but I'll take your word for it. You contact me the moment you feel weird or unsafe, okay? I'll come running."

She was a real ride or die like that.

Hazel: "Thank you."

She gave me a hug and I went back to my flat. I found Ghadaffi waiting impatiently, looking rather cross but the moment he saw me, his face changed and became soft again.

Ghadaffi: "Oh, there you are. I was starting to think you had ditched me."

He was showing signs of dependency already, he had a deep fear of neglect. That didn't seem right.

Hazel: "Oh, sorry about that. I was just telling my friend that I'll be driving with you."

Ghadaffi: "I see. She didn't seem too happy to see me."

Hazel: "Don't mind her, she's just over protective."

Ghadaffi: "I don't think she's a good friend, Hazel."

So what now? Was he my advisor?

Hazel: "I don't want to talk about my friend with you. She's off limits, okay?"

Ghadaffi: "Sure. Sorry."

Hazel: "Can we just leave, please?"

Ghadaffi: "Okay, let me grab your bag and we'll be out of here."

He took my bag, I locked the flat and we left. There I was comparing him to Beast yet again; Beast would have never let me leave the flat without praying for a safe journey. He wouldn't have told me that a concerned friend was a bad friend and he most certainly wouldn't have gotten so offended about Mathilda's statement. He also would never have introduced himself as my boyfriend without asking me to be his girlfriend first. He opened my car door, and got into his side. Before he put the ignition on, I asked him if we could pray.

Hazel: "Can we pray, please?"

I expected a "yes" since he was a regular church member, but his response really rendered me speechless.

Ghadaffi: (chuckling) "Why? You don't trust me?"

Was he serious?

Hazel: "I always pray before a long drive."

Ghadaffi: "Well, okay then."

I was rather irritated, so instead of praying with him, I closed my eyes and prayed silently, alone.

Ghadaffi: "Are you done?"

Hazel: (nodding) "Yes."

Ghadaffi: "Alright then."

Right as he was about to drive off, a call came through. It was as if something always reminded me of Beast whenever Ghadaffi was around. He didn't even excuse himself to me before he answered his call just like Beast used to, but he just answered instead without warning.

Ghadaffi: "Hello? Yes, of course I still have some. Okay, give me about half an hour and I'll be there. Cool. See you then."

He hung up and didn't even ask if I was okay with his little impromptu detour.

Ghadaffi: "I need to stop by a business partner of mine. I won't be long, promise."

His words didn't have any sincerity as Beast's used to have. I was starting to miss him all over again. My heart was starting to

ache yet again. We drove in silence while I was listening to one of Zonke's albums. I was busy texting Mathilda who kept asking me how my drive was going so far with Ghadaffi. I couldn't wait to start dishing out everything I disliked about him. I truly didn't like him at all, but I didn't have a reason as to why I was still hanging out with him. He arrived at his so called business partner's club, just near the beach in Cape Town.

Ghadaffi: "I'll be right back, stay here."

He got out, took a sports bag out of the boot and shook the two guys' hands. They looked like twins, but seemed rather familiar. I just couldn't pin point where I had seen them before. They had a few fingers missing, while one of them was severely limping. The other had an eye patch on his left eye. I wanted to get a clearer view of the two and I wanted to figure out why Ghadaffi was busy with them, so I lowered the window without him noticing.

Ghadaffi: "I have everything in the bag, as discussed."

Twin 1: "How sure are we that you're not going to rip us off?"

Ghadaffi opened the bag, heavily annoyed and showed them what was in it. The twin guys looked pleased with the contents of the bag and smiled. I could still hear them, faintly.

Twin 2: “Ja (yes), alles is reg (everything is fine).”

Twin 1: “I'll go get the money.”

It seemed like some kind of illegal trade. Was Ghadaffi perhaps into drugs? I actually realized I never took the time to do proper research on the guy. But then, I had no intentions of ever dating him. While I was deep in thought, I had completely forgotten that the window was open. The first twin came back and recognized me some how.

Twin 1: (shocked) “Bra (bro), wie de fok is daai (who the fuck is that)?!”

Ghadaffi: “That's my girlfriend.”

I made a mental note to tell Ghadaffi where to get off regarding the entire girlfriend story. The twin guys came closer to me, and I just froze. I thought they were going to attack me for witnessing something I shouldn't have. Only when they were up close to me, did I realize who they were. That was when my heart nearly stopped. My eyes popped wide open, and I think I stopped breathing for a second or two. They were both so shocked, that they stepped back as well.

Twin 2: “Di's sy, bra (It's her, bro). Di's Beast se vrou (It's Beast's woman).”

Did he just say Beast? How on earth did they know him?

Ghadaffi: (angrily) “Fuck this, I came for our transaction – not for you to find an interest in my woman!”

Twin 1: “Don't fuck with her, man. She belongs to Beast. He'll do anything for her!”

He spoke about him as if he were alive. That gave me hope, but I was so afraid of them that I couldn't even ask them about him.

Ghadaffi: "Fuck that, Beast is dead."

How did he know that?

Twin 2: (shaking head) "There's no way. He's not dead. Look, we can't do business with you any more. Our deal is off."

Ghadaffi got so angry.

Ghadaffi: (livid) "Don't you two fuck with me! We had a deal."

Twin 1: "Did you take a good look at us? Did you see what Beast did to us because of what we did to her?!"

Twin 2: "We were once handsome, man. Now we can't do that shit no more. It's over. Our deal is off. We want nothing to do with Beast and whomever he's associated with."

Ghadaffi: “Beast is nothing of mine!”

Twin 1: “We don't care. You have his woman in your car. We can't trust you no more.”

With that said, they left him hanging. I was in such disbelief while I tried to process everything that they had said. Ghadaffi seemed to care more about that bag and the so called deal than about my feelings He threw that bag back into the boot and got into his side of the car. He looked so annoyed, while I was traumatized.

Ghadaffi: (angrily) “I told you to stay put in the car. Why were you listening in on a business transaction?!”

He was shouting at me. One thing Beast never did. I couldn't take a drive with a man like that.

Hazel: “Please, take me to the airport. I'd like to fly back home.”

Ghadaffi: (shouting) “Oh, so this is how it is now?! You ruin my plans and now you suddenly don't want to drive with me any more?!”

He looked so different. His eyes became bloodshot and I could hardly see the pupils of his eyes any more. I became so scared, that I just got out of the car without any warning. I started crying and hyperventilating at the same time. I was so afraid. He realized how afraid I was and came back to his senses. He looked like something that wasn't supposed to be seen when he was angry, and he changed back to his normal self.

Ghadaffi: “Hazel, I'm sorry. Please, get back in the car.”

Hazel: (frightened) “No, please, just give me my bag. I'll find my own way to the airport.”

Ghadaffi came out of the car and tried approaching me, but the more he did that, the more I threatened to call the police.

Hazel: "Don't come near me! I will scream, and I will call the cops. Just give me my bag."

He handed me my bag slowly

I grabbed it from him so fast and walked away from him so sternly. I had never been so afraid of someone in my life before. All I heard was him calling after me, but I didn't care. Something was very wrong with him and I wanted nothing to do with him. I didn't even realize I was crying. A few guys tried stopping along the way to ask me if I was okay, but I mean, this is South Africa, any man who's nice to you can turn out to be a rapist and killer. After walking a while to who knew where, I heard a familiar voice.

Guy: "You shouldn't be walking around this side of town alone."

I turned around and it was Pleasure, one of the guys I always sat with at the library whenever Mathilda wasn't around. He refused to tell me his real name, as he claimed his parents had given him the wrong name. He was quite big, much like Beast, but he was gay. A lot of girls had no idea, but Mathilda and I knew. The moment I saw him, I knew God was working over time. I just rushed into his arms and cried. He consoled me and

just as I was done crying and I had calmed down, I saw Ghadaffi in his car with the window rolled down. Was the guy actually stalking me? I got into Pleasure's car without thinking twice. I told him what happened briefly, and he suggested that I get a restraining order against Ghadaffi. All I wanted was to get home. I thanked him when he took me to the airport and I looked around trying to see if Ghadaffi was there, but there was no sign of him. I couldn't help but think that Beast was right there – in Cape Town. Something within me could feel him. I got on my flight and I was on my way home. I didn't tell Mathilda what happened between Ghadaffi and I because she would have been even more pissed at me. Once I got home, my mother was so excited to see me, but yet another irritating surprise awaited me. Bella got out of her room and I realized she was pregnant. I was frowning and frozen right there for a second.

Binah: “Yes, that's actually what I wanted to talk to you about. How about we go inside the house? You can unpack later.”

Jenny was so happy to see me, she was nearly a year old and surprisingly, baby girl could walk. She still remembered who I was despite not seeing me for so long. Her mother, was barefoot and pregnant and even more moody than normal. She

still wasn't in the mood to greet me – despite me taking care of her child. I was unbothered. Once we got into the house, my mother offered me a glass of wine. I guess alcohol was our thing.

Hazel: “So, who's the father this time?”

Binah: (shrugging) “I have no idea. She refused to tell me yet again claiming she doesn't know. You know what made me even angrier? It was the fact that she hid it from me and I only saw her when she started showing – at 6 months! Had I known earlier, I swear, I would have asked her to have an abortion.”

Hazel: (sigh) “What about her job?”

Binah: “She had disappeared for a whole two weeks. When I sent someone to her work place, I found that she wasn't working there any more. I couldn't go myself, well, because Mr. Ferreira is still the owner of that store. I didn't want him to think I had come to start trouble, should he have been there, you see.”

I totally understood that part, but I dreaded to hear what she was about to request from me. I saw it a mile away.

Binah: "I've been trying to tell you over the phone, but I know, it isn't an easy thing to ask of you. You see how bad the situation here at home is, I mean you are the only one taking care of us, while I am taking care of Jenny. She has no job, we have no idea who the father is, which is why I'm asking you to take care of this one as well. I know, it is unfair of me to do so, but if we don't try, then what will happen of that child?"

I hadn't started working as yet and already I had been drowning in black tax. I hadn't had children of my own, and already I had felt what it was like being a mother.

Hazel: "Okay, Mama. But this is the last time. She has to step up. This will really dent my budget."

Binah: "I understand, ngwanaka (my child). You are going through so much, already. I feel so guilty for asking this of you."

Hazel: "It's fine."

My phone had been ringing non stop ever since I got off the plane. I was getting calls from Ghadaffi one way. So, he was calling me yet again when I was with my mom. She noticed how I didn't want to answer it.

Binah: "Who is it?"

Hazel: "It's Ghadaffi. He's been calling non-stop."

Binah: "Oh? Did you guys fight?"

Hazel: "Fight over what? We're not dating, Ma."

Binah: "I still don't see why you don't want to give him a chance, you know. I mean, he truly isn't that bad."

Hazel: (shaking head) "That's not it, Ma. I don't think you understand. Something doesn't feel very right about that guy."

Whenever I am around him, I hardly have the ability to say no. It's like, he has some kind of spell on me or something.”

Binah: (surprised) “Really? That's strange.”

Hazel: “What's even more strange is this; today, he just came out of nowhere. He wanted to drive me from Stellenbosch to Pretoria, I mean ma, those are the things that Beast used to do. You know, he used to buy me flowers, and suddenly he bought me yellow roses, he was dressed casually. Since when does he leave the house without wearing a suit? And he has been spending so much time in Stellenbosch and Cape Town lately, I fear he might be keeping tabs on me. He told me Mathilda is not a good friend to me, Ma. He doesn't even know her. He then told her that he is my boyfriend.”

Binah: (shocked) “What?!”

Hazel: “That's not all. We were about to leave, when he told me he had to make a detour and he met up with those two guys who tried to rape me one time when I went out with Kg and Otlile. When they noticed me, they said to him that the deal

was off and that they wanted nothing to do with Brandon because he was with Beast's woman. They know Beast, Mama. He said that Beast is dead, while they said he is alive. How on earth does Brandon know that Beast is dead? And then he got so angry that they noticed me, that he changed, Ma. I can't explain it, but he turned into something that just doesn't happen to normal people, more especially during the day.”

My mother suddenly acted out of character. She started looking a bit sweaty and nervous.

Binah: “I'll be right back. I just need to go to the shop for something. Do you mind looking after Jenny for a while?”

Hazel: “Of course not. Go right ahead.”

Binah: “Thanks, I won't be long.”

Binah

The moment Hazel started telling me everything Brandon had been doing, I knew I had made a very bad choice. I quickly walked out of the gate and took a walk to the furthest tuck shop from my house. I needed to be far enough to say what I needed to say. I quickly dialed his number and he picked up on the first ring.

Ghadaffi: (shouting) "Where is she?! Where is she, Binah?!"

Binah: "Excuse me? You don't get to talk to me like that."

Ghadaffi: "Don't you fuck with me. I asked you a question. Where is that whore you call your daughter?!"

Binah: "Ghadaffi, you have no right to speak about her like that. We had a deal. The deal was that you get the chance to make her fall in love with you."

Ghadaffi: "Do you think I have the fucking time to try sweeping her off her fucking feet?! This isn't the Cinderella story, honey. I paid you, now do your part."

Binah: "Don't act like R100 000 is money. I can give it back to you. I regret taking it from you. Things are going so well with my daughter, why would I want to ruin it by selling her off to zombie?!"

Ghadaffi: (shocked) "She called me that?!"

Binah: "No, but she explained what you looked like when you were angry at her or something. I don't know what you are, but I have changed my mind. The deal is off. I don't want any part in this any more."

Ghadaffi: "Too late, Binah. You should have thought about that before taking the money. I own you now, you'd better make sure that Hazel finds me attractive by tomorrow morning, or else, I will."

He hung up before I could swear at him, that piece of shit. I had no idea what I had gotten myself into. I was honestly starting to enjoy being a mother, a real mother. Instead, I have fucked things up once again. What kind of person am I? I knew then

that I had made a pact with the devil and getting out of that was not going to be an easy ride.

Ghadaffi

I was so furious. It had taken me longer than I expected to get to Pretoria. I had so many plans for Hazel and I, only for her to just fuck everything up. I honestly thought that I was doing it all right. I was texting her daily, calling her daily, I was even making means to send her money, but she refused it all. I sent gifts to her flat, but she hardly even opened any of them. I sent her flowers, lunch and snacks – even on campus, but she never took them. At times, she'd give them to Mathilda or donate them to people. I have eyes and ears everywhere; I get reports on her every move. It pissed me off that despite what I did for her – she still didn't even feel an ounce of love for me. Was I that ugly? I mean, Beast wasn't exactly lookable according to me, but she fell head over heels for him. I did everything right; I changed my appearance, I even tried acting like him – soft like a sponge just for her. I deleted all their pictures and his profiles on social media. I mean, I honestly thought she had fallen for that trick I had done when I called her pretending to be Beast. It magically worked until Norah did her shit. Now, I had to drive back home, simply because I couldn't get a flight in time. It was

time for me to buy a private jet. If Hazel wasn't into money or fancy gifts, what exactly made her fall for Beast? If I couldn't be Beast, and if I couldn't be better than Beast, then I'd make sure that she fell for me – no matter what. After she saw me turn, I knew that I had fucked up. I wasn't supposed to get angry, that was the deal, because the one I loved would see the real me. When I saw her with that pathetic faggot, I knew something had to be done. I wanted nothing and no one standing in my way. Beast was far away from her, and she would never find him, and I ensured that he wouldn't find any one, nor contact anyone. I needed Hazel, I couldn't imagine my life without her. Binah promised me that Hazel would have been mine by then, but after her phone call, I was convinced that Hazel was nowhere near being putty in my hands, so I had to make the call.

Dragon: “Son.”

Ghadaffi: “Papa, I have tried everything – everything, Papa. That bitch doesn't want me.”

Dragon: “Maybe you should just give up.”

Ghadaffi: "I can't. She has seen me turn."

Dragon: "I told you not to get angry. Mkhulu warned you about your rage!"

Ghadaffi: "I know, and I'm sorry, but I have bigger problems right now. I need her, Papa. I need her to be mine."

Dragon: "Are you telling me that you want to go all the way now?"

Ghadaffi: "Yes, tell Mkhulu I'm on my way. Let him start with the preparations. I want Hazel to be mine by tomorrow."

Dragon: "Alright."

I couldn't wait for that moment when she would look at me and see her knight in shining armour. It was finally time for her to be Mrs. Mashile. Fuck Beast, may he die a slow, painful death.

1 John 2:15 – 17 - “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.”

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“Nobody deserves misery but sometimes it’s just your turn.” -

Unknown

Hazel

After the horrid day I had, I managed to fall asleep, though I was very worried and scared of what Ghadaffi might try to do to me. I prayed before I slept and what a struggle it was to have a peaceful night's sleep thereafter. I couldn't feel like myself; I had a weird dream. It was by far the weirdest and scariest dream I had had. I could see a tall man dressed in all black, with a hidden face approach me while I was sleeping right on my bed. I could hear Malachi's voice.

Malachi: “Hazel! Wake up. I told you that you need to fight. Look at what has happened now. Your ancestors have all left everything in your hands.”

I woke up in the dream and saw Malachi standing right across the room, alongside my ancestors. My grandmother, my mother's mother, the woman who had always protected me

stood there with folded arms, alongside my grandfather, who hardly spoke to me. Mam'Rose wasn't speaking, but this dark figure of a man was slowly approaching me. I could feel him nearing my bed, his aura was dark and he felt cold. I felt him touch me. I felt like moving, screaming, but my body failed me. I tried so hard and all I could shout in my dreams was "Jesus! Jesus!" I felt like I was undergoing sleep paralysis, but I didn't stop. I kept shouting my redeemer's name, and after about five minutes, I finally woke up. I was draped in sweat, and my room felt so cold, as if I were in a fridge. It felt so real; that dream was not a dream, but a reality. I had no idea whom that person was, but oddly the first person I thought of calling, was Ghadaffi.

Ghadaffi

I wasted no time and drove as fast as I could. Before I knew it, I had made it back to my parents' house. I found my father already waiting for me.

Dragon: "Good, you are finally here. Mkhulu was starting to annoy me with his impatience. He charges by the hour, you know."

Ghadaffi: "Money isn't a problem. Where's Ma?"

Dragon: "She went to a church meeting. Come. He's been waiting."

I followed him to our secret room behind his book shelf, down stairs right in his study. Once we went in, I could smell the blood. I nearly turned when Mkhulu commanded me to keep myself in check.

Mkhulu: "Get back into your cage, Mkhovu (zombie). It's not time yet."

As much as the smell of blood was testing the inner beast I had in me, I had to keep it in check.

Mkhulu: "Take off your clothes and Kneel."

I did as told. He started throwing his bones to check the current status of my life and what the future held for me. Immediately he started burping and shaking his head.

Dragon: "What? What is it?"

I knew that wasn't a good sign.

Mkhulu: "You're playing with fire, my boy. What you did to that Sibiya boy; his ancestors are angry at you."

Ghadaffi: "He isn't dead if that's what you mean."

Mkhulu: "You know exactly what I mean. You tampered with the law, you have paid people off. He has been living in misery for the past year, but he hasn't stopped praying. Now, you are about to target his woman. She is highly favoured – they both are."

Dragon: "So what are you saying? Are you saying that he can't have her?"

Mkhulu: “You know what we're about to do. Love potion won't work on her. She loves that boy and he loves her more than anything. He is prepared to die for her. What you're about to do is unleash a curse that might backfire on you – more especially if she finds him.”

Ghadaffi: (panting) “Well, that won't happen because she will never find him!”

Mkhulu: “I said back to your cage, Mkhovu (zombie)! Godfrey, you really have to keep this boy on a leash. If he continues like this, he will turn in the presence of that girl. We can't let that happen.”

Dragon: “Ghadaffi, you need to control yourself. She's already seen you, you can't afford to make the same mistake again.”

Mkhulu: (shocked) “What do you mean she has already seen him?”

Dragon: (sigh) “He was enraged, and she happened to see him turn. Not fully, though.”

Mkhulu: (angrily) “You are making my task very difficult for me, boy!”

Ghadaffi: “Can you do what I pay you for, or not? You don't come cheap, you know.”

Mkhulu: “You have no respect.”

Ghadaffi: “Neither do you. You don't respect your ancestors enough to be a good healer, instead, you're in my father's dungeon practising witchcraft. We're even. Now, do what you're supposed to do.”

He was angry, but he knew I was right, so he got busy with me and I prepared my soul for what was about to happen next. After about an hour, I sat there and waited for midnight to strike. I knew then I had to feed my inner beast his usual meal – raw liver.

Mkhulu: “It is nearly time, say your prayers now.”

I started speaking before eating my midnight meal.

Ghadaffi: “My people, help me claim the woman I love – Hazel Hannah Makwetla. I want her to be mine – solely mine. I want her to do whatever I say, I want her to love me the way I love her. I want her to forget all about her stupid ex Bethuel “Beast” Sibiya, I want to show her off to the world, and I want her soul to produce fertility and make my business blossom. Her first born should be my sacrifice – as promised.”

I ate and waited for the potion to work, before I knew it, I was in Hazel's room. She looked so peaceful and beautiful, just what I needed in my life. I already saw her ancestors long before I entered her gate, but they couldn't touch me. I'm the mighty Ghadaffi, I'm not Satan's son – I am Satan. No one can touch me. I entered her room without fail, and I managed to get close to her. Even her own brother couldn't save her from me. All I had to do was touch her, that was it. It wasn't too long after I disappeared from her room that she called me.

Mkhulu: "My job here is done, Godfrey. I'll send my invoice. Pay me on time."

Ghadaffi: "Hello."

Hazel: (frightened) "Brandon, I..."

She started crying and I knew then that the ritual had worked.

Ghadaffi: "Hey, slow down. What happened."

Hazel: (teary) "I... I saw a man... I can't even describe him. He was here, right here in my room, Brandon. He... He touched me, or at least I think he touched me."

Ghadaffi: "Calm down. Are your windows closed and is your door locked?"

I chuckled internally. Shame, if only she knew it was me. I was about to have so much fun toying with her. She got up to check everything and told me that the door was locked. I didn't even need to enter through the door.

Ghadaffi: "Then it must have probably been just a dream."

Hazel: "Ye... Yes, perhaps it was."

Ghadaffi: "Do you need me to come and keep you company?"

Hazel: "No, no, it's alright. I don't want my mother to think I'm sneaking you into my room at this time of the night."

I could tell she was already hooked on me.

Ghadaffi: (chuckling) "Sneaking in, huh? Does that mean, you agree to be my girlfriend?"

Hazel: "You haven't asked me."

Ghadaffi: “Well, I'm asking you now.”

Hazel: “Now is not the time. Ask me tomorrow. Let me pray and sleep. Good night.”

She didn't wait for me to say it back. I thought that spell was supposed to make her submit to me – fully. Oh, well, at least I managed to get some positive feedback from her. I slept like a baby after that.

Hazel

After that horrendous dream, I prayed, I had never prayed so hard before. After my prayer, I left the candle on and I sprayed some sea salt in my room. I tossed and turned for a while, but managed to fall asleep eventually. The following morning came and I still felt incredibly tired. I only managed to fall asleep round about 2am, and I only recall having the dream and speaking to Ghadaffi. Was I really into the guy? I had no idea, but something changed inside of me. I less reluctant to chase him away and more reluctant to get to know more of him. It

was really insane. I made my bed and as I was about to take a shower, my mother came to check up on me.

Binah: (knocking) "Hazel, how are you, my baby? Can I come in?"

Hazel: "Okay."

I opened the door and she looked a bit distraught.

Hazel: "I was about to take a shower. What's up? You look a little worried."

Binah: "Eish (oh), my baby. I hardly slept. I had an awful dream, man. I just thought I should come and check up on you."

Hazel: "I'm alright, Mama. What kind of dream?"

Binah: "I don't know, but it felt as if o tsenetswe (someone had broken into your room)."

That was shocking.

Hazel: "Well, I had a similar dream, actually. I dreamt someone was in my room and I was so frightened. But after I called Ghadaffi - "

Binah: (interrupting) "Ghadaffi?"

Hazel: "Yes. He actually managed to calm me down, you know. He's actually not that bad at all."

Binah: (nervous) "I see. Well, then. I'll leave you to your shower. I'll make us some breakfast."

Jenny was crying for me, so I let her leave her in my room. I took a shower and got dressed. Once I was about to go back to my mother's room to eat, Ghadaffi appeared out of nowhere.

Ghadaffi: (smiling) "Hey, you."

The moment I saw him, something within me changed once again. I didn't feel the way I felt an hour before; I was smitten but when I saw him I sort of loathed him all over again. All those conflicting feelings came back and I started missing Beast all over again. Was I perhaps going crazy?

Hazel: "Oh, hi."

Ghadaffi: (frowning) "Are you okay?"

Hazel: "Of course. I just hardly slept, that's all."

Ghadaffi: (frowning) "I see."

My mother came out and looked rather displeased about Ghadaffi's appearance.

Bina: "Brandon, what an odd surprise. What brings you here so early in the morning?"

Ghadaffi: "Oh, I came to treat my girlfriend to a lovely breakfast."

Hazel: (frowning) "Girlfriend? Am I your girlfriend, now?"

I saw Ghadaffi look at my mother briefly, as to why, I had no idea.

Binah: (nervously) "Oh, yes. Remember this morning when we spoke, you told me that he wanted to ask you out formally today. Don't you recall?"

Hazel: (shaking head) "No, I actually don't."

Ghadaffi: (frustrated) "Okay, then. Shall we go. I promise you, you're going to love what I have planned for you."

Hazel: "Does it have to be now? I mean I'm kind of tired."

Ghadaffi gave my mother “the look” once again.

Binah: “Oh, don't worry, go, honey. I'll make sure I cook a lovely supper for us. Enjoy yourself, you work too hard. Surely you deserve to be spoiled too.”

Hazel: (reluctantly) “Alright. But I don't want to stay for long, okay?”

Ghadaffi: “Your wish is my command, my lady.”

I couldn't understand what was happening within me. Ghadaffi was trying a little too hard all of a sudden. I saw him drive out of Atteridgeville. I presumed we were on our way to Pretoria, like Menlyn or something, but he took me to Sandton instead. What a long drive, all for a measly breakfast.

Hazel: “Why are we going to Sandton if I may ask?”

Ghadaffi: “Well, I just wanted to surprise you, that's all.”

Hazel: "Okay."

He took me to one of the posh restaurants at Sandton Mall. I had no idea why he even bothered, because I already knew most of them. I was never short of anything when Beast was around. I couldn't help but compare the two and he fell incredibly short. He pulled my chair for me and once again, much to my annoyance, he sat right next to me.

Hazel: (annoyed) "Could you please sit across me? You're making me uncomfortable."

Ghadaffi: (surprised) "Oh, I'm sorry. In fact, please order for us. I'll be right back."

Hazel: "Okay."

Ghadaffi

I'd never been so confused in my entire life before. I mean, my ritual went well and Mkhulu promised me that everything would go well. I tried my best to refrain from getting angry, but I could feel that I was going to something rather reckless had I continued to stomach Hazel's bitchy attitude towards me. I mean, I had been nothing but nice to her and she chose to diss my every move! I decided to call Mkhulu. I needed clarity, I needed answers. His services didn't come cheap, so why the fuck did I have to suffer?

Mkhulu: "Yebo (yes)."

Ghadaffi: (angrily) "Mkhulu, since when does your muthi stop working? I paid heftily, you know."

Mkhulu: "Kodwa (But), I warned you boy. I did warn you, didn't I?"

Ghadaffi: (shouting) "Do I pay you for warnings or do I pay you for results?!"

I could hear myself growling in the men's toilets.

Mkhulu: "If you don't keep yourself in check, you might find yourself turning in the midst of people. Is that what you want?"

Ghadaffi: (breathing heavily) "Tell me what to do. You ensured me that she'd love me."

Mkhulu: "I never said that. I said I wasn't sure if it would work."

Ghadaffi: "Is that all you can give me?"

Mkhulu: "Look, she'll only love you after midnight, because that's the only time you set the spell, also, she can only love you when she's not around you. Once she sees you after 6am, it's back to the real her."

Ghadaffi: "Surely, there is something you can do. I can't live like this."

Mkhulu: "I'll try. You know my services don't come cheap."

Ghadaffi: "Do what you need to do."

He hung up while I got myself in check. I went out and found her already having a cocktail. It was the very first time I saw her drinking around me, besides the Christmas party.

Ghadaffi: "So, are you up for some pampering today?"

Hazel: "I don't know, really. I mean, I'm quite tired, more especially after that dream."

Ghadaffi: "Which is why you need some pampering. Shall I book you into a spa? I promise you it will just be you. I won't bother you."

Hazel: "Okay."

I tried carrying the conversation, but I could tell that she just wasn't listening to me. She was hearing me, yes, but she just wasn't listening. I had a long way to go. Pity I couldn't ask Beast for any tips. He was slowly rotting away.

Hazel

My goodness, I was bored to be honest. Ghadaffi just wasn't Beast and that was it. I slowly remembered everything; how good Beast was to me and how much chemistry we used to have. I was determined to find him, though I had no idea where to start. Ghadaffi went on and spoke about so many boring things, I just didn't care, to be honest. After we were done, he took me to a spa as discussed. He left me there while he proceeded to go run some errands. I remembered the day Beast and I went to a spa for the very first time, those memories of us were hitting me like they had happened just the day before. I recall having a champagne glass in my hand while I had a face mask on. One of the ladies was busy giving me a pedicure, and all I could do was burst into tears. My heart ached for Beast, and the only thing I thought of doing at that moment, was calling Ghadaffi, but I chose not to. I couldn't understand what was happening to me. I felt like I was going mad at some point. It wasn't right; I was so hot and cold. I really

needed a friend. I made a mental note to speak to Mathilda later on regarding Ghadaffi. It's high time she knew everything. I couldn't live like that for any moment longer. The rest of the spa day was just hell on earth. I was heart-broken and I couldn't even comprehend another minute without Beast, more especially since my birthday was coming up. What had I done? Had I given up on Beast? That's why Brenda wanted nothing to do with me. I was beyond conflicted. After my spa day, I found Ghadaffi waiting for me right outside. The moment I came out he wanted to hug me, which was awkward. I just burst into tears, and he caressed me.

Ghadaffi: "Hey, what's wrong?"

Hazel: (crying) "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to, it's just that, I miss Beast so much. I have no idea how to continue without him."

Ghadaffi: "Oh, I see."

Hazel: "Sorry, perhaps that was a bit inappropriate."

Ghadaffi: "It's okay. You can actually tell me anything you want to."

Hazel: "I... no, I'm fine. Please, just take me home."

He got the ignition and we had a silent drive back home. All I wanted to do was get into my bed, even though my room didn't feel the same any more. I greeted him goodbye and went straight to my room. The moment I walked in there, it just didn't feel the same any more. Everything felt so different, and most definitely not in a good way. The room was still cold – despite it not being winter yet. I tried sleeping for a bit, since I was feeling down, but I failed to. So, I decided to take a walk around the neighbourhood while talking to Mathilda on the phone.

Mathilda: "Hey, I've been waiting for your call."

Hazel: "Sorry, I've been a little pre-occupied."

Mathilda: "Want to talk about it?"

I started telling her everything; from the moment I saw Ghadaffi with those twins, to what happened in the dream, until this morning's stunt.

Mathilda: "Beyond all this and you still don't see the problem, Hazel?"

Hazel: (frowning) "What do you mean?"

Mathilda: "It means something is really off about that guy. I don't trust him at all. I don't like him. I really think he's the man who came through in your dream. Besides that, that's not my point. I mean, why haven't you been praying the way Mam'Rose taught you? The way you and Beast used to? I know, you're only human and we all make mistakes, but I truly think that you are sabotaging yourself. Nothing beats prayer, Hazel. Everything was fine, not perfect, but fine until this Ghadaffi guy came into the picture. I'm only worried about you because you're my friend."

Hazel: "I hear you."

Mathilda: "Please, don't sleep in that room tonight, at least until you get it cleansed or something, okay? And go buy candles and start praying like you did with Beast, please. That's the only way you'll ever find him."

She was right. I had no idea why I gave up, but the truth is, I felt so hollow, spiritually. Perhaps that was the reason why my ancestors had turned their backs on me. I didn't want to feel like a bad person for not praying, but the truth is, I had been feeling a lot like God hadn't been hearing me. I had been feeling as if he had taken my happiness away from me. Beast was my only sanctuary and I couldn't get him back. It had been months and I still had no idea where he was, if he was still alive or if he was even okay. I took Mathilda's advice and went straight to my mother's house.

Binah: "Oh, Hazel. Thank goodness you're here. I've been so worried about you."

She hugged me, while I was left confused. She was genuinely scared for me.

Hazel: (frowning) “Mama, are you okay?”

Binah: (teary) “Yes, yes, I'm fine, baby. Listen, why don't you spend the night here? You and I can have a girls' night in.”

That didn't sound like a bad idea at all.

Binah: “I was even thinking that maybe you should go back to Stellenbosch tomorrow. You don't seem yourself lately. You need to speak to Dr. Zwide. I don't like what I'm seeing.”

She looked genuinely concerned and I could see that she meant well, though. I'd have done anything not to go back to my room, so I agreed. Before she started cooking, she cleaned the entire house with Jeyes fluid, sea salt and Rose water. She made sure that the mixture reached the gate. She didn't hesitate to clean up everything – including my room outside. She had been doing that while praying. I'd never seen my mother like that before. She showed me that she was just capable of being a caring and loving mother. She didn't even want to drink that evening, instead, she ensured to wake me up

to pray. She woke me up at 10pm, midnight and at 3am. I slept way better than I would have in my room outside, although after midnight, all I could think of was Ghadaffi, and by the morning, I was so tired. Little did I know that she had already booked a flight back to Stellenbosch for me. She was a god sent, actually. I got up, took a bath right in the house, I only went to my room to fetch the necessary things. She instructed me to leave the clothes I had come with behind, as they were most probably tainted by whatever came to me that night. I wasted no time as she had asked of me, so, I took an Uber straight to Jo'burg and got on my flight. I arrived and the first thing I did was go buy all the necessary things she wanted me to buy; candles, imphepho, sea salt and rose water as well as holy ash. I ensured that I added candles on top of it all. I went straight to my flat and got busy. I wasted no time and cleaned up; I lit blue and white candles, since she told me that the blue one was for protection. Mam'Rose would have been so proud of my mother, honestly. I left the candle on, and went about my business. I decided to indulge in a little bit of wine and a book. I had told Mathilda that I was already back. My lovely friend wanted to cut her own vacation short to come be with me, but I couldn't allow her to do that. I asked her to stay at her mother's house and she'd be back by Sunday, a day before the second quarter started. Once I was reading, I managed to find

so much peace in my newly cleansed flat, that I dozed off without any trouble.

Ghadaffi

I was so frustrated, so much that all I could think of was Hazel. Luckily, Mkhulu gave me something to make her bow down to me whenever I spoke to her, otherwise I'd have asked for a bloody refund. On the down side, it seemed as if Binah just wasn't doing a good job on her side. All she was instructed to do, was get Hazel to fall for me, but she just wasn't pulling her weight. Such an easy job and she fucking failed at it. No wonder she didn't even finish school properly. I decided to stop by her house, hoping I'd get to see Hazel, since she didn't answer my calls after midnight. The moment I stepped out of the car, I could feel my feet were on fire. The more I tried stepping closer to the gate, I felt like my entire body was literally boiling. Since when did that bitch invest in spiritual protection?!

Ghadaffi: (shouting) “Binah! Hey, wena (you), Binah!”

She took her time to come out, that's for sure. I could see the smug on her face. She was so proud to see that I couldn't even get into the house.

Binah: (smiling) “Keng wena (what is it)? O batla eng (what do you want), Ghadaffi?”

Ghadaffi: (angrily) “I want to see Hazel. And what's all this? Why can't I enter your house?!”

Binah: “Because I ensured that I protect everyone in it – from you. I knew I shouldn't have taken that money from you. You most probably killed Norah and staged it as a suicide.”

I could feel my inner beast about to prowl. She was testing me and I was getting really angry.

Ghadaffi: “You think you can get away with this until when?”

Binah: "I don't mind staying in my house all damn day, every day. As long as I'm far away from you. You won't find Hazel here. She left."

I got so mad, that my beast started smelling blood. I felt myself growling, and my teeth started becoming longer and sharper. I could feel the blood overflowing in my eyes, while my body temperature was becoming sky high. I could feel the hair on my face, and judging by her facial expression, she was seeing me turn.

Binah: (shocked) "Oh, my God! Modimo wa ka (My God)! Is this my punishment?! What the fuck am I seeing?!"

Before I knew it, I ran as fast as I could into that house, I grabbed her in the speed of light and took her to the other side of the yard where no one could see us. That was the perfect opportunity for me to turn, though whatever she had thrown into that yard was burning me so badly, I could bare it while I was not myself. I ensured that she saw me – the real me. I needed her to come face to face with the devil himself, so that she knew not to mess with me next time. She was trying to scream, but I quickly covered her mouth. All it took was one big

knock to the ground for me to break her back. I didn't want her to die, I just wanted to send a strong message to her. One hard knock to the ground and I heard how her spine cracked into two pieces. She wailed like a helpless baby. Bella came rushing out and the moment she saw me, her water broke as well. I had no time, so I ran to my car as fast as I could and I drove off. With her helpless and hospitalized, Hazel would have to lean on me – both financially and emotionally, and I'd ensure that she get all the support she needed. She didn't need Beast any more, I was her new saviour.

2 Corinthians 10:4 – 5 - “For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ.”

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“By each crime and every kindness, we birth our future.” -

David Mitchell

Hazel

I managed to sleep after reading my novel, although I had a puzzling dream that woke me.

Mam'Rose: “What happened to you, my baby? What happened to the prayer warrior I raised?”

Hazel: “I have failed you, Mama, I know.”

Mam'Rose: “I get it, you're still young, now, you'll have to drag yourself out of the mess that you could have avoided. You shouldn't have given up so easily on Beast, but I don't blame you. I can't always come to you, Hazel, but you know how much we love and protect you on a daily basis? We're still so angry at you for not listening. Bethuel had long been accepted by your

ancestors – long before you even accepted him as your boyfriend.”

Hazel: “You mean to tell me that he is still alive? And that he didn't leave me by choice?”

Mam'Rose: “For an intelligent girl, you sure can be stupid some times. Would a man who loved you so unconditionally, so effortlessly, leave you like that without warning?”

Hazel: “You're right. I'm sorry.”

Mam'Rose: “This is not the time to be sorry. This is the time to face the music. You're going to marry Brandon sooner than you think; trouble is looming, but you'll fix it – eventually. Bethuel has been waiting for you. You'll soon realize that he has been right under your nose all along.”

Hazel: “But, I don't love Ghadaffi, Ma.”

Mam'Rose: "This has nothing to do with love. He has created an evil covenant with you, but you're purer than that. Keep praying and believing and we'll do the rest for you. Your biggest battle is about to begin."

With that said, I was woken up by my phone ringing. I looked at the time and it was 2am in the morning. I checked and it was Bella. She never called me.

Hazel: "Hello."

Bella: "Thank goodness, you finally answered your phone, Hazel!"

She was so entitled.

Hazel: "What's so urgent that you had to call me at 2am in the morning?"

Bella: "Clearly you were ignoring all my messages. Both Mama and I have been admitted to Life Eugene Marais hospital. I gave

birth via emergency C-section while Mama had surgery. She's currently in recovery. She's paralyzed.”

Hazel: (shocked) “What do you mean?! What happened?”

Bella: “I... She fell and as a result her spine split into two. She won't be able to walk any more, apparently. My twins are in the NICU, thanks for asking by the way.”

Was she fucking kidding me? That wasn't the time to make everything about her.

Hazel: “Okay, I'll be there as soon as I can.”

Bella: “Please do that. Ghadaffi has been with us ever since, but he left saying he was on his way to you. He's been such a great help, besides, we need someone to settle the bill.”

I just hung up in annoyance. She couldn't have been serious. My mother was hurt badly, and then Bella had three children. How the fuck did that become my problem again? I was deep in

thought, so I decided to pray. I lit my candle and prayed. I prayed so hard, more especially for my mother to pull through. She was the strongest woman I knew, more so, she wasn't old enough to just fall on her back and become paralyzed. Something didn't feel right. After praying

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I heard a stern knock on the door. I went to open and it was Ghadaffi. How on earth the guy always managed to make it to my place at odd hours, still beat me.

Hazel: "Hi, I didn't expect you here at this time."

He looked a little uncomfortable; I mean he was sweaty and his pupils were a little dilated. He didn't even want to come in.

Ghadaffi: "Do you mind if we sit in the car outside? I have a few things to discuss with you."

Hazel: "Uhm, or you could come in?"

Ghadaffi: (sweaty) "No, I don't want to give people the wrong idea about you and I. They might just judge you for that, you know."

He had a point, though. I mean, we weren't really anything and people did talk, but so what? I got into my gown and proceeded to follow him to his car. He told me about the grave urgency of my mother's situation, he even told me about Bella's twins. What alarmed me most was that he didn't bother telling me, but I get it – he was busy supporting them the entire day and night. What stressed me most was the medical bill. How on earth was I going to pay over R135 000?! That was both their expenses combined in a day, including the twins's. Jenny was luckily with Ghadaffi's parents. I mean, we had no other family in Atteridgeville, and they lived in Montana, which wasn't very far from my house.

Hazel: (crying) “How on earth will I be able to pay for all this, Brandon? I'm just a student. My mother will need a psychologist as well as physical therapy and treatment. The twins will need to stay for quite some time. I don't have this kind of money.”

Ghadaffi: “I was serious when I said to you that I care about you. Let me help you, I'll do anything you want me to. I'll take good care of them – including you, if you just agree to marry me. I'll make you the happiest woman alive. Just marry me, Hazel.”

How the fuck did I get myself into such a mess? I was barely his girlfriend, yet he was asking me for my hand in marriage.

Basically, I had to sell my soul in exchange for my mother, sister and nieces to get the best life they deserved. I was a pawn in a chess game, and I couldn't go away. There was no way out. I then remembered Mam'Roses's words.

Hazel: (shakily) “Ye... Yes.”

He seemed so excited, in the mean time, I had just sold myself to the devil, unbeknownst to me. I had no idea at that time, that marrying Ghadaffi, would have been my only chance to find Beast. Ghadaffi was so happy that we were finally engaged; basically, we skipped a few chapters and stages of our “relationship”; I became his fiancée before I could even become his girlfriend. All that happened three months after his wife died. That, I knew would not go down well with people of my neighbourhood. He was so ready to show me off, meanwhile I just wanted him to remain a secret. That was the beginning of my misery, but it unlocked my future with Beast.

John 8:32 - “And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

87

“Not only is there often a right and wrong, but what goes around does come around. Karma exists.” - Donald Van De Mark

Hazel

Life has a funny way of forcing you into a corner. Never in a million years did I think I'd be engaged to be married again, a month before my 20th birthday. Surely something was not right in my life or something – I just couldn't tell. I had come back to Stellenbosch to get away from whatever had been consuming my room back home, but it seemed as if trouble had followed me. Perhaps my mother forced me to leave because she could sense that trouble was lurking. Or was she saving me from something bad? Something that was aimed at me? Just when I thought that Ghadaffi would let me sleep at my own place and adjust to the news of us being engaged so suddenly, while my family was hospitalized, but no, he asked me to go sleep with him at the hotel he had booked into. I didn't want to seem ungrateful for what he had done for them, since he did make the payment transfer immediately after I agreed to his proposal. I felt like I was literally exchanging my life for

theirs. Something had to be done regarding Bella and her children. I couldn't possibly live like that for the rest of my life. We went to his hotel room, and thankfully, he didn't want to sleep with me because I was dreading that with a passion. We did sleep on the same bed, however, after midnight, he turned and had his back facing me. I thought he was dreaming, but I could hear him growling, almost like a dog. When I heard him making noises in his sleep, I tried waking him. He quickly jumped out of the bed without looking at me and went out. I had no idea what time he had returned to the room. All I remembered was the smell of blood while I was asleep. The morning came and he was already up. That guy didn't sleep at all yet he had all the energy in the world. I had just woken up, to find he was already dressed as he came out of the bathroom.

Ghadaffi: (smiling) "Good morning, Sunshine. How did you sleep?"

Hazel: "Fine, thanks. What about you?"

Ghadaffi: "I slept better than most days now that I know that you and I are going to be husband and wife soon."

I tried to seem happy, but my body just wouldn't comply. All I had in mind was my family.

Ghadaffi: "Let me order breakfast so long."

Hazel: "I'm going to take a bath, while we wait."

I let him be while I went to the bathroom. The aftermath of my choices were beginning to haunt me. I had no idea what I had gotten myself into, and I had contemplated reversing all my actions, but it was already too late. There I was, trying to stall so that people wouldn't find out about us, yet there he was, ensuring that the entire world knew about "us". After I took a rather long, exasperating bath, I found him already planning our wedding.

Ghadaffi: "Oh, you're finally done. So, I was thinking we could get married on your birthday. Yes, I know what you're going to say. Three weeks might not be enough to plan an entire wedding, but I got you covered. There's absolutely nothing money can't buy. I already posted your picture on my

Instagram and informed everyone on my contact list that we're engaged. Please, accept my Facebook friend request. It is high time people knew that you're now mine. And also, delete your pictures with Beast while you're at it – all of them.”

My emotions were ranging from seething rage to annoyance to complete brokenness. How on earth did he expect me to wipe memories of someone I loved so dearly, just like that?

Hazel: (surprised) “I... don't you think we're rushing things a little bit?”

Ghadaffi: (puzzled) “Hazel, you did say that you wanted to marry me last night, didn't you? I mean, I don't want to make it all seem like an arrangement, but who on earth pays for his mother-; sister-in-law and her twins's hospital bill if not be the husband? I thought we were on the same page.”

Indeed, I had sold my soul and my body to the devil himself. That would have always been leverage. I'd never get peace of mind because I'd always be reminded how I was “taken out of the gutter”. Beast wouldn't even have told me

that he took care of the hospital bills. That is how much pride he had. Ghadaffi fell so short of Beast's character, and I couldn't help but compare the two. It was not an easy decision to make; agreeing to Ghadaffi's proposal, and yes, I did it out of impulse. I lived to regret it from the moment I said yes.

Ghadaffi: "Come closer, I need to take a picture of us and put it up as my profile picture."

Hazel: "Do we have to? I mean, I am not even properly dressed yet."

Ghadaffi: "They'll see the gown and know just how intimate we are."

I was unhappy, from the pit of my gut. I hated everything about Ghadaffi, but as always, something made me refrain from acting on my feelings and also, I couldn't tell him – no matter how much I wanted to. He took me back to my place, and as the previous evening, he couldn't even step in.

Ghadaffi: “Ensure that you start packing your things. I don't like this flat. Something doesn't seem too right about it, you know, it almost has some sort of evil aura to it. You can go live in my house here in Cape Town while studying. Who knows? You might just move to Jo'burg to be closer to your husband. I expect you to be done packing by the end of the week, so that we can start preparing for our wedding. I'll see you later, you know, when we go and see your mother and sister, not forgetting your nieces.”

Just like that, he left me completely speechless. I couldn't help but think of the horrendous mistake I had made. It didn't take too long for people to flood my wall with comments, and of course, Ghadaffi just had to tag me on his profile picture, with the caption “My bride to be”. Of course, Beast's other two sisters commented, stating that I was a gold digging whore after all the men with money. I didn't even get the chance to inform my friends and family and already it was public knowledge. For someone studying psychology, one would have thought that I was a lot smarter than that, but the truth is – I was. I was smart enough to notice that he was a narcissistic prick, who had way too many red flags, but stopping him – I couldn't do. Mathilda called me endlessly, she even texted me, but I just couldn't even speak to her. I was so ashamed. I

switched off my phone, while I was roaming deep in thought. Barely an hour later, Ghadaffi arrived yet again. He texted me saying he was outside, waiting for me in the parking lot. I quickly changed and grabbed only the necessary items I'd need for the trip since he didn't exactly give me a chance to get ready and off we went. Throughout the entire drive, all he could literally talk about was the wedding. I didn't even have an engagement ring yet, and already he was planning to get me a designer dress from the likes of Kobus Dieppenaar and Natalia Trisolino. I hated the attention already. At least he had booked us a flight back home, and the more I thought about the entire situation, the more anxious I started feeling. I remembered how attentive Beast used to be. He'd always ensure I was at my calmest whenever flying, but Ghadaffi was something completely opposite.

Ghadaffi: "What's wrong?"

Hazel: "Flying makes me anxious."

Ghadaffi: "Oh, you're just being a baby. You've been flying for so long already, I don't get why you're still anxious even now."

I was so annoyed, that I just shut down completely. I was scared shitless; thinking about my future then. The plane was the least on my mind. I had my eyes closed, while he thought I was just trying to sleep, but I was in fact thinking of the shit I was in. The flight was dreadful and felt so long, that by the time the plane had landed

I wasted no time in getting out. Ghadaffi caught up with me and truly forced me to put my hand in his when we were walking together. It felt so forced, like I was in complete hell already. He had one of his drivers pick us up in his company car and off we went to the hospital. He didn't even give me time to go home and change, I was still in the previous night's clothes and gown. I reeked of annoyance, but I was too afraid to show it. The moment we got to the hospital, I started at my mother's ward. I saw her lying there, so weak, so defeated. She looked like she had been crying; and seeing all those bandages around her, made it all seem so real.

Hazel: (teary) "Mama..."

The moment she saw me, tears rolled down her cheeks without her saying a word. I saw a completely new type of brokenness

in her eyes. She was speechless; I figured it was because of her situation, but it seemed as if there was more to it.

Hazel: (teary) "Mama, I'm right here. Tell me what it is you need and I'll get it done."

Binah: (crying) "Please, just let God take me, Hazel. Ask him to take me because I can't do this any more."

Hazel: "Is it because you can't walk any more, Mama? I'm not bothered by that, I still need you in my life."

She shook her head and was about to speak, but got interrupted when Ghadaffi walked in. He wasted no time and stood right beside me, with his arm around my waist.

Ghadaffi: (smiling) "Sis'Bee, I'm officially your future son-in-law. Hazel and I are now engaged."

She looked at him so wide-eyed, much to my confusion and she just went numb from there onwards. I heard her machines

start beeping, and that's when her doctor instructed us to leave her for a while, while the nurses were busy with her. I knew something deep was wrong, but nothing prepared me for what was about to come next. The doctor came out and found us waiting in the waiting area.

Doctor: "You must be Ms. Makwetla's daughter?"

Hazel: (nodding) "Yes. Is everything alright?"

Doctor: "I'm afraid to tell you this; your mother has stage 3 cervical cancer."

What a huge blow. I heard him talking further and babble a few medical terminology, but all I could think of was that my mother was going to die.

Ghadaffi: "How long does she have left, doctor?"

Doctor: "Well, it would depend on the kind of treatment we give her and how soon that is. She isn't on any medical aid, so cash would also be quite expensive."

Ghadaffi: "I'm willing to put her on my medical aid. So? I guess this means that we need to get married as soon as possible, so that we can focus on your mother's recovery. What do you think, love?"

By love I suppose he was referring to me. So, we hadn't even been engaged for a day and already he wanted to move the wedding date sooner.

Hazel: "Yes..."

Ghadaffi : "Alright then, Doctor. Start her on the best treatment option available and we'll talk. I'm ready to sign the forms."

Doctor: "Okay, then. Follow me."

I went back to my mother, and that most probably explained her reaction when she saw me. Her entire hospital room was gloomy; she just didn't want to live any more.

Hazel: (teary) "Mama, Ghadaffi is making arrangements as we speak. You will start treatment soon and hopefully, the cancer will be removed from your body."

Binah: "When did you get engaged?"

Hazel: "Last night. He wanted us to get married on my birthday, but after your saddening news, it seems as if we're going to get married a lot sooner."

Binah: (crying) "No, no, no, Hazel. I'd rather die. Just please, let me die. I won't handle it if you marry that guy."

Hazel: (frowning) "Why, Ma? You were the one pushing me to give him a chance. What changed? In fact, what happened? How on earth did you fall so hard that you broke your spine so badly?"

She wanted to speak, but then in walked Ghadaffi.

Binah: "He... It broke me. I didn't fall, I was attacked."

I was so confused, but then she stopped talking completely when Ghadaffi walked in and had completely changed tune.

Ghadaffi: "Oh, Mamzo (mother-in-law), I see you were just about to explain to my fiancée what happened to you."

Binah: "Ye... Yes, I had a very bad fall. I must have been drunk or something, so much that I assumed I was attacked. Please, whatever the doctor decides – decide against it. I'm ready to meet my fate and die. I don't want to be saved."

Hazel: "Don't say that, Mama."

Binah: "I mean it."

Ghadaffi: "Too late, Mamzo. Hazel and I need you to bless our marriage. You will be there - you have to be there."

I'll never forget the sorrowful look in my mother's eyes. She started going into distress yet again and her machines started beeping. The nurses came back rushing in.

Nurse 1: (angrily) "This is the second time that she has gone into distress while you have been here. What on earth have you been saying to her that upset her so much?"

Hazel: (surprised) "Nothing. We were just talking about - "

Ghadaffi: (interrupting) "About our wedding. Our upcoming wedding."

Nurse 1: "Well, clearly that is upsetting her. Perhaps she's stressed that she might not make it til then. Do step out and give her time to heal. She's just been out of surgery, please."

Ghadaffi and I stepped out and I thought he'd end it there, but he asked me to go to Bella's room and check on her and the twins. Only then I worried about Jenny.

Hazel: "Oh, no, Ghadaffi! Where's Jenny?"

Ghadaffi: "Relax, she's with my parents. They love Jenny like she's their own grand child. You and I will have plenty of time to plan our things accordingly."

I had no idea what to even say to someone who had already made up his mind. We went to see Bella, I had no idea why even, but I guess Ghadaffi wanted to rub it into everyone's faces. We found her relaxing in bed, stuffing her face with food already.

Ghadaffi: (smiling) "Hey, sister-in-law."

Bella: (frowning) "And this? Are you two an item now?"

Ghadaffi: “Even better, we're engaged to be married. By the time Hazel goes back to school, she'll be Mrs. Mashile.”

The shock in me; I nearly tumbled over. Bella was just as shocked. I mean, I'd be going back to campus in four days.

Bella: “Tell me you're joking. I mean, you barely even know one another. Besides, you are a widow, Ghadaffi.”

Ghadaffi: “Oh, I had no idea that me paying for your hospital bill included you being my relationship counselor. I never asked for your advice.”

It seemed as if Ghadaffi's words were more than just that – it felt like a stern warning.

Bella: “Of course, what I meant is Congratulations, to the both of you.”

That was a very flat congratulatory message, but I wasn't offended. I also felt just as flat.

Ghadaffi: (smiling) “Yes, well, Hazel will make the best bride in the entire world. She's just what heaven ordered for me to heal from Norah.”

That didn't sound right at all to me.

Ghadaffi: “Anyway, what have you named the babies?”

Bella: “Oh, Mia and Ava.”

I had no idea where Bella even dug those names from. They were nice names, but I had no idea why she chose them seeing as to the father was non-existent. She was too good at keeping secrets, but even as the Bible says; “nothing can stay hidden forever; for whatever is done in the dark, shall be brought to the light”. My whirlwind had just begun and little did I know that I was one, crucial step ahead of finding Beast again.

Isaiah 43:18 – 19 - ““Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old. Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.”

“We become what we think about” – Earl Nightingale

Hazel

It had barely been a day that we'd been engaged, when Ghadaffi decided to get the process rolling; from the engagement ring to the engagement party, all the way to the negotiations. I just couldn't comprehend the fact that he wanted all that to get done within four days. After seeing Bella's twins, we had to leave. I couldn't even get to my house to freshen up. Unlike Beast, Ghadaffi wasn't very considerate of my feelings; it was always about what he wanted and what he wanted us to do. The moment we got into the hospital parking lot, he didn't hesitate laying down the plans for the day.

Ghadaffi: “So, we're going to be off to see my parents first. My father and uncles have to send your family the negotiation letter, right?”

Hazel: “Yes, and they'll say it is short notice.”

Ghadaffi: (shaking head) "Money talks, baby girl, money talks."

His love for money just threw me off completely.

Ghadaffi: "From there onwards, we're going ring shopping. We have to have an engagement party by tonight; and then tomorrow morning you'll pick the dress."

Hazel: (surprised) "But, Mathilda isn't even here yet. Brandon, I really think you're rushing things. I mean, I don't want to regret this day."

Ghadaffi: "You only need me. Besides, the vows are just a formality, Hazel. I thought you were a 100% in on this."

Hazel: "I am... At least let me tell Mathilda in advance."

Ghadaffi: "I still don't like her, but okay."

I didn't even know any of his friends. I was pretty sure he didn't have any. I had been avoiding Mathilda's calls and I eventually switched off my phone. My phone had been buzzing with messages from all over, with most people bashing me on social media. It was not like Ghadaffi seemed bothered at all. Beast's family revealed their true hatred towards me, while Mathilda raised her genuine concerns. I decided to call her before even reading all her texts.

Mathilda: "She finally calls."

Hazel: "Hey, I'm sorry. My phone was off..."

Mathilda: "You sound off. Are you alright? I mean, it's not every day your best friend gets engaged and doesn't tell you, though, is it?"

Hazel: (sigh) "That's what I wanted to talk to you about. Can you make it to my engagement party?"

Mathilda: "Sure, when?"

Hazel: "Tonight."

Mathilda: (shocked) "Hazel! You don't even know that guy - "

I had to intervene quickly, because Ghadaffi didn't seem as if he was prepared to give me any moment of privacy. He was eavesdropping without shame.

Hazel: (interrupting) "We'll speak tonight. Can you make it? My mom is in hospital, and I basically have no one."

Mathilda: "Of course you can count on me. I'll be there. Pin me the location. I'll see you soon then. Keep well."

I hung up and I could see the dissatisfaction on Ghadaffi's face.

Ghadaffi: "I told you; I don't like that girl."

I just kept quiet. I felt so oppressed already. It didn't take too long for us to make it to his parents' house in Pretoria East. I didn't like his parents much, and as for his mom, Melita, she really despised me without even knowing me. The aura around their house spoke volumes. I just didn't completely at ease. Something was completely off about that house. I felt so nervous before entering, and the odd part was that from the moment he parked his car in the parents' house, he was all chivalrous and doting all over me. I was left confused. He knocked and entered almost immediately. We found his mother making food in the kitchen. She seemed to have been baking and making dumplings and stew, accompanied by hard body chicken cooking on the stove. All that at 11am in the morning! I could have never. She seemed excited to hear his voice, but it disappeared immediately after seeing my face.

Ghadaffi: "Mama, guess who's home?!"

Melita: "Oh, I see you have brought someone with."

Ghadaffi: "Mama, Hazel and I are getting married."

Just as she was trying to process the shock – he shocked her even more.

Ghadaffi: “This Sunday!”

The news seemed to have shocked her more than me.

Melita: (flabbergasted) “But, Brandon, that's too much of a short notice! We don't even know her!”

Ghadaffi: “You didn't know Norah either when you forced me to marry her. Now, I can finally marry someone I truly love and there's nothing you can do or say to change my mind.”

Melita: (frowning) “I see. Look, I get it, you love her and all, but you've literally just been widowed. What will Norah's parents say?”

Ghadaffi: “Like you've ever cared about what they've ever said. I didn't come here to ask for your permission, I came here to fast track the lobola negotiations. Baby, you stay put right

here. Get to know your future mother-in-law while I quickly go and find my dad. Ma weh (please), be kind to her. She's my golden girl.”

He kissed my cheek, much to my annoyance and left. I could feel that woman's hatred straight from her eyes. She was actually worse than Ma Sibiya – much, much worse. She didn't even have to say anything – all she had to do was just give me a death stare and that was it. Unlike Beast's mom, she didn't throw shade – she told me straight to my face how she felt about me and what she thought of me. I think for me, that was the hardest part; having to face someone who hated me for no reason and who had no reason to hide it from me at all.

Melita: (annoyed) “Hmm, girly, what's your story?”

Hazel: (frowning) “Askies (excuse me), Mme (mother)?”

Melita: “You know what I mean. Are you trying to trap my son? Are you pregnant? Are you after his money? I mean, you're not that good looking, you know. He could have found someone better looking – way prettier than a mixed breed.”

Yep, and just like that, I was back to being called names for the colour of my skin. Beast's family didn't like me – yes, but that was only because I was about to marry their breadwinner. Sure, they'd occasionally throw shade about the way I looked, but nothing too drastic. Melita on the other hand hated my looks with a passion. I hated being called a mixed breed or non-black. It wasn't my fault that God made me that way. I had come a long way before accepting myself all thanks to Beast, only for that gigantic bitch to ruin it all for me.

Hazel: (teary) “No, Mme (mother). I'm not after anything.”

Melita: “Do you honestly think that you're the perfect fit for him? I mean, come one, let's be real for a second. Look at your background; your mother is a drunk, your sister is a slut who keeps breeding like crazy, while you don't even know who your dimwit white father is. Surely, woman to woman, you'd also want your son to be associated with a better family. I mean, you were perfectly fine with that gangster of yours before he went missing. Surely you can find another gangster to fall in love with you.”

That woman wanted to break me – literally, but I just didn't want to give her the satisfaction. Yes, I didn't love Ghadaffi at all, and yes, I had no idea what I was doing, but she had no right to treat me like that whatsoever. I wanted to cry so badly, but she was just a mere stranger, trying to break me - emotionally. That was a very old tactic broken people used to get their way. Psychology goes beyond what we see, physically.

Hazel: “With all due respect, Mme (mother). I have no intention of tearing your family apart. Yes, Ghadaffi and I might be moving on too fast, but this is what he wants. Yes, my family might not be as glamorous as yours, but they're my family and I love them. As for the colour of my skin or the way I look, I didn't create myself, but all I know is that I am a human being. I am Hazel Makwetla, which means I am not an animal, I'm no mixed-breed as you might call me. I am a human being and please, I'd appreciate it if you address me as such in future.”

She didn't like me standing up to her, of course. I knew that I'd pay heavily for that stunt one day.

Melita: (annoyed) “Hmm, o nale kgang ne (you are quite fiesty, aren't you)? Get an apron on, start peeling over there and help me cook. My husband enjoys freshly cooked food, much like my son. If you want to be his wife, you will need to step up to the plate.”

Hazel: “Where might the aprons be?”

Melita: (snappy) “Don't ask me nonsense! You'll figure it out.”

Clearly she wasn't aiming at trying to make me feel at home, so I had to stomach her bullshit for a little while. I finally found the apron while she was ordering me around. I honestly thought she was making great food, for someone who had such “status”, I was quite appalled at her cooking skills. All she used was salt, chicken spice and heaps of water. I chose to mind my own business and follow her lead, as I was still in her house, and she had a lot of access to knives. Ghadaffi and his father came back down after about an hour. I was heavily annoyed by then. I hated being around his mother, let alone having to cook with her.

Dragon: (smiling) “Oh, this is rather nice. I am so glad to see that the two of you are finally getting along. You're even cooking. It is a great bond.”

Ghadaffi: (chuckling) “Baby, my mother enjoys cooking. I think she may be able to teach you a thing or two.”

They both chuckled, while Melita faked a smile. In my mind, her cooking felt seemed like something equivalent to murder.

Melita: “Please, sit. The food will be served in a few minutes.”

Ghadaffi: “This is rather nice, but I'm afraid Hazel and I have to go outfit shopping – for tonight's engagement party.”

Melita: (angrily) “Oh, Brandon, le wena (you, though)! I hate this idea of your last minute wedding! What will my church ladies think of me?!”

Dragon: “Melita, calm down. It's not the end of the world. Besides, Hazel and Brandon will handle it on their own.”

Melita: “Over my dead body! My son is about to get married again and I need this entire wedding to be draped in style and class! Leave it all to me. I'll handle it.”

I thought I'd be asked of my opinion, but I was just told.

Ghadaffi: “My mom is right, baby. She'll handle it, while you and I go shopping. Come on.”

I was basically just an add on to that entire wedding since my own opinion didn't matter. Had it been Beast, I'd have been given so many options to choose from. That really sucked. I greeted them goodbye and I was honestly glad to leave. I was rather hungry, and of course, Ghadaffi didn't give a flying fuck about my interests and love for food.

Hazel: “Brandon, I'm quite hungry. Can we stop by a restaurant or something?”

Ghadaffi: (surprised) “You just ate breakfast this morning, and it's not even midday yet and you're already hungry again. No offence, but you're about to be the wife of a very prominent man. You'll need to cut down on the food intake, sweetie.”

That was enough to drive me over the edge. I just kept quiet and listened to my own stomach growling. He was no longer trying to be Beast, though. I was starting to see his true colours. He started playing his own songs whenever we drove around, mostly King Monada, Mkahadzi and the likes of Maskandi music. He'd never really play my selection of songs. I guess he really just needed to get the cat in the bag – which was me. That was enough for him. He didn't have to sweet talk me any more with his fake efforts. We got to Sandton yet again, and met up with the designer. Apart from him picking a wedding dress for me, which was quite big and beautiful, but really not my style, he also chose my bridesmaid dress, that evening's gown and also chose my engagement ring for me; an incredibly huge rose gold, Ruby diamond ring. I mean, honestly, did he expect me to walk around campus with such a huge rock on my finger, in the midst of Cape Town, without getting mugged? He was not serious about life. I was quiet throughout the entire proceedings. I felt really annoyed, because ever since the engagement itself, I hardly even got

time to myself. It was either we were doing what he loved, met up with those he knew and I was literally always by his side. While we were eating lunch, at 3pm, which felt like torture, I had come up with a thought, hoping he'd agree.

Hazel: "Mathilda is on her way. Do you mind if she picks me up here while we catch up on some girl talk?"

I couldn't believe what my life had been downgraded to – I was asking for permission to meet up with a friend.

Ghadaffi: (frowning) "Okay, but I still don't like her, though. I'll assign a driver to you."

Hazel: "No need – she has a car."

Ghadaffi: "Fine, but don't be long. We still have to get ready for our engagement party, and my friends and employees will also be there. I need you to look your best."

Hazel: "Okay."

Ghadaffi: “Do something with your hair while you're at it.”

Hazel: (surprised) “What's wrong with my hair?”

Ghadaffi: “It looks too “white”, you know. Perhaps you can straighten it, or cut it even. Get a new hair dye, or something.”

Wow, he had stooped quite low. I was rather hurt by that. He was infatuated by the way I looked, but he claimed I wasn't black enough.

Hazel: “Oh, okay.”

When I could finally be alone – without him. I was so relieved the moment I saw Mathilda appear at the mall. I just ran towards her and gave her the longest hug ever. Ghadaffi hadn't left yet by then. He deliberately wanted Mathilda to see him; to notice his feelings towards her. Narcissists always do that; they slowly start alienating you from those who love you, by simply painting them as the bad guys. That way, you will no

longer be surrounded by those who get to see the bad things the narcissists do to you.

Mathilda: "Hey, hun. Hi, Brandon."

Ghadaffi: "Mathilda, I expect you to bring her back on time. We have a big night tonight. I suggest you get yourself a good dress too. Prominent people will be attending the occasion."

That guy was so condescending, he must have forgotten whose daughter she was.

Mathilda: (chuckling) "Well, then, I might just wear my new Vera Wang gown then."

Ghadaffi kissed my cheek and left without saying goodbye to us. I was actually so relieved, to be honest.

Mathilda: "Now that we're all alone, mind telling me what the fuck is going on?"

I was highly embarrassed, I had no other choice but to tell her the full story. We had gone to a nearby bar and grill, and I couldn't recall the last time I vented like that. We laughed, cried but overall, she was so empathetic.

Mathilda: "I wish you had told me before all this happened, Hazel."

Hazel: "What were you going to do, friend? I am not about to dump my life problems on you like that. I can't possibly expect you or anyone to pay my mother's hospital bills. She's about to undergo chemo, multiple surgeries. I can't expect that."

Mathilda: "What now?"

Hazel: "I don't know, to be honest. I mean, I don't love the guy that much I do know, but during certain times, I find myself thinking about him, you know, the way I used to – about Beast."

Mathilda: "Okay, well, I still think he has a hand in Beast's disappearance. I think you should keep digging, until you find something."

Hazel: "I hope you're right. I can't imagine what my life would be like should I have kids with this guy."

Mathilda: "Well, we'll just have to ensure it doesn't get to that then. Whatever you need and whenever you need it, I'm here."

Hazel: "I appreciate you, Mathilda, I really do."

Mathilda: "You know I'm always here. So, what are you going to wear tonight?"

Hazel: "Well, can you believe he actually picked my outfit for me?"

Mathilda: "No way. That's just so wrong on so many levels. He seems really controlling and abusive, to be honest."

Hazel: "I don't have much of a choice, though, do I?"

Mathilda: "You just hang in there, for a little while longer. I promise you, we'll get you out of this mess. I just wish you didn't have to marry him. Something is seriously off about this guy. I mean, who marries another woman just a few months after his wife's death? Do you know how this looks on you?"

Hazel: "You don't say. All I know is I have no idea what is going on with my life."

Mathilda: "Just don't forget to pray, babe. We'll figure something out. I somehow feel as if this is meant to happen, you know. I can't explain it, but it feels to me as if God's preparing you for something bigger."

Perhaps she was right, I mean, she always knew just what to say. Maybe she was just trying to calm me down, but her words always did the trick. We continued to drink and hang out for a little while longer, I mean we were still on holiday, to be precise. I lost complete track of time, something I didn't

even know was against the new rules set by my husband-to-be. Once we were done, it was about 5pm, and I was quite tipsy. Those few cocktails had done quite a number on me. We got into Mathilda's car after paying for our parking spot at the mall.

Hazel: "Eish (Oh), I'm a little wasted. What will I say to Brandon?"

Mathilda: "You don't have to explain yourself to anyone, man. Come on, let's go get ready for your engagement party."

Speaking of which, my phone rang and for some odd reason, I hadn't heard it ring all day. I answered it without even checking whom it was.

Hazel: "Hazel, hello?"

Ghadaffi: (angrily) "Where the fuck are you?! I've been trying to get hold of you all damn day!"

I started freaking out because I had no idea what he was capable of, really. I hardly knew him.

Hazel: (panicky) "Mathilda and I are on our way to your house."

Ghadaffi: (shouting) "Don't fucking lie to me! You're still at the mall! You've been there for hours!"

How did he even know that?

Hazel: (puzzled) "How did you know that?"

Ghadaffi: "Look, just get here already. My mother's been working on this party all alone today and it is not fair on her. I'm counting on your friend to be here within the next 20 minutes."

He hung up on me just like that. I could tell that he was shouting at me so loudly, that Mathilda even heard everything.

Mathilda: “Hazel, I really don't like this guy. Perhaps you should call this entire arrangement off. It's not too late.”

Hazel: “No, I have to do this. Don't you worry about me, I'll be fine. Let's just go – please.”

I could tell she was just so unhappy about the entire situation, but I was already in – deep within. I couldn't turn back then. Who knew what he was going to do to my mother? I just needed to hang on a little longer until she was in remission, right? Mathilda drove as fast as she could, and above everything, there was traffic we had to deal with on the road. We couldn't drive as fast as he had hoped, but we did make it in about half an hour. The yard was packed; it was actually the very first time I'd been to his house. The house felt so weird – so cold. The atmosphere was just a bit creepy. All the cars that were parked there were luxury cars, and we only saw about one or two standard cars, you know, your VW Polo's, the Toyota's, cars we were used to seeing on campus. I could tell that there were quite a lot of esteemed people present, that time Mathilda and I were still not dressed yet. She had her dress delivered to her while we were having drinks at the mall, so she was covered in that aspect. The moment she parked her car, Ghadaffi stormed out of the house, dressed in probably the

most expensive suit I'd ever seen, and draped in the best cologne my nose had ever smelled, but even that couldn't make him look half as good as Beast. He looked so pissed, and I knew by the way he looked at me that I was in deep shit. I'd never been so afraid of a man; more especially a man who claimed to have loved me.

Ghadaffi: (angrily) “What the fuck took you so long?!”

Mathilda: (firmly) “Traffic. Why are you shouting at your fiancée?”

Ghadaffi: (angrily) “Get in the house – both of you.”

Mathilda was beyond bewildered, but I begged her not to retaliate. I didn't want a scene, to be honest. Ghadaffi took us to one of the bedrooms in the house, and I caught a glimpse of his mother before we went up stairs. I knew then that she was following us. Ghadaffi opened the bedroom door for us and we walked in.

Ghadaffi: “My mother will be coming to help you get dressed. Don't keep me waiting more than you already have.”

With that said, he left. His mother walked in almost immediately, looking big as always; and dressed in one of those expensive two-piece outfits that were suitable for people her age. That could never be me at that age.

Melita: (angrily) “Clearly this marriage is not something that is top priority for you, Hazel! Do you realize the amount of work that I had to put into organizing this entire thing?!”

She didn't even have the decency to pretend to be nice nor to even greet Mathilda.

Mathilda: “Hi, I assume you must be the mother-in-law. I'm Mathilda, Hazel's best friend.”

Mathilda politely extended her hand for Melita to shake, but she looked at her with the same disgust as she did me.

Melita: (disgusted) “I see you have brought yet another albino friend of yours. How many of you are there?”

Mathilda: (chuckling) “This is getting old. If you don't mind, Hazel and I would like to get dressed – in peace.”

Melita: (angrily) “This is my son's house, you will not - “

Mathilda: (interrupting) “Exactly – your son's house – not your house. We don't need permission from you to do anything. Unless you want Hazel to just drop everything and leave your son out there like a hot potato. She is about to get married to your son, so in fact, she's doing him a big favour. I've had my fair share of Ogre's like you, lady. So, please, with all due respect, give us some fucking space.”

Mathilda was in no mood for dramatic shit that evening. Melita could see that she was up against someone pretty hard headed.

Melita: (annoyed) “Just make sure you do something with that hair. It looks ghastly.”

She banged the door right behind her, while I was just frozen with shock.

Mathilda: “You still sure you want to get married into such a family?”

Hazel: “I don't want to do this right now, Mathilda. Please.”

Mathilda: “Okay, then. How do you want your hair?”

Hazel: “You know what? How about we just tie it up?”

I was in no mood to change my hair for anybody. It was naturally curly and golden brown. If they didn't like it, they shouldn't have let him pick me, then. We both got dressed, and put our make up on. Another half and hour through, we were finally ready. We ensured that we locked the door to avoid any disturbances. Once we got out, everyone was enjoying themselves while I truly felt like I was at a *débutante* ball. Sure,

Ghadaffi picked a dress my size, but I had to ensure that I didn't step on that dress the entire night through.

Ghadaffi: (smiling) “Finally, you made it, my love.”

He kissed my cheek, and I could see his mother fake-smiling. I suppose that was for show.

Ghadaffi: “Ladies and gentlemen, may I have your attention, please.”

Oh, great. A speech. I hated speeches – even Beast knew that.

Ghadaffi: “As you all know why you're here – I'm about to marry the love of my life. Sure, a lot of you are probably asking yourselves why I'm remarrying so soon, but when the heart wants what it wants...”

The crowd laughed softly. I felt so nervous.

Ghadaffi: “I told my beautiful fiancée over here, that I'd give her the best engagement party ever – followed by the most spectacular and most talked about wedding of the century. As you can all see – I've landed myself quite a diamond. With that said, I shall do what I have promised her.”

He knelt down on one knee and took out yet another diamond ring. That guy was such a show off, I mean I was already wearing a diamond ring he had bought me earlier that day.

Ghadaffi: “Hazel, you have brought nothing but joy into my life. When Norah died, I thought that I'd never find someone who'd love me so unconditionally the way you do. You bring so much peace and blessings upon my life. I wish for us to spend the rest of our lives together, in peace and harmony with lots of children. Will you marry me?”

Really? Everyone seemed so chuffed about the entire thing and I could see flashing lights my way. I hated taking unnecessary pictures. I just nodded without any words. He put the ring on my finger and gave me a french kiss, which I loathed. It had been the very first time we had actually kissed, but even then, it just didn't feel natural. It always felt as if I was kissing

someone inhumane. The crowd clapped, while Melita came in between to take a picture of us. She even invited Mathilda to take part in the entire show. I noticed right there and then, that my life was going to be a facade from that night onwards. It was never going to be the same again. My mother was lying in hospital, while I was getting engaged to a monster.

Ghadaffi: “Baby, come, let me introduce you to my fellow partners and colleagues.”

While I was being whisked away from Mathilda to be introduced to people who had nothing but shares, politics and money to talk about, she was drinking and checking the surroundings. I had nothing to say, really, throughout the entire night. Mathilda was left alone, while Ghadaffi kept pulling me right beside him. She and I were texting one another until I suggested she go home and that I'd be fine. She was there to look after me, I suppose. I really appreciated her efforts. I was glad when she came to hug me goodbye, right when Ghadaffi was still making me stand with him as he was engaging in useless talks with his fellow partners.

Mathilda: “Call me whenever you need me, okay?”

Hazel: "I will. I appreciate you, babe, really."

Mathilda: "I love you, Hazel."

Hazel: "I love you too, Mathilda."

She just gave Ghadaffi a brief stare and went home. Dragon was having the time of his life, while Melita was around the church ladies, who happened to be her friends. Half-way throughout the night, I was stunned to see Ma'Sibiya walk through the house, alongside her two daughters. Brenda was not there, though, and I just knew that shit was about to hit the fan. The moment she walked into that house, she ensured to take a good look at me and give me the devil's eye. Melita did that intentionally, I just knew it. I was so uncomfortable already, and her being there meant that my night was about to get worse. I sobered up immediately.

Hazel: "Excuse me, I need the bathroom."

Ghadaffi: “Okay, then. Just don't take too long, okay?”

I just nodded and went upstairs, hoping that no one would follow me. I went to the en-suite bathroom of the bedroom I used earlier on to get dressed. I gathered it was Ghadaffi's. He seemed to have OCD just like Beast, his room was too clean. I took my time in there, hoping that somehow, he'd forget all about me. I looked in the mirror and I just didn't want to cry. I could hardly recognize myself. I was trembling for some reason, but I gathered the strength to go back out. Upon opening the door, I found Ma'Sibiya right outside the door.

Ma'Sibiya: “Oh, there you are.”

Hazel: (terrified) “Were you looking for someone?”

Ma'Sibiya: “Yes, you, actually. I wanted to take a good look at the whore who ensured that my son would disappear and is about to get married to another man, barely a year after my son has been gone.”

That woman was insane. She didn't want me to marry her son, though.

Hazel: "Excuse me, I have to go."

Ma'Sibiya: "Oh, don't worry. I'll be out of your way, soon. I just wanted to tell you that you'll never be good enough for my son – good enough for anyone's son, really. You're just a gold-digging whore who enjoys spending men's money and the moment you've had enough you get them killed. I curse the day my son met you."

Hazel: "I don't know what you mean, but - "

I didn't even finish my sentence, when she did the unthinkable. She spit in my face. I had never had someone do that to me before. Insult me, curse me, do whatever you wish, but to spit in my face? That was the lowest form of insults. I was so hurt. Was I really that disgusting? She left me right there without saying another word afterwards. I got back into the bedroom, shut the door behind me and went to the bathroom immediately to rinse the spit off my face. I was so

heart-broken, so hurt. I had no one to turn to, and I was sure not about to tell Mathilda what had happened. I wished Malachi and Mam'Rose were there. I wished my mother was there to deal with that woman. After I was done washing my face, I was in no mood for a party. I just sat on the bed and cried, silently and slowly. After about 15 minutes, the door opened slightly. I looked up and it was Ghadaffi. His entire persona had changed from the soft, loving guy who was posing for the cameras, to someone cold and fearful. His eyes had changed and became bloodshot. His pupils had dilated in such a way I couldn't even be explain even if I had been asked.

Ghadaffi: (firmly) “What happened today?”

Hazel: (scared) “What are you talking about?”

Ghadaffi: “Don't fuck with me, Hazel. You know exactly what I'm talking about.”

The closer he got to me, the more afraid I became.

Hazel: (shaky) "I seriously don't know."

Ghadaffi: "You disobeyed my orders. I asked you so nicely to be here on time, and what did you do? Instead, you made me look like a laughing stock, by making me wait and call you like a love-sick puppy. I was actually afraid you were going to back out on our engagement. We have a deal, Hazel. It's all or nothing."

Hazel: "I'm sorry."

Ghadaffi: "Don't ever do that again. Are we clear?"

I just nodded with a huge lump in my throat. What had I gotten myself into?

Isaiah 43: 18 – 19 - ""Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old. Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert."

“Happiness is not something readymade. It comes from your own actions.”-Dalai Lama

Hazel

The following morning came, which meant the wedding was three days away. I slept at Ghadaffi's house for the very first time, and I woke up feeling so tired. My shoulders felt so heavy, while my spirit just felt broken. I couldn't even wake up to pray like I used to. Something didn't seem right at all. I hadn't even drunk too much and already I felt like a truck had run me over. I couldn't remember feeling so tired. The last time, was most probably during Malachi's passing. Ghadaffi wasn't in bed, and I truly thought that I had dodged a bullet of him ordering me around all day, but nope, he came back right after I thought of that.

Ghadaffi: (smiling) “Good morning, Sunshine. It's time to get up.”

Hazel: (frowning) “Where are we going today? I'm so tired.”

Ghadaffi: "We'll be on our way to Limpopo soon."

Hazel: (frowning) "Limpopo? What for?"

Ghadaffi: "Your lobola negotiation, remember?"

Hazel: "When did they respond to that? I mean, didn't you just send the letter yesterday?"

Ghadaffi: "Yes, and like I said, they agreed for the ceremony to be done today, although it was short notice."

I had no idea, I mean no one had informed me. So many things were rather unconventional about the entire situation with Ghadaffi.

Hazel: (sigh) "I'm so tired. Can't we reschedule?"

Ghadaffi: (angrily) “Maybe if you hadn't indulged in alcohol like a spoiled brat, you wouldn't be this tired.”

The shock that had consumed me. I think it took a while to sink in and he must have realized that he said something really offensive.

Ghadaffi: “I'm sorry. Look, let's just get this over and done with. The sooner we do this, the sooner we can get married.”

I just nodded and went to the bathroom. I couldn't even take my time because he'd check up on me every five minutes, literally. I didn't even have any clothes taken from my apartment back in Stellenbosch, but somehow I had a new set of clothes bought for me. He didn't really know my size – he guessed it. Beast took his time with me, he got to know all of me and appreciate all of me. Ghadaffi was just so consumed with the thought of having me, that what I wanted and needed didn't matter at all. We got into the car and he drove off. I didn't even get time to eat any breakfast, unlike him who just got up early in the morning, worked out and had his protein shakes and healthy breakfast. He wasn't even buffed or anything, he was just a tall, skinny, dark man. He was healthy,

so it seemed, and I suppose I had to jump on the wagon, despite hardly having any body fat. I had a very high appetite for food, and he just didn't seem to get that. I couldn't even tell him that I was hungry without being snapped at, so I kept quiet and listened to my stomach grumbling. That two hour drive felt like hell on earth and nothing appeased me at all. All I could think of was food, but thank goodness Melita and Dragon weren't around. I missed my mother so much, but I couldn't see her, thanks to Ghadaffi's ridiculous obsession with the wedding. Once we arrived at my mother's family home, I was rather shocked to see everything set already. The tent was all set, with decorations and everything. The yard was so full, which reminded me of the bitter-sweet day when Beast had to come and pay lobola for me, but never did. I mean, according to my knowledge, I was supposed to have been hidden in the house already while awaiting the Mashile family, but seemingly they lived just around the corner.

Ghadaffi: "I'll see you a little later, okay?"

I nodded and he kissed me yet again. His lips weren't even inviting at all. I kept asking myself why Norah actually killed herself, but slowly I started seeing the reason why she did what she did. I didn't hesitate to get out of the car, and I found Aunt

Hunadi in the yard, already giving people orders. She started ululating when she saw me.

Hunadi: (ululating) “Ngwana sesi (my sister's child), man! Luck must be following you everywhere, my dear. A second marriage proposal in less than a year.”

I wished I could have been as pleased as her, but all I kept thinking of was getting food in my stomach.

Hazel: “Have you cooked already? Ke bolawa ke tlala (I'm famished), aunty.”

Aunt Hunadi: “You know we can never leave you hungry. Come, let's go to your bedroom. I'll bring you the food.”

Oddly, everyone was all set and I hadn't seen my uncles as yet. Sinah was already busy in the house, and she was so excited to see me. The moment I went to the bedroom allocated to me, I found an outfit was already set out for me. My best friend wasn't there, which was expected since Ghadaffi was a real

motherfucker, but to just choose an outfit for me without me being there, was just appalling.

Hazel: (surprised) “Who picked this outfit for me, Mmane (aunty)?”

Hunadi: “Oh, I did. Brandon sent us money for everything and I took it upon myself to pick everything for you. I hope you like it. It's the perfect size.”

Sinah came back into my room with a plate of pap with mogodu. I didn't even complain. I gobbled it up so quickly, that I asked for a second plate.

Hunadi: (frowning) “Is everything okay, my baby? I mean, I thought that this was God's way of giving you a second chance, after what Bethuel did to you, but I'm starting to think otherwise. Are you truly happy?”

I had no idea how to even answer that question.

Hazel: (nodding) “Yes, aunty. I'm happy.”

Hunadi: (shaking head) “Well, all I'm saying is that if you're not, it's never too late to change your mind, okay? I'd rather let people laugh at us than have you sinking in depression.”

She was so supportive and I really loved that.

Hunadi: “By the way, where is my sister?”

I guess Ghadaffi didn't tell them the entire story.

Hazel: “Oh, she's not very well. She is in hospital, after she had a bad fall, but she'll be alright.”

I didn't enjoy lying to my aunt like that, but how was I supposed to tell her that her sister was wheelchair bound and had cancer, while I was supposed to get married? I sold my soul and I had to play along.

Hunadi: “Hmm, I hope you're telling the truth, because I dreamt of our mother. Whenever I dream of her, it is always a bad sign. She never appears in my dreams unless something is really wrong.”

I had no idea what else to say, so I opted to change quickly while waiting for the Mashile's to arrive. Something deep inside of me was hoping for things to go wrong – horribly wrong, but they didn't go wrong enough for the entire thing to be called off. Firstly, the cow was found mysteriously dead before they were about to slaughter it, and then the vegetables that were chopped and prepared for that morning's cooking, were off – despite being bought a day early. So, they had to send someone to go buy some more. Just as I was internally hoping and praying for shit to hit the fan, Sinah came rushing.

Sinah: (shouting) “Mama! Re tshwere bothata (we have a problem). Bjala ba sesotho ga ba bela (the traditional beer didn't brew).”

Sinah and her mother looked at me instantly.

Hunadi: (frowning) “Something is not right. I brewed that beer five days ago. I honestly thought that it was the weather, but it should have brewed already. I don't think the ancestors accept this union.”

Sinah: “Hayi (Oh), I also didn't want to seem like a jealous person, but it seems that way, Mama.”

Well, it was too late to turn back, because I heard one of the relatives call out from outside saying that they had guests at the gate.

Hunadi: “Well, then. They have arrived. I shall see you soon, Hazel. Sinah, stay here with her. You know the drill.”

Sinah nodded and once my aunt left, she took out a bottle of wine from her secret stash in the bedroom and poured me a glass. I needed that. I heard some people talking after a few minutes, and then I heard some bickering.

Hazel: “Sinah, bula monyako ga nyane re kwe ba reng (open the door a little bit so we can hear what's being said).”

She did as told and we listened attentively.

Malome Matome: “Ja (Yes), Rea lekwa (we hear you). You know our traditions and as much as we too are Pedi's, you need to abide by our culture and how we do things.”

Malome Lesiba: “You came to us, le rile le batla ngwetshi ya rena (you have an interest in our bride), so what's so hard for you to understand?”

Dragon: “With all due respect, bo Malome (uncles), my son is very eager to make this marriage work. So, we want to pay the entire bride price today – in full, as the wedding has already been scheduled two days from now.”

Malome Lesiba: “I fully understand, but why the rush?”

Melita: (sigh) “Look, we're actually doing you and your family a favour by taking your daughter. She's not exactly a prized possession nor is she even a virgin.”

She just had to be present.

Dragon: “Melita, didimala (keep quiet).”

Malome Matome: (angrily) “Well, then. If that's how you feel about our child, then it is best you take your money elsewhere. No one will marry our daughter with that kind of attitude.”

Dragon: (embarrassed) “Forgive my wife, please. She didn't sleep very well last night.”

Malome Lesiba: “That's no excuse. If she feels like this now, then what's going to happen to our daughter when we're not around? We are not here to sell her to the nearest bidder or make her a slave to an abuser.”

Dragon: "I hear you, and I can assure you that our intentions are completely pure."

Malome Matome: "I'm very concerned. Your son is a recent widow. I don't have a good feeling about this. I mean, we couldn't even slaughter a cow, already it was a sign that this union is not blessed."

Dragon: "I'm not a very superstitious man, Malome (Uncle), but perhaps my son is rushing this so that your daughter can focus on her studies. I suggest you call her out so that she may be able to answer these questions herself?"

Malome Lesiba: "It is rather unconventional. Your ways of doing things are not our ways, but we shall ask her ourselves. Hunadi, please bring Hazel to us."

I could hear her getting up and Sinah immediately closed the door. She walked in and had this worried look on her face. I knew she was deeply unhappy about the entire thing.

Hunadi: “Come, they're calling for you.”

I fixed my doek and had a blanket around my shoulders. I got out to the lounge and kneeled, facing down.

Malome Lesiba: “Motlogolo (niece), these people are the Mashile family. They have come here to ask for your hand in marriage. Do you know them?”

Hazel: (nodding) “Yes, Malome. I know them.”

Malome Lesiba: “They say that you are scheduled to marry in two days from now. This man is prepared to pay R200 000 for your hand in marriage – today. What do you say about that?”

Hazel: (nodding) “I agree, Malome (uncle).”

Malome Lesiba: “Are you sure you're happy? Is this what you truly want?”

I hesitated for a while, it seemed as if Malome Lesiba was hoping I'd tell the truth, but disappointingly, I didn't.

Hazel: (nodding) “Yes, Malome, I am happy. This is what I want.”

Malome Lesiba: (clearing throat) “Well, okay then. You may go back to your room now.”

That was my first ever lobola negotiation, and the worst of my entire life. After a few minutes, I heard ululations, but I could sense my uncles' unhappiness. Aunt Hunadi came to my bedroom and offered me the money, but I could not take it. They deserved it. They could have done something big for Sinah as well. She was so happy and I was honestly moved that they wanted to give me the money. Had I taken it, they would have realized that my mother was ill and that I needed the money for her medical bills. Ghadaffi's family had arrived and so did he, dressed in his traditional attire. Yes, people outside saw a wedding, but I was not happy. All I wanted was it to end. Nothing worked out, other than the part where the bride price was paid. We went about our day and Ghadaffi seemed like the doting husband, who was truly happy to be around his wife.

Instead of me spending the night at home, we drove back home to Jo'burg. I was so tired, to be honest. Beast's house always felt like home, but Ghadaffi's just felt so odd. All I wanted was food and sleep. I dreaded our first night being intimate, I really wasn't looking forward to that. Beast was the first and only man I'd ever been intimate with, and I couldn't see myself sleeping with Ghadaffi – ever. We got home and I headed straight to the bathroom to take a shower. I was surprised how he even managed to find the time to buy me clothes, but I never asked. He didn't know my style, so I let him be. While in the shower, I heard the shower door slightly open, and I was absolutely flabbergasted to see Ghadaffi, completely naked in front of me. I got immediate chills down my spine.

Hazel: (frightened) “Br... Brandon... What are you doing?”

Ghadaffi: “Oh, I'm sorry. I thought that since we're married now, we could finally be intimate, you know.”

Hazel: “I... I'm sorry, but I'm just not...”

Ghadaffi: “Okay, I get it. You're not ready yet. But please, make sure you get ready soon, because I can't wait forever, can I?”

I just got out of there in the speed of light. What the fuck did I expect? I couldn't exactly get married to a man and not want him to have sex with me, right? It felt so foreign to me seeing another penis, other than Beast's. That alone was enough to send me down an emotional roller-coaster. Talk about triggers. I got dressed without even lotioning my body and found myself in a pit of tears in bed. I couldn't help but cry. I heard Ghadaffi get in bed and he noticed that I was in tears.

Ghadaffi: (sigh) “What is it? Why are you crying?”

Hazel: “It's nothing.”

Ghadaffi: “You're obviously upset about something. I can't sleep with you sniffing all night. Out with it.”

Hazel: “I'm just feeling down, that's all.”

Ghadaffi: "Look, I get it. It's a big adjustment to be with me right after your relationship with Beast, you know. But you need to let go of the guy. After Sunday, you'll be Mrs. Mashile. You weren't even married to the guy, unlike Norah and I. Let it be. Open up your heart and allow me to be yours."

I didn't respond, but he did kiss me on the cheek and say goodnight. Thank goodness he didn't cuddle me, because I just couldn't cope with that. I slowly fell asleep, as hard as it was. I must have tried to get up to pray, but I couldn't. I fell into deep sleep right after midnight. It happened every single night. That alone told me that something was not right. Sunday finally came, and my own wedding was planned for me without my knowledge or input. All I basically had to do was show up. I had the fairy-tale wedding; the big tiara, veil, and princess dress, the venue was absolutely gorgeous, the décor was stunning although nothing was exactly my style or how I'd have wanted it to be. I kept thinking of Beast. I was slowly dipping into depression, I'd wake up feeling extremely exhausted, but all that kept me going was the fact that my mother was undergoing chemo and was making some huge progress. My sister was out of the hospital and back home, and Ghadaffi was taking care of her and the children as promised. I hadn't even seen Jenny in such a long while, and I was so happy to see her

on my wedding day. I just didn't want to let her go. She was in my arms the entire time, while Bella was already drinking her day away at my wedding. I didn't mind at all, I wasn't the usual happy bride. Mathilda was there to support me as my Maid of honour. We managed to forget about the real reason why I had to get married and just zoned out. Thankfully, Ghadaffi was busy doing marketing for his business, he was just not around much and wasn't hovering over me at all. I dreaded the sun going down because that would have meant we needed to have sex. I didn't want to, and it didn't seem like he was ready to accept that as an answer that night. I opted to party up a storm – despite school holidays coming to an end. Luckily we only had to go back to campus on Tuesday, which meant that Monday was a resting day for us. After the ceremony and partying, we had to go back to Ghadaffi's house. I headed straight to the shower and took my time, hoping he'd fall asleep, only to find him naked and awaiting my presence on his cold bed.

Ghadaffi: “I've been waiting for you, love.”

Seeing his thin, tall self with a massive, unappetizing penis staring at me, all I wanted to do was choke to death. Anything would have been better than that at that moment.

Hazel: (panicky) “Oh, I thought... you'd be tired by now.”

Ghadaffi: (chuckling) “You can be so funny, you know. Come here.”

I tried, believe me, I tried forcing my legs to step forward, but they failed me. I forced the tears back in, although my body was stiff from the shock and fear.

Ghadaffi: “Okay, I'll come to you.”

He took a few steps and came closer to me. His touch felt so inhumane, so cold. His kisses felt like I was being kissed by a bloody frog. He caressed my body, and as much as a person's touch is warm to the touch, his felt cold and rough. My body refused to co-operate, but he didn't seem to notice. He attributed it to nerves.

Ghadaffi: “I get you're nervous, baby, but just allow yourself to feel me – all of me. I've been waiting for this moment, Hazel.

You are now officially Mrs. Mashile. I can't wait to devour you every single night.”

I quickly wiped away the warm tear which fell down my left cheek. That was an unforgettable yet unmemorable night. It was the worst night of my entire life. I felt him spread my legs a bit further apart – no foreplay whatsoever, he just greased my vagina with his penis and I felt him enter me. It felt so painful, so uninviting, but he was enjoying himself so much. All I felt was pain; physical, emotional, spiritual and mental pain all in one. My mind blocked the entire thing moment out completely and I hadn't even noticed once he was done, literally five minutes later. He didn't even use a condom. No man had felt like they earned the right to sleep with me before like that – not even Beast. He didn't even bring a towel to wipe me down there, but he threw one at me instead and got into bed. That was the start of a very terrible married life for me.

We got on a flight the following morning, yes, we. I thought I'd be flying alone and I had mentally prepared myself for a long-distance marriage, only for him to drop a bomb on me.

Ghadaffi: "So, now that we're officially married, you'll be staying at my Cape Town house. You'll be assigned a driver who'll be responsible for taking you to and from Campus. You won't be staying at your flat any longer."

It seemed as if I didn't have the freedom to do anything I wanted. I had a car while being Beast's girlfriend, but now that I was the wife of a lawyer, I had to be driven around like I was handicapped.

Hazel: "What about your lecturing at Wits?"

Ghadaffi: "I have asked them to replace me for a while, while I spend time getting to know my wife. Before you know it, we might just have a little one on the way. It's high time we get a legacy in order."

I was happy about one thing, though, that I wouldn't have to see his mother very often. The news of my wedding had made the rounds so much, that somehow KG and Otlile were at the wedding. I didn't even notice, but they had taken pictures and didn't hesitate to talk about me. Those were the least of my

worries. I needed to see Dr. Zwide urgently, to get myself in check. I didn't like whom I was becoming and what my life had turned into. It was the second quarter, so which meant I'd have a new module. Thankfully, Dr. Zwide was our lecturer for that one. Once my new driver, Drew dropped me off, I was so relieved to see Mathilda. I couldn't even tell her about my first night with Ghadaffi. It was so embarrassing for me. It was actually traumatic.

Dr. Zwide: “Good morning, students. Welcome to a brand new Quarter. As you all know, this is a new module, which you'll be doing throughout the entire year. We have decided to add this to our division, as it will assist you in dealing with patients in the long run, and it will determine the kind of psychologist you'll be in future. You'll all get to choose two preferable environments to shadow one of the resident psychologists, and that will be your new home, once a week for the rest of the year. So, please fill in the forms that are being passed around. Don't forget to add your student number at the top and please tick your two preferences.”

We had quite a few choices; hospitals, schools, orphanages, mental clinics, prisons, old age homes – you name it.

Mathilda: "I like hospitals, but goodness, the smell always gets to me. School kids can be such a nightmare, though. Which places are you going to pick?"

Hazel: "I really don't know, to be honest. I'm just going to tick the first two, and whichever one I get, perhaps that would be a good thing. All the people in these institutions are depressed, but we all share something in common."

Mathilda: "Seems fair. Tell you what, let's bet; I think this is just a trial run. They've already chosen places for us to do our practicals at, they just don't want us to complain. I think, you're going to get a prison."

That would have been awful.

Hazel: "Well, I think you're going to get a school. What's the prize if one of us gets it right?"

Mathilda: "A full spa treatment."

Hazel: "Deal."

After Dr. Zwide introduced us to the module and took us through the entire thing, class was dismissed. I was about to leave, when she called me.

Dr. Zwide: "Hazel, may I have a moment of your time, please?"

Mathilda: "I'll see you outside."

Hazel: "Cool."

She seemed so serious, I dreaded to hear what she had to say for some reason.

Dr. Zwide: "How are you doing? I hear congratulations are in order."

Hazel: "Oh, yes."

Dr. Zwide: "How are you really doing?"

Hazel: "I'm fine."

Dr. Zwide: "I see you haven't seen me in a long time. I take it your meds are still on par?"

I was ashamed to lie to her like that.

Hazel: (nodding) "Yes."

Dr. Zwide: "Well, it's a good thing we'll be working together a lot closer from now onwards."

Hazel: "Yes."

Little did I know what she actually meant by that statement.

Dr. Zwide: "I'll see you soon. Pop by whenever you need to talk."

Hazel: "I'll do so. Bye."

She seemed really concerned and I honestly felt so bad that I hadn't even checked in with her for weeks. She was so welcoming from the moment I landed there. Days had passed and Ghadaffi was so busy, all he did was work, which didn't bother me. The first thing I did when I got back to Stellenbosch, was to get to a gynae and get on immediate contraception. The last thing I needed was a baby – more especially a baby from Brandon Mashile. I didn't even like the ring to my new surname; Hazel Mashile. It sounded so weird to me. I felt like I was under constant surveillance, even when I wasn't around Ghadaffi. He'd randomly call me to check where I was and when I got home, he'd ask me where I was. It was as if he ensured that I wasn't lying. My driver was instructed not to talk to me unless I wanted to go somewhere else that wasn't home. I finally managed to get my clothes from my flat, and that was pretty much it. If I needed to go somewhere, the driver had to tell him first. I started feeling really off days leading to my

birthday, and only then I remembered Malachi's death anniversary. It had been an entire year that he was gone, and it just felt like life was slowly going down hill for me. I was losing weight, I wasn't eating regularly because I was seemingly put on a strict vegan diet. Ghadaffi took me out one day, only for me to land in a salon, where he instructed the hairdresser to change my hair completely, by dying it black and straightening it. The idiot forgot that my genes were straightforward; my hair was naturally curly, which meant that I'd wake up with curly hair on a daily basis. So, he ensured that I straightened my hair every single day. I wanted to check in with Dr. Zwide so badly, but instead, I got a refill of my prescription which she had given to me months before. I had to beg the pharmacist since it was outdated. I got myself back on my meds, but they still weren't helping. I felt so hollow inside, and nothing mattered whenever I got back home. I was happy to be out of the house, but the moment I went back in there, my life felt like I was in a very dark hole. I only recalled that I hadn't prayed in a very long time. I managed to pray whenever I was away from the house, but whenever I got into the house, I couldn't pray – no matter what. That needed to change. I found myself calling my mother. She was doing really well.

Binah: “Hazel, my baby. How are you?”

Hazel: "I wish I could have been better, to be honest. How are you doing?"

Binah: (sigh) "I don't know. The more I beg God to take me – the more he just makes me better."

Hazel: "You don't want to live any more, Mama?"

Binah: "I'm tired, Hazel. I've been such a bad person, and I'm even amazed that you have forgiven me for being such a trashy mother to you. My son has died because of me, and look now, your life is not going so well."

Hazel: "Mama, my life is going really well. All I am focused on is you right now."

Binah: "I want you to succeed, Hazel. If only you knew what I've done, you wouldn't be so lenient towards me. I'm a very bad person who doesn't deserve even an ounce of your kindness. I was so mean to you; Beast treated you so well and I was just

blinded by my own wickedness. Now, I'm being haunted by my choices.”

Hazel: “Mama, don't speak like that. I have forgiven you a long time ago. When you get better, I'll fly you over so you can come visit.”

Whenever I mentioned her coming to visit me at Ghadaffi's house, she would flip.

Binah: “No! I mean, I have nothing against your husband, baby, but I don't see myself sleeping at that man's house at all.”

Hazel: “Why?”

Binah: “No reason at all. Listen, I've got to go, okay? Keep well. I love you.”

Hazel: “I love you too.”

She hung up and I couldn't help but wonder. Maybe she had negative vibes about Ghadaffi as well. I went to Campus and it was exactly a day before my birthday. I looked completely different. They say that change is good, and that when a

woman cuts her hair, she's about to change her life, but I on the other hand, hated my new look. People said it was bold and daring and totally different, but I just hated it. It looked nothing like the Hazel I knew. Mathilda was surprised, but she too liked it, as long as I liked it too. We had to go to our module with Dr. Zwide to hear where we had gotten placed.

Dr. Zwide: “Good morning, students. The day has finally come and I do hope that you have all prepared yourselves mentally. The circumstances around the people you're going to meet can be quite daunting, but this is only to prepare you for what is about to come in your future careers.”

She started calling out lists of those who were placed in certain areas, and to my shock, Mathilda was right. I was placed at Polsmoor prison. Why on earth that was, beat me. Perhaps that was my calling, I had no idea. I wasn't prepared to see killers and rapists and have sessions with them at all. I dreaded those moments. To my surprise, it was the beginning of a long-awaited journey. Life works in mysterious ways indeed.

2 Corinthians – 11:14 - “And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.”

“Believe you can and you’re halfway there.” Theodore Roosevelt

Hazel

I hardly slept, for the first time in a very long time. I'd always fall into a deep sleep from midnight at Ghadaffi's house, even when I had planned on studying, but that night, I managed to stay awake. Ghadaffi grew increasingly anxious with every moment that passed by. He kept asking me when I was planning on going to sleep, as if he was planning on doing something I had no knowledge of. Right after midnight struck, he decided that he'd go work in his study. I had no idea why, but I wasn't complaining. I managed to kneel down and pray, for the first time ever since I got married to that man. I prayed as if it was my very first prayer to God, for a good 10 minutes or so, I felt as if the pain I'd been feeling in my shoulders was slightly eased. I could feel a little more like myself again. I could feel the holy spirit enter my body again after a long while of not feeling connected to God and my ancestors. I managed to sleep, sleep like a baby. Indeed it was my birthday. Perhaps that was the real reason why I managed to pray, I don't know. I was

officially 20. My mother sent me a very nice message, and a few of my family members from Limpopo also called me. Mathilda was obviously one to send me the greatest message of all, and tag me on my Instagram. All that, apart from Ghadaffi. I didn't mind, he was rather annoying. He had his moments, though, but he was just not enough. I got dressed in a brand new dress I had bought myself. I went downstairs and found him already dressed, eating breakfast prepped for us by our chef.

Hazel: "Morning."

He took one good look at me, and was rather unimpressed.

Ghadaffi: "And that? Where did you get that dress?"

Hazel: "Oh, it is a small birthday present to myself. Do you like it?"

Ghadaffi: (angrily) "Are you trying to seduce men out there, Hazel?! I mean, you're going to a prison dressed like that?! Go fucking change before I lose my mind!"

I was so startled, that I quickly ran up the stairs. It was rather odd how he knew that it was the first day of my practicals at Polsmoor. I hadn't told him anything about that, since he never even asked. He shouted at me like I was some kind of toddler, on my birthday and it just broke me. I quickly changed my outfit and started hating dresses slowly from that day onwards. When I went downstairs, I had hoped that he was gone, but no, he was still there. I had gotten dressed in a jean, sneakers and Golf Tshirt.

Ghadaffi: "That's much better. I wouldn't want convicts drooling over my wife."

I kept quiet and started dishing out for myself.

Ghadaffi: "That's enough food. You need to watch your weight. We have a function to attend tonight. How on earth will you fit into that dress with you constantly stuffing your face with food?"

I was completely shattered. Each day of looking at his ugly face was a painful reminder that I had sold my soul. I seemingly lost my appetite right there.

Hazel: "I've lost my appetite. I'll see you later."

Ghadaffi: "I'm just stating the truth, you know. No one wants a fat wife – yellow bone or not."

I just took my bag and headed out. My heart was so broken, I was filled with so much heartache, but I refused to cry. I wouldn't see Mathilda until later, as I had to report for duty with Dr. Zwide. I found her right outside Campus parking and she said we could take her car.

Dr. Zwide: "How are you really doing? Happy birthday, by the way."

Hazel: "I'm doing fine. Thank you."

Dr. Zwide: "You do know that my door is always open, right?"

Hazel: (nodding) "Yes."

She never nagged or pestered me at all; she always waited for me to just come to her. That's what I loved about her. She was very patient. She decided to turn up the radio volume and Ami Faku's Ubuhle Bakho started playing. I hadn't heard that song in a very long time. It was Beast and I's song, which made me burst into tears.

Dr. Zwide: (surprised) "Hazel, are you okay? Did I say or do something wrong?"

Hazel: (crying) "No, no, you did nothing wrong. I'm just saddened, that's all."

Dr. Zwide: "Do you want to talk about it?"

Hazel: (shaking head) "Not now. I'd just like to be quiet for a while, if that's okay with you."

Dr. Zwide: "Of course. Check in the compartment. There are a few tissues in there."

Hazel: "Thank you."

I listened to the song attentively, as if it were the very first time. Little did I know that it was a sign. Once we got to the prison, my tears had completely dried out. Dr. Zwide asked me if I was okay yet again, and I reassured her that I was.

Thankfully, all I had to do with her that day, was shadow her while she had sessions with her prison clients. The moment we stepped out of the car, we could hear a few of them whistling from their cells. We were searched as per protocol and our cellphones were taken in. Apparently, we weren't allowed to have our phones in there. We walked through the long, halls and I could see so many prisoners in cells; some didn't even look like they belonged there. I was gripped with fear, but it wasn't so bad. I was a little excited to see what awaited me that day. It was an odd way to spend my birthday, but it had to be done. It was part of my course. We started off with one of her clients, who had come to her room. There was a guard right outside, sometimes he'd be inside the room with us, to keep tabs on the prisoners in case they started something funny. Whenever we had the juveniles, we sometimes had two guards

watching us. Those were apparently the worst as they were a bit violent. The first patient was 45 year old man, who was struggling to come to terms with going to prison for killing the man who raped his 7 year old daughter. The entire process that happened to his daughter, traumatized him more than being sent to prison. The justice system could be so unfair at times. Then we had the second one and third one, while I'd occasionally zone out and make my notes. Nothing prepared me for the one that was about to come in next.

Dr. Zwide: "Are you coping over there?"

Hazel: "Yes, it is just a little too much to take in."

Dr. Zwide: "I totally understand. The next patient just breaks my heart. I've been seeing him here ever since he came in. He's tried to commit suicide so many times, and all he ever talks about is his fiancée whom he never got to marry. He calls her his "Mkami"(wife). That's all I know about him; that's all he talks about."

I wasn't really paying much attention, but it sounded like a story a lot similar to love. Forbidden love, most probably. The moment the man walked in, dragging his feet, I only looked at him from the floor up. He seemed rather depressed, judging by the vibe. Something about his aura told me something, but I still didn't have the energy to look up. I mean, it had been a really tough day, and all the story I'd heard were enough to make me want to quit studying that field.

Dr. Zwide: "Ah, Bethuel, how are we doing today?"

My heart skipped a few beats when she called out his name. I refused to look up. "It can't be", I said to myself.

Beast: "Dr. Zwide, it's been a while."

Fuck, that voice. It was exactly like his. I looked up and I was stunned to see that it was Beast. He looked so frail, he had lost so much weight; he hadn't shaved his face in most probably months and his hair had grown so much.

Dr. Zwide: "How are you feeling today?"

Beast: (sigh) "Same old, same old. Same shit, just a different day, right?"

He didn't recognize me, most probably because he wasn't paying attention to me. I had changed my hair and hair colour completely; I wasn't dressed like the usual Hazel he knew. He didn't expect to see me sitting right across him behind prison walls, so of course he didn't notice me!

Dr. Zwide: "Tell me more."

Beast: "Today is a very special day, you know. It is her birthday today, she's turning 20."

Dr. Zwide: "How sure are you she's still alive?"

Beast: "My dreams tell me so. I know she is. For some odd reason, I can feel her around me right now, you know. Perhaps it is a soul connection, I don't know."

Dr. Zwide: “Well, perhaps my student here will remind you of what to look forward to in life. This is Hazel. She's my second year student who's currently busy with her practicals, so she'll be joining our sessions from time to time.”

It was at that moment when I moved hair out of my face, with tears in my eyes that he finally noticed me. Our eyes locked for a short while, and I could tell I was looking at my Beast. Sure, he was a broken version of him, but he was there. What were the odds? We were both silent for a while and our tears fell down at the same time. Something inside of me had been ignited once again.

Dr. Zwide: “I'm sorry, am I missing something here?”

Beast: “Hazel... is this really you?”

Dr. Zwide: “Do you two know one another?”

Beast: "This is her, Doctor. This is my Mkami (wife). She's the one I've been telling you about."

I cried so much, that I completely forgot we were in a prison, busy with a therapy session. I just jumped at him and hugged him for the longest time. I think somehow, that was the breakthrough Dr. Zwide needed from him, since she had been complaining that she hadn't been getting much from him. We both cried so much, it was surely a dream come true.

Hazel: (crying) "Oh, my God, Beast! Is this really you?! I thought that you'd left me! You called and said... you didn't want me any more."

Beast: (crying) "Mkami (my wife), I'd never leave you even if I had been forced to. Why would you even think such a thing? That would be a crime against humanity itself."

We completely forgot about Dr. Zwide for a moment, and I'm glad she let us be.

Dr. Zwide: "I'll give you two a few minutes – alone."

I didn't even worry about the guards, I was seeing my Beast right in front of me and it wasn't a dream. Talk about a real birthday gift. I hugged him over and over, and we kissed. It was so beautiful, unlike when Ghadaffi would kiss me. Beast was still pure of heart – despite being in that prison uniform.

Hazel: (teary) "What happened?"

Beast: (sigh) "I was on my way to fetch my family from KZN, when out of nowhere I get pulled up by the cops. I thought it was for a speeding ticket or something – even though I wasn't even driving past 120 km/h. I'd been unable to sleep as you could tell because we'd been texting the entire night through. It wasn't long when the cops got out of the car and instructed me to put my hands up. I asked them what for? What I'd done wrong and I was simply told that I was under arrest for murder."

My heart sank because I knew instantly they'd caught him for Raymond's murder. He murdered him – for me and he was paying the price.

Beast: “I was prepared to pay the price for it, as I'd told you, but something felt off to me the moment they threw me in that police van. My phone was taken away immediately and the two cops took their time, they were conversing with someone on the phone for about an hour before I was taken into questioning. I was asked for my phone pin and I was tortured – despite giving it to them. I demanded my rights to be read to me, but they weren't bothered. I demanded my phone call, but none was given to me. I couldn't call my lawyer, my family and not even you. I've been isolated the moment I got here. When I went to court, I expected to get a bail hearing, but instead I was sentenced just three days after being arrested. I didn't even get my statement taken. I knew then that someone was working over time to ensure that I am being kept from you.”

I couldn't believe my ears. Who the fuck had so much power?

Beast: “Not a day went by that I thought of you, Hazel. I couldn't eat, I couldn't even sleep. My worst fear was losing

you to someone else. I know someone is behind all this, I just don't know who. I've tried to enlist help from other prisoners, but I hardly even get time to see anyone. I'm always trapped in my cell and whenever I ask the guards for assistance, as it is my right, I get sent to solitary. It didn't take me long to crack, I have tried to kill myself numerous times, but my faith has kept me going. God has kept me going. Malachi has been visiting me in my dreams. All I could think of was you and I knew that I'd see you again, I just didn't know how soon."

Oh, shit. I felt so guilty at that moment. I knew that I'd fucked up and he was going to be devastated if he knew that I was married to Ghadaffi by then. I could never break his heart like that.

Beast: "You look so different, Sthandwa sami (my love). Your hair... you never straighten your hair and you never even wanted to dye it. It looks unique. I never figured it would be your style, though. You're still the beautiful Hazel I've always known."

Hazel: "I'm so happy I have found you, Beast. You look so worn out. Are you eating alright? We have to fix this."

Beast: "I've seen a few of my mates here in prison. All I need you to do is get in touch with my family. Let them know where I am and that I'm alright. I need you to try and get hold of my lawyer and get hold of Sporo for me. He'll know what to do."

I had no idea where to even start. I mean, if I'd started with his family, they weren't going to hesitate telling him everything. I was in a serious rut, honestly. How was I going to explain everything to him?

Hazel: (nodding) "Okay."

Beast: "But you need to be careful. I still have no idea who put me here and as to why I'm being kept from you like this. Are you alright? Are you taken care of? Is the bursary still paying for your accommodation and everything?"

Fuck

despite him being in that miserable situation, he still managed to think about me and my needs. I was such a horrible person. Beast deserved better than me, surely.

Hazel: “Yes, I'm alright. I'm just happy that you are okay. I've missed you so much.”

I didn't even bother telling him what had happened to his assets, I mean that wasn't important. I'd have crushed his spirit. Luckily we weren't allowed to wear jewellery whenever we went to the prison, so he didn't notice anything unusual.

Hazel: “Beast, I swear, I'll get you out of here. I promise.”

Beast: “I knew I'd count on you to wait for me, Hazel. I know, it must have been so hard, and your family most probably hates me for what happened and what they think I did to you, but you still held on.”

The guilt was eating away at me. Dr. Zwide came back after about 15 minutes.

Dr. Zwide: "Well, I'm sorry for interrupting. I'm glad you two have finally been acquainted with one another again."

Beast: "Yes, doctor. This is the love of my life, the one who's been the center of all my sessions with you."

Dr. Zwide looked at me and then back at Beast. I knew she was thinking what I was dreading.

Dr. Zwide: "I see. Well, I guess this is the breakthrough we were hoping for, Bethuel."

Beast: "Believe me, you have no idea. I'm the happiest man alive right now. Hazel, I'm so sorry I can't even give you the birthday you deserve today. Once I'm out of here, I swear, I'll make it all up to you."

Hazel: "Beast, don't you worry about that. All I need is for you to get back on your feet and be okay. You look so thin now, I'm very worried."

Beast: (chuckling) "I'm not afraid of a lot of things, you know, Doctor, but the one thing that would kill me is losing this beautiful woman over here."

Every time I felt that guilt-ridden, stabbing pain within my heart. I could hardly look at him. He was over joyed, while I was married – to another man.

Dr. Zwide: "That is very good. Well, at least now we can get her on your visitor's list then."

Beast: "No! I mean, no, not yet. Once the dust settles down and once I have all my ducks in a row, I'll most definitely get her on my list."

Dr. Zwide: "I see."

The guard knocked and entered without being told to. I immediately removed my hand from Beast's. I mean, they were

all watching – from everywhere according to him. I didn't want to get him into trouble.

Guard: “Time is up, Doc.”

Dr. Zwide: “Thank you, we'll be out in a second.”

I saw the way that guard looked at me and something told me it was not good.

Dr. Zwide: “I'll give you guys two minutes to say goodbye.”

I couldn't believe how time had flown so quickly. I'd just found my Beast and then it was time to say goodbye.

Beast: “Listen to me, Hazel, be very careful, okay. When driving, I want you to keep an eye on who might be following you. Don't come here until your next appointment with me. I need you to do what I've asked you, please.”

Hazel: "Okay."

Beast: "I love you, Hazel."

He kissed me and re-ignited all those feelings that had been buried away all those months. Goodness, I missed him so much. He got up and the guard put those cuffs around his wrists. I knew that it was back to reality. The guard gave me one look yet again and he left. I couldn't stop feeling like I was losing a piece of my heart all over again, with each step he took away from me. My heart was bleeding all over again, but I was consoling myself with the fact that he was alive and I still loved him irregardless. I knew that Dr. Zwide had quite a lot of questions. We walked out of the prison and took our belongings without saying one word to one another. The moment we got into the car, I expected the third degree from her, but she offered me lunch instead.

Dr. Zwide: "You must be famished. How about we go get something to eat before we head back to campus?"

Hazel: "Sounds like a plan."

Beast

From the moment I laid eyes on her and noticed that it was actually her, I couldn't believe it. Something within my heart was woken up yet again; something I thought had died a long time ago. I looked at her and noticed that she was a little different. She could barely look me in the eye, but what did I expect? I was not groomed properly and I was dressed in a prison uniform. That wasn't the exact ideal situation for someone to look at me like a knight in shining armour. I was too excited to see her and I didn't want to worry her fragile heart by telling her that I had a feeling Ghadaffi and Dragon were behind all of that. I wasn't angry about being arrested – no, but I was angry at the fact that I wasn't being treated like a citizen of my own country. My own rights were stripped away from me; I didn't have a fair trial and I couldn't even say goodbye to my woman and my family at least. I didn't get any phone calls like other prisoners, and I was always alone on a daily basis. It wasn't easy, but my faith kept me going. Now that I knew God was indeed on my side, I could relax a little bit. I couldn't even give Hazel the birthday she deserved; she looked a little thin, I mean she didn't have much weight, but she looked really frail. I felt so guilty knowing that I left her all alone

in a cruel world. I knew that one day, I'd get out of there and justice would be served for all the time I'd lost. I was rather puzzled when I wasn't taken to my cell immediately after my session with Dr. Zwide. I was taken to one of the visitor's rooms.

Beast: "Where are you taking me?"

Guard: "Shut up and keep walking."

I was used to the ill treatment, but it was nothing I couldn't cope with. Once I was in the room, I was thrown right into my chair, and I saw someone rather familiar, standing before me with his back facing me.

Ghadaffi: "Well, well, well, I see you still can't keep your hands off my woman, Beast."

I knew that voice from a mile away.

Beast: “Ghadaffi. I see you're still delusional. I guess I was right, you are the one who's keeping me under lock down in here.”

Ghadaffi: “Well, there's nothing money can't buy – not even your own girlfriend.”

Beast: (angrily) “Don't talk about Hazel like that.”

Ghadaffi: (chuckling) “Oh, you don't know, do you?”

Beast: (frowning) “Know what?”

Ghadaffi: “How could I expect that you'd even know? I mean, you're in a prison for crying out loud. You have no contact with the outside world whatsoever.”

Beast: “What the fuck are you talking about?”

He did something I never thought he was capable of; he took out his laptop from his bag. He opened it and showed me pictures that horrified me.

Beast: "Is this some kind of joke?"

Ghadaffi: (chuckling) "I wish, Beast. Your woman is now my wife."

I felt as if a gigantic dagger stabbed me right through my heart and was then ripped out of my chest yet again. My heart was literally bleeding; I lost my sight for a few seconds and I felt my ears ringing. That was some kind of mistake. He browsed through the pictures like it was some kind of slide show. There she was; my Hazel – dressed in traditional attire and then in a big, princess wedding gown. It wasn't even her style. Her family members were there, but I didn't spot her mother nor Bella in sight, but it was expected. The last time I checked, they still weren't on good terms. It felt so surreal, that I was instantly sweating. I had zoned out, staring at those pictures. The entire wedding wasn't even her style. She didn't even look happy. Perhaps it was photo shopped.

Beast: "You're lying. You photo shopped these to make it seem real. Hazel would never marry a guy like you."

Ghadaffi: (chuckling) "Well, then, why don't you ask her yourself the next time you see her? Oh, wait, that's right. You won't get to see her again because you're being transferred first thing tomorrow morning."

That couldn't be happening to me. I had just found my Hazel and now that motherfucker was toying with my life yet again.

Beast: "You wouldn't dare."

Ghadaffi: "Oh, yes, I have already dared. I have good contacts, you know. It's so amazing how even family can turn against their own. Guard, prepare him for tomorrow's transfer. You know what to do."

The last time I felt so much pain was when I was arrested and sentenced, when I couldn't even say goodbye to Hazel. It was happening again; was I that cruel to deserve such punishment?

Beast: (screaming) “You will pay for this, Ghadaffi! Mark my words!”

He was laughing, so unbothered. I knew that there was light at the end of the tunnel – eventually, but it was such a dark, long tunnel. I felt so helpless, so unheard. Why was God not being gracious to me? I tried pleading with the guard, but my plea fell on deaf ears.

Beast: (pleading) “Vader (Guard), please. Have mercy on me. Just one phone call. That's all I need.”

Guard: “I answer to those who pay me. Do you have money to pay me for that phone call? If not, get into your cell.”

I was stripped of everything and anything I ever knew. I had no idea what was happening with my businesses, with my family and seemingly, my fiancée was now my enemy's wife. What had my life become? Was I really such a horrible person? I was thrown into my cell like a dog. I felt so much pain in my chest, that I just wailed. I wept on that floor as if I had one more

minute left to live. My life was over; the agony was just too much. Prison, I could bear, but losing Hazel yet again – to Ghadaffi of all people, was something too painful for me.

Beast: (weeping) “Father God, why? Why? You sent me here for a reason, I get it. I am supposed to be punished for what I've done. I'm most definitely reaping what I've sown, but this is all too much. I can't contact any one; I am living like a dog on a leash. Yes, I've done my fair share of bad deeds, but I have never killed anyone without reason. Raymond was my very first kill and I don't regret it at all, for he could have killed Hazel. Why am I still living then if I have to undergo so much misery? Where is your mercy, oh, lord? Where's your grace? Ba ka Sibiya (The Sibiya's), o Sotobe (The Sotobe's), why have you deserted me?! Am I such a useless rat to you that you see no reason to protect your son?! My father has done worse – so much worse! Yet, he has never suffered the same fate or even half of what I'm going through right now. When will all this end?! Malachi, you promised me that there's light at the end of the tunnel. Where's that light now?! Your sister married my arch enemy! I'm still alive. Not a day went by that I didn't think of her, yet she felt it necessary to move on! I'm broken, I'm slowly dying inside. If this is what my life ought to be, then kill me. Just let me die in peace!”

I screamed out so loudly, and put my head in between my bent knees. I didn't even notice anything, until I looked up.

Malachi: “Bethuel, mfo (bro). I'm here – we're all here. We've never left you. I promised you and yes, it was not an empty promise.”

Beast: (crying) “I'm not fit for this, Malachi. Please, just take me with you. Being spirit seems far better than living in the flesh. I don't want to feel pain any more.”

Malachi: (shaking head) “Your destiny is far greater than the pain you're experiencing right now. You possess great power within you, Beast, and it is about to be unleashed. If you just hang onto your faith a little while longer, you will soon realize that you still have to deal with a demon you've been avoiding your entire life. You're about to change people's lives.”

Beast: “I don't want to change people's lives. I want peace in my life. I want Hazel.”

Malachi: “So much has been going on with Hazel – more than you'll ever know. If you know her, truly know her, you'll know that she'd never even marry Ghadaffi – let alone date him. Hang in there, I promise you, you will reach your destiny, far greater than you even expect.”

He just left me wailing on the ground like that. His presence always brought tranquillity to me, but all I could think of that evening, was the trauma Hazel had endured me. She didn't tell me the truth; it would have been far better hearing the truth from her than from Ghadaffi. The road to freedom was rather long, but it was on the way. Nothing worthy has ever come easily.

2 Corinthians 5:7 - “For we walk by faith, not by sight.”

“Happiness is not by chance, but by choice.” – Jim Rohn

Hazel

I felt so much at ease knowing that Beast was alive and that I finally got to see him. He looked so bad, but at least he was still alive. I could only imagine the kind of shit that went through his mind the entire time he had been in there. Dr. Zwide had taken me to lunch, but I got the feeling she wanted to know what really happened between Beast and I. We went to a nearby restaurant, but somehow, I got the feeling that I was being watched. It was a strange feeling, but I just felt that way.

Dr. Zwide: “So, do you mind telling me what is going on?”

Hazel: (sigh) “Beast is – was my fiancé. The man I was always telling you about. He pulled me through the darkest times in my life, and we were about to get married last year, when he never pitched.”

I explained the entire story to her and the events leading up to the lobola negotiations which never occurred. She listened attentively, of which I truly appreciated. She always had a good ear and I was thankful that she wasn't making notes, but was listening as a friend.

Dr. Zwide: "I see. And what happened to him? How did he end up there? I mean, he seemed rather suicidal and didn't even get any visitors."

Hazel: (deep sigh) "I have never told you this, but he killed someone – for me. Raymond is – was the guy who tried to rape me at a party I had gone to with my friends. He attacked me really badly, and luckily Beast was waiting for me outside. He was fuming when he saw me bleeding, with my clothes torn. I thought he was just going back into the house to teach him a lesson on how to treat a lady, but then, he killed him. No one ever knew it was him, though. He had always said that a day would come for him to pay for his sins and that he was ready. Weeks leading up to the negotiations, he kept saying to me should anything happen to him, I'd have to move on. He wanted me to promise him that. It was as if he knew what was coming. I refused to promise him that. I didn't want to give up on someone who was my soul mate – someone who loved me

unconditionally. He taught me how to accept myself, you know. Now, I have failed him – dismally. I married someone while he was still missing. I should be ashamed of myself.”

Dr. Zwide: “No, there's nothing to be ashamed of here, Hazel.”

Hazel: (teary) “You know what's the shitty part? I don't even know why I married him, besides him having to pay for my mother's hospital bills. I mean, where would I find the money to pay for all her chemo therapy and surgeries, hospital stay and physiotherapy?”

Dr. Zwide: “This is quite a lot to take in in a very short space of time, Hazel. What is Beast's story? I mean, he didn't divulge much, other than the fact that he just wanted to see you, but he wasn't allowed to.”

Hazel: “He says that he was arrested and from there onwards, he was sent to Polsmoor and sentenced within three days. He had no legal counsel, no bail hearing, no fair trial even. He is constantly in solitary, and is not allowed to have any visitors or even make phone calls.”

Dr. Zwide: (frowning) “Hazel, how well do you know your husband?”

Hazel: (shaking head) “Not well at all. I don't know much about him. Why?”

Dr. Zwide: “You just need to be very careful of him. He's really not what he seems to be.”

That sounded like a stern warning. She spoke as if she knew him personally.

Hazel: “Do you know him, personally?”

Dr. Zwide: “Just be careful. I can't talk to you about such things in public. Watch your every move. I just don't think that you marrying him was just a convenience for him. Someone put Beast behind bars for one reason and one reason only – to get even and most importantly; to get him away from you. He can't

kill him because that would make you slip into a much deeper depression and you won't have the time to fall for him.”

Hazel: “Dr. Zwide, you're speaking in riddles. What are you saying?”

Dr. Zwide: “That's all I'm willing to say. Just be very careful, Hazel. I care about you. Whenever you need to talk, come to my office. Be very weary of your surroundings. How well do you know your driver?”

I was starting to grow very anxious. She was speaking to me like some sort of undercover spy agent.

Hazel: “Not that well.”

Dr. Zwide: “Are you aware he has been following you? He literally hovers around Campus until you call him to come and pick you up. Now, you tell me if you think that your husband is a sane man after that.”

I was starting to feel like I was losing my mind. Was she trying to tell me that Ghadaffi was more dangerous than I thought he was?

Dr. Zwide: “He's been following you all day today. Your husband probably knows you were at the prison today, and he most probably knows you saw Beast and know he is alive. So, from now on, be very careful. If you want to contact his family, get a burner phone or a phone that your husband won't know about. Start hanging out with Mathilda more often if you want to do your things in private. Do not tell your husband about today – no matter what he says.”

I just listened attentively, hoping that I'd get everything to stick in my brain. It was just so much information to handle all at once. We didn't even get to touch our food much.

Dr. Zwide: “Don't worry, there is always light at the end of the tunnel. You just need to act normal, and most importantly, enjoy your birthday, okay?”

That seemed a lot harder than she put it. I mean, my life was a literal mess, and it had only just begun. We had to finish eating, because it seemed as if Drew was indeed following me. So, Ghadaffi didn't trust me enough to be left alone? That was just creepy. After our brief lunch, she took me back to campus. I couldn't even tell Mathilda what had happened yet, because I also feared that her life might have been in danger. I was starting to connect the dots and believe that Ghadaffi was the one who put Beast behind bars. Who else had the power to get him to stay there that long without any outside contact or a lawyer? Something big was brewing and it made me scared – petrified, actually.

Mathilda: “Hey, there. How was your first day of practicals?”

Hazel: “It was... interesting, actually. Prison is not so bad, hey. People have it rough.”

Mathilda: “Well, mine was actually not too bad at all, really. I mean

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school kids go through the worst trauma one can imagine, hey. Imagine killing someone at the tender age of 13. Life can suck, hey.”

Hazel: “Totally, anyway, what are we doing today?”

Mathilda: “Well, it's your birthday. So, you tell me.”

Hazel: “How about a pamper session and some drinks? I mean, we can even go wine tasting. Somewhere quite far.”

Mathilda: “Say no more. I know this really nice place. I actually have membership there.”

Hazel: “Thank goodness. Shall we go now?”

Mathilda: “Well, you're the birthday girl, so today is all about saying yes to you.”

We got into her car and she drove off. The entire time, I couldn't help but keep looking out the window. I truly felt as if I was being followed, and just as Dr. Zwide had said, I spotted Drew's car two cars behind Mathilda's. That made me grow really suspicious. Was I that ignorant the entire time? Had Ghadaffi known my entire moves? He didn't waste time and called me.

Hazel: "Hey."

Ghadaffi: "Hey, baby. Where are you?"

Well, he most probably knew the answer to that question already. He just wanted to hear what I was going to say.

Hazel: "Oh, just taking a drive to the mall for some shopping and pamper treatments with Mathilda. Why?"

Ghadaffi: "Just asking. Pamper treatments on a Tuesday?"

Hazel: "It's my birthday. You forgot, didn't you?"

Ghadaffi: (chuckling nervously) "I'd never forget such a day, baby, come on now. I mean, why else would I have told you about tonight's function? See, now, you made me ruin the surprise."

He was lying right through his teeth. He had honestly forgotten about my birthday. That sly fuck.

Hazel: "I see."

Ghadaffi: "Don't be late, enjoy yourselves. Okay?"

Hazel: "Fine."

Ghadaffi: "I love you."

I hung up before I could even respond. I needed Mathilda to ditch Drew's car before he started reporting to Ghadaffi on where exactly I was headed.

Hazel: "Hey, do you perhaps know of a short cut to that place? I mean, it is an all exclusive spa, right?"

Mathilda: "Well, yes. They mostly work with appointments and membership only. Why?"

Hazel: "No reason. I'm just so excited, I can't wait."

Mathilda: "Well, in that case, let me take a short cut then."

She didn't hesitate to swerve and before Drew could follow us, the robot had closed and he was left right behind one of the cars before him. I managed to breathe out a sigh of relief.

Mathilda: "Are you alright?"

Hazel: "Oh, honey. After the day I've had, I'm more than alright. Speaking of which, you still have that delivery service, right?"

Mathilda: "Yes, why?"

Hazel: "I'd like to order a new phone. Nothing fancy."

Mathilda: (sigh) "Well, if you want to ruin a surprise, you could have just said so. I bought you a new phone for your birthday, dummy. It's in the boot."

Hazel: (surprised) "Friend, you honestly didn't have to buy me a brand new phone."

Mathilda: "I believe thank you is the correct response."

Hazel: (chuckling) "You know what I mean, man. Thank you, boo. I really appreciate it, but I was hoping you'd order me a normal phone, you know, one without internet connection and so on."

Mathilda: (surprised) "You mean a burner phone?"

Hazel: "Something like that."

Mathilda: "What on earth do you need a burner for? Is there something you want to tell me?"

Hazel: "No reason, I just need one. Can you get me one, please?"

Mathilda: "I don't understand why you won't just go to the shop and buy one, but hey, I guess you'll tell me when you're ready."

Hazel: (smiling) "Thank you. See why I love you?"

Mathilda: "Yeah, yeah."

I was so relieved to see no one following us any more. I really needed to be more observant, honestly.

Ghadaffi

Hazel was trying to play me for a fool. Firstly, she went to Polsmoor without alerting me and without her driver, then she went to lunch with Dr. Zwide. I bet that bitch told her a lot of things. I needed to keep an eye on her. I hated people like her; people who just could never keep to themselves and stay out of people's business. She knows too fucking much. I had to deal with Beast fast before Hazel started going rogue on me. I thought she and I were fine, and she just had to go do that shit. I called Drew for an updated status on my wife's whereabouts, only for him to bore me even more than I already was.

Ghadaffi: “Drew, what's the status on my wife? Where is she now?”

Drew: “Eish (Oh), boss. I lost her.”

Ghadaffi: (shocked) “What do you mean you lost her?! I don't pay you to lose her, I pay you to keep tabs on her!”

Drew: “Yes, I was on the right track behind them and all, but some fucker stopped right in front of me and now, I have no idea where she even is.”

Ghadaffi: “Have you tried tracking her phone?”

Drew: “It seems to be off. I'm trying.”

Ghadaffi: “Keep trying. Update me in fifteen minutes.”

I hung up. Something didn't feel right. What the fuck did Beast tell her? Better yet, what did Zwide tell her? I needed to send that bitch a message before she messed up my plans. I couldn't have that – no ways. Hazel was mine and I intended on keeping it that way.

Proverbs 3:5 – 6 - “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.”

“Hope can be a powerful force. Maybe there’s no actual magic in it, but when you know what you hope for most and hold it like a light within you, you can make things happen, almost like magic.” – Laini Taylor

Hazel

Mathilda and I finally made it to the spa. We were welcomed with a proper complimentary French breakfast and a very nice glass of champagne. I hadn't had such great tasting croissants in my life before. They were so soft as if I were literally digesting a good amount of air. From there onwards, we proceeded to changing into our complimentary robes and slippers, and we got our hair washed. We started off with our full house massages; hot stone therapy, body waxes, hot water therapy and the best relaxation facial I'd ever received. It felt so good and rather nostalgic. Beast and I always enjoyed going to the spa together. He'd always say that once we were married and he had enough money to afford the biggest mansion in the country, he'd build me an in-house spa, so that I didn't have to travel very far to get pampered. Mathilda would occasionally ask me why I was smiling out of nowhere from

time to time, but I just couldn't tell her yet. I didn't want to jinx it all. I felt a great sense of hope within me and every minute that passed by was rather agonizing. We finally had the time to get our manicures and pedicures.

Mathilda: "This is so relaxing, don't you think?"

Hazel: "Oh, friend. You have no idea how much at peace I feel right now. I truly needed this."

Mathilda: "Oh, yes, you did. I pray for nothing but new and greater blessings to come your way this year. You deserve so much happiness."

Hazel: "Speaking of happiness, you seem to be glowing a lot more than usual. Is there anything you would like to tell me?"

Mathilda: (blushing) "No, there's nothing really."

Hazel: "Are you sure?"

Mathilda: “Yes, if I had anything to tell, believe me you'd be the very first one to know.”

I still suspected she had a lot to tell, but I decided not to pry. She'd tell whenever she was ready. While we were getting the finishing touches of our nails done, she received a call.

Mathilda: “Hazel, the phone has arrived. One of the staff members is bringing it now.”

I felt so excited.

Hazel: “Thank you so much, Mathilda. I owe you one.”

The moment the woman brought the phone, I couldn't hesitate any longer.

Hazel: “I need to do something really quickly before we get to have lunch. If that's okay with you.”

Mathilda: "Go, I still need to get my nails finished up. I'll wait."

She was understanding, really. I left her there and proceeded outside. I quickly got the phone ready and thankfully, it arrived with a sim card as well. I looked for Brenda's number on my usual phone and took a deep breath before dialling. I was nervous, I won't lie, but I had to do it. Who knew what else Beast was going through at that prison? After a few rings, I was getting hopeless, but she finally answered, hesitantly.

Brenda: "Brenda Sibiya."

Hazel: (nervously) "He... Hello, Brenda. It's me... Hazel."

Brenda: (irritably) "Oh, are you stalking me now?"

Hazel: "No, I-"

Brenda: (interrupting) “Then why are you calling me with a different number?”

Well, I was trying to explain that she had blocked me, but she was still so angry at me, she barely gave me a chance to explain.

Brenda: “Oh, you just can't stay away, can you? It's bad enough you decided to give up on my brother, but now you are married to another guy. So please, Hazel, live your life and leave me the fuck alone.”

Hazel: “Brenda, please wait, I-”

She hung up on me without even allowing me to speak further. I decided to try calling again, but after a few rings, I figured she had blocked me because it only rang once and then I wasn't connected anymore. I was heart-broken, I won't lie, but I promised Beast I'd get him the help he needed. I took the chance and sent her a message, even though I knew that I was blocked. Blocked messages still appeared in a person's spam folder, so surely she'd have read it one way or another. I cut to

the chase and started typing the message. “Hi, Brenda, I firstly would like to apologize for doing whatever I have done to you and your family. I know, I have no right to justify my actions, but this is hardly the time. I contacted you because Beast is in prison – here in Polsmoor. I don't know how he got here, but he says that he can't contact anyone – he is not allowed to, so which means someone with really serious connections is hiding him from all of us. I would like to ask you to tread carefully, get a lawyer or something before you decide to go see him. He's alright, but fragile and has lost a lot of weight. I know, you'll think that this is me looking for attention, but do what you must with this information. All I know is that I won't give up on him – even though you all think I have.” I left it at that, though I felt like typing more. I pressed the send button, and decided to switch off my phone. I didn't want any further disturbances on my birthday, I mean, I did have a day to spend with my best friend after all. As I walked back, I found Mathilda already on the balcony with lunch waiting for me. She was sipping on champagne, waiting for me.

Mathilda: “Finally, you came back.”

Hazel: “Sorry, I hope I didn't take too long.”

Mathilda: “Not really, I literally just sat here about twenty seconds ago.”

Hazel: “That's a relief. I don't want you to think that I'm neglecting you on a day you had planned all for me. I must say, this is the most beautiful lodge I've ever visited, Mathilda. Thank you so much.”

Mathilda: “It's nothing, that's what friends are for, man.”

I sensed she wanted to ask me something

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but she didn't want to pry much.

Mathilda: “So, how's it going with Monster-in-law?”

Hazel: (sigh) “That one. I haven't seen her in a while, which is actually a good thing. She's just too much, although she calls a

lot. Whenever I don't answer her calls, she tells Ghadaffi about it and he scolds me. It's a bit draining.”

Mathilda: “I can imagine. I mean, you're a lot stronger than I am, I'd have most definitely killed myself. How's your mom?”

Hazel: “She's getting better, although I haven't seen her in a while, we do talk from time to time. I miss her, though. My life seems to be getting more complicated by the day.”

Mathilda: (frowning) “What do you mean?”

Hazel: (nervously) “Oh, I'm just saying. Like, I get the feeling Ghadaffi isn't whom he is said to be, you know, like he has so much to hide.”

Mathilda: (sigh) “Well, I'm glad you raised that issue, because I've been wanting to tell you something.”

My heart skipped a beat for a while. That didn't sound very positive.

Mathilda: “You know how my father is into business and has a lot of clients from all work fields, right? So, one time I went home, I saw Ghadaffi there. I mean, my father can be a rather shady guy, and dealing with Ghadaffi means that they obviously know each other. I saw him hand my dad a big bag of cash. I'm telling you, something is not right with this guy. I can just feel it within my gut.”

That raised an even bigger alarm for me. What on earth was Ghadaffi into that I had no idea of?

Mathilda: “All I am saying is that you'd better start praying harder girl, more especially if you still had hopes of ever seeing Beast again.”

I blushed immediately when she mentioned his name. I didn't know what the future held, but all I knew is that I was sure to be in Beast's arms again – one way or another.

Ghadaffi

I was left feeling so frustrated when Dave couldn't tell me where Hazel was. I mean, what kind of driver was he to lose her? I employed him to keep me updated about her whereabouts no matter what! That wasn't a clever move from him. I literally had my phone glued to me, and it was rather frustrating. That time, I just couldn't even control myself, despite having to meet a new potential client who'd take my business to the next level. I was agitated, but business was business. My father had flown specially from Pretoria to be my anchor, as always. And so, my mother also flew with him to be here for Hazel's birthday. I wasn't going to lie, I had forgotten about that right up until she mentioned it that morning. Marriage was hard, and being married to Hazel seemed to be harder than I thought. It felt like I just couldn't keep her happy at all.

Dragon: "Will you take your phone away? It's rude to keep staring at your phone while in the middle of a business meeting."

Ghadaffi: “Eish, Papa (father), I know, I'm sorry. It's just that, Dave hasn't been keeping me posted about Hazel's whereabouts.”

Dragon: “Enough about that. If you keep obsessing about that girl like this, you'll end up losing focus. We can't afford you to lose this client.”

He was right. I had to get my shit together. Before I knew it, my potential client had just arrived.

Phil: “Good day, gentlemen. You must be the Mashile's. Like father, like son, I've heard so much about you.”

Dragon: (smiling) “Mr. Ferreira, it is such an honour to finally meet you.”

Phil: “Please, do accept my apologies for being a few minutes late. I hardly am late for anything in my life.”

Dragon: "Oh, no, we completely understand. You're a busy man."

Phil: "You must be Brandon Mashile. The infamous Ghadaffi. I've heard so much about you, hence I've been dying to do business with you."

Ghadaffi: "Yes, Mr. Ferreira, you're absolutely right. I just have a question, though."

Phil: "Do ask."

Ghadaffi: "Why me? I mean, your network is big enough to cover the entire South Africa. Why choose me?"

Phil: "Why not you? I mean, you have your hands in almost every single pie in this country and I also want a piece of it."

He and my father chuckled briefly, but I just couldn't help but stare at him. He reminded me of someone. It was quite odd, but I just couldn't pin point it, really. He and my father engaged

in conversation for a while, meanwhile I couldn't help but stare at my phone. It was really frustrating not being able to get hold of Hazel, but I just couldn't help it.

Phil: "I'm sorry, you seem rather pre-occupied, Mr. Mashile. Perhaps we could reschedule this meeting for another time?"

Ghadaffi: "Oh, I'm sorry about that. It's just that – my wife..."

Phil: "Oh? I saw in the papers that you recently got married. Congratulations by the way. She looks like a real gem."

Ghadaffi: (chuckling) "Thanks, she's someone you wouldn't want to show off, hey. "

Phil: (grinning) "Hmm. Is she okay?"

Ghadaffi: “Yes, she's fine – well, I think. You see, I assigned a driver to her, but he somehow lost her location. So, I have no idea where she is at this moment.”

Phil: “Hmm, your driver sounds rather incompetent, I must say. If you are looking for a good one, I could refer one to you.”

Why would I have said no to someone with so many contacts?

Ghadaffi: “That would be really great, Mr. Ferreira. I'd truly appreciate it.”

Phil: “Well, now that that's out of the way, how about I buy you two gentlemen a drink?”

I couldn't say no. My network was about to get bigger, all thanks to Phillip Ferreira. He found me when I least expected it and I knew that I was doing something right for one of South Africa's most prominent men to have wanted to poach me for business.

Proverbs 16:9 - “The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps.”

“Fate is like a strange, unpopular restaurant filled with odd little waiters who bring you things you never asked for and don't always like.”

— Lemony Snicket

Ghadaffi

I had such a fulfilling meeting with Phillip Ferreira. The more I got to read up on him, the more I became absolutely obsessed with doing business with him. That man could open so many doors for me. I did invite him over for Hazel's surprise birthday party, but he declined saying he had business to do. It was expected, though, but I had hoped that he would have been around. Having him at my house would have meant such a huge networking move, and since the media would be there, I needed to up my game. Okay, sure, it was actually one of my business evenings, but I had to make Hazel feel a little special by making it seem it was her party. On that note, I tried calling her while on my way back home, and she still hadn't been answering her phone.

I was left so frustrated, moreover when Dave told me he still couldn't find her after all those hours, I chose to fire him with immediate effect. I mean, he was useless and I had hoped that the driver Phillip was going to assign to me, was going to be much better than Dave. I was agitated; I couldn't focus on anything not knowing where my wife was. I couldn't even think of anything else, but I had a feeling that that bitch Zwide told her something about me. So, I decided to make a quick call. I didn't want anything or anyone standing in my way.

Ghadaffi: "It's me. I'll be sending you someone's location. I need you to send a very stern message to her. Simply tell her to stay away from my wife if she knows what's good for her."

I didn't want anyone messing up with my life. Hazel was mine and mine to keep. I had already gotten rid of Ghadaffi, so why on earth would I let someone as small as Zwide get in my way? She wasn't about to do that shit to me. I arrived home to find my mother had prepared everything.

Melita: "Oh, thank goodness you have finally arrived, Brandon! What's the point of having a wife when your entire house looks like such a shitty mess?!"

Ghadaffi: “Not now, Ma. I need to get ready for tonight.”

Melita: “Hmm, shouldn't she have been here to help you prepare?”

Ghadaffi: “It's her birthday, Mama. Come on. Give me some space.”

I chose to leave her talking to herself downstairs, while I went up to my bedroom. Hazel was seriously frustrating me, and when I was left frustrated, it meant that I was running a risk of having the inner beast in me getting unleashed. I could feel myself panting. I couldn't stop. I called her over and over – every minute, even though the phone went straight to Voicemail. The more I called and the more voicemail messages I kept receiving on the other end of the line, the angrier I became. I was baying for blood, but I had to try and contain myself. I could feel my body temperature rising. I stared in the mirror and found that my teeth had already started to change. That meant I needed to eat raw meat. I couldn't help it. My mother didn't even know. I had to do something. I quickly went downstairs and luckily she wasn't there. I took

some raw liver from the freezer, and headed back to my bedroom. I indulged in my meal and waited, impatiently for my wife to arrive home. Mkhulu promised me that she'd love me, but I still hadn't seen any love from her side. I had no idea what the fuck I was doing wrong, and I was left frustrated. I just had to hope that she'd make it home on time. I had been saying that I didn't like that friend of hers. She even wanted to sleep over at her place, of which I refused. I didn't marry a woman to let her sleep at her friends' places.

Hazel

My birthday was so great. Mathilda gave me my new phone and I fell absolutely in love with it. I had even forgotten that I switched off my phone, and I left it that way. I delayed going back home to that depressing place, and being around Mathilda was really peaceful to my soul. She always brought out the best in me, and since she literally was the only friend I had, it was understandable why I enjoyed spending so much time with her. She truly was one in a million. After the spa date, I really didn't want to go home so soon.

Mathilda: "So, I suppose I should drop you off at home, huh?"

Hazel: "Actually, I was hoping you and I could go out for a little while."

Mathilda: "You know that we never go clubbing. Are you sure?"

Hazel: "Yes, it's my birthday, Mathilda, come on. I just want us to have some fun and break out of our shells for once."

Mathilda: "Okay, but we're only going to spend three hours max and then head back to my place. Okay?"

Hazel: (smiling) "Thank you! Step on it, will you?"

We played all our favourite songs and sang along to them. I hadn't been able to let go like that for the first time in a very long time. I felt so free, so much at peace as if my life had returned back to normal. I couldn't even explain the joy I felt within. We initially wanted to go to Club Coco, but it would only open at 10pm, so we decided to do a little club

hopping. We went from The Pink Candy Night Club, to District and finally ended up at Club Coco. By then, we had painted Cape Town so red, that we were so much on cloud 9. Mathilda seemed to have been known by almost every club we went to, specifically Club Coco. She was greeted personally and so was I because I was tagging along with her. We were assigned one of the VIP areas, and a bouncer never left our sight from the moment we walked into that club. A special bar tender was assigned to us, so we never had to go to the bar to order drinks ourselves.

Hazel: “Hmm, please do tell me why you and I are getting special treatment as of this moment?”

Mathilda: (smiling) “It's no big deal, but my father has a few shares almost everywhere in Cape Town.”

That explained it all.

Hazel: “Oh, is that why you are never afraid of driving at night?”

Mathilda: (chuckling) “You of all people know I've come a long way, but yes, something like that. Besides the fact that I've done advanced driving, my father has assigned quite a few people to watch me wherever I go.”

Hazel: (shocked) “You mean you have body guards?”

Mathilda: (nodding) “Yes. He's protecting his assets, since well he doesn't have a son, he thinks I will be next in line to carry on with his legacy. He wasn't too happy with me studying psychology, but he let me be.”

Hazel: “Wow, I could never live my life like that, I mean, knowing that someone is watching my every move. I mean, is that why you don't date?”

Mathilda: (laughing) “No, I'm not dating because I haven't met the right guy as of yet. But, having bodyguards would most definitely not stop me from dating. You say that you wouldn't be able to live like that, what makes you think that Ghadaffi hasn't hired anyone to report your every move?”

I started having palpitations the moment she said that.

Hazel: (surprised) "What do you mean?"

Mathilda: "I mean, haven't you noticed Dave never leaves your sight? He's always hovering around Campus."

I suddenly became weary of Ghadaffi. Could he really have had Dave follow me nearly everywhere? Dr. Zwide might have been right.

Hazel: (shaking head) "No, I haven't noticed."

I could see she felt as if she had said quite too much.

Mathilda: "Oh, I'm sure I must have not seen clearly. Anyway, let's forget about Ghadaffi for now and focus on tonight, shall we?"

I decided to let it be and forget about my life's problems for a while. After a short while, Pleasure and a few friends of his came to join us. They were allowed to sit with us, and ever since my brief conversation with Mathilda, I became sober minded and I could be much more vigilant. How ignorant could I have been? Had I been so blinded that I couldn't see I was being watched – always? I could suddenly see a few big men dressed casually looking our way. Those must have been Mathilda's body guards – or mine. I couldn't tell any more. I started thinking about Ghadaffi. Was he that crazy, that obsessed about me, though? What if he was the person who put Beast behind bars? Or might it have been Dragon? Beast did fuck him over once upon a time and now that my brother was no more, Beast was left to face the music alone. So many thoughts were going through my mind, and I hadn't even realized how much I had been drinking. I was safe, because Pleasure was around and so was Mathilda.

Pleasure: “Hey, doll face. Don't tell me you already miss that crazy husband of yours.”

Hazel: (chuckling) “I guess everyone thinks he's crazy, huh?”

Pleasure: “Well, if you don't think a drug lord being disguised as a prominent lawyer is crazy, then I don't know what is.”

I was so flabbergasted, that I felt my heart drop right to the pit of my stomach at that present moment. I must have frozen for a moment and stared at Pleasure, but with all the flashing lights, the buzzing music and the alcohol that kept flowing, he didn't seem to notice the shock I had written all over me. What had I gotten myself into? I felt myself tremble for a minute, over ridden with fear. I had sacrificed my soul for my mother and sister and her children. What had my life become? You know how you seem to feel like vomiting or having sudden diarrhoea when you are extremely shocked? That's exactly how I felt soon afterwards. My stomach was turning, my mind was running wild with a million thoughts of what once was, what was at that present moment and what was to come. I couldn't shake the feeling that something awful was about to happen to me. I didn't know my so called husband; sure, I didn't love him, but I never expected to be married to an atrociously bad man.

Mathilda: (frowning) “Hey, are you alright?”

Hazel: “Ye... yes. I just need the bathroom really quickly. My stomach feels a bit funny.”

Mathilda: “Must be all the cocktails. Slow down a little. Go, one of the bouncers will keep an eye on you. Don't worry, you're safe.”

I nodded and proceeded to walk to the bathroom. Indeed one of the big, scary men followed me and waited for me right outside the ladies toilet. The moment I got into the toilet, my stomach decided to react and everything I had consumed that day came right back up. I didn't vomit out of being too intoxicated, but I vomited due to panic and severe agitation. I sat on the toilet seat contemplating my life, and I decided to switch on my phone and call the one person I felt could understand my feelings a lot better. I ignored all the messages that came flooding through my phone and made the call.

Binah: “Hello, my baby. Are you well?”

Hazel: (teary) “Hi, mama. I'm great, how are you doing?”

Binah: "I'm doing much better, thank you. It's just that the pain can be a bit severe some times. Chemo can be really rough on a person's body. Did you get my text this morning? I've been so out of it with all the medication being pumped into my body."

Hazel: "Yes, I did."

I couldn't help but cry. I felt so bad adding my problems onto my mother's already long list, but I couldn't take it any more.

Binah: "Are you crying, Hazel? What's wrong? Talk to me, please."

Hazel: (crying) "Mama, I think I've made a big mistake. I shouldn't have married Ghadaffi."

Binah: (sigh) "I'm so sorry, my baby. I regret allowing you to meet that man."

Hazel: "I only did it for you, and for Bella, and the kids. I had no idea how I was going to pay for all the hospital bills and take care of us at the same time. I had no choice."

Binah: (shocked) "Wait, did he force you to marry him in exchange for money?"

Hazel: "Sort of. I agreed in any case, Mama. Otherwise you wouldn't have survived everything."

I heard my mother wail, though she was so weak, I heard her cry so loudly. I hadn't heard her cry like that ever since I was born.

Hazel: "I'm so sorry, Mama. I shouldn't have done that, but I did it for you."

Binah: "Hazel, you shouldn't have done that. You shouldn't have sacrificed yourself like that. You should have just let me die. I fear for what is coming your way, my baby. What have I gotten you into?"

Hazel: "Mama, this is all me – it isn't your fault."

Binah: "I need to tell you something, please. How soon can you come see me? I need to speak to you in person."

I had so much on my plate, one of them being getting Beast out of prison.

Hazel: "I'll come as soon as I can, Ma. I am just dealing with a lot right now and then there's school. Plus, I'm doing my practicals at the prison, so I can't afford to leave as yet."

Binah: (shocked) "Wait, you have been to Polsmoor?"

Hazel: "Yes, why?"

Binah: "Hazel, please, listen to me. Whatever you do, don't go back there."

Hazel: "Relax, Ma. It is for school. I promise you, I'm safe."

Binah: "Hazel, you don't understand - "

I heard the bouncer call out my name and I knew I had to get out before my friends started worrying about me.

Hazel: "Mama, I have to go. I'll speak to you tomorrow. I promise."

Binah: "Hazel, wait."

I hung up before the guy wanted to come in. I reassured him that I was fine and had some lady problems. I just put my phone back into my pocket and walked out of the bathroom. I went back to my friends and felt a little better after talking to my mother. The only thing that kept me going was the fact that she was getting treatment and she was a lot better.

Binah

The past few months had been so much hell for me. I hadn't been able to sleep, eat, or even go to the toilet as I used to before I got ill. Seeing the thing that Ghadaffi changed into that day he came to my house, scared the living daylights out of me. Never in my wildest dreams did I ever think that I was selling my daughter to the devil. Yes, I was greedy at first and I just wanted to keep living a good life. I didn't think that Hazel would mind marrying Ghadaffi. He was as ugly as they came, but he was wealthy and a prominent lawyer, I thought that it would do her good and I wanted the status that came with it. The moment I started growing a conscience, I developed the love I should have had for my daughter the moment she was born. I regretted so many of my choices, and now

I was stuck in a hospital bed, with my back broken by the very same animal I had sold my daughter to. I was being kept alive by the very same animal's money – at the cost of my daughter. I hadn't been able to sleep because my mother and father had been visiting me in my dreams – endlessly. I had finally been served my punishment on a silver platter, and it had been eating away at me. Day in, day out, I'd been praying to God to take me. I didn't even mind ending up in hell, just as long as I didn't have to live another second on this earth. My life had become so empty, as if my entire life's choices were

playing before me like a bloody movie. I was being tortured, and I surely deserved it. I needed to tell my daughter everything, even if it meant her hating me forever. After her call, I just became restless and my body became ridden with pain all over again. Just as I was about to switch off my phone, for peace of mind, Ghadaffi's call came right through. I knew very well what awaited me if I chose not to answer it.

Binah: (trembling) "Hello."

Ghadaffi: "Don't fuck with me, Binah! Where the fuck is your daughter?!"

Binah: (shakily) "I... I don't know, Brandon. She was having fun with her friend for her birthday, the last time I checked."

Ghadaffi: "Are you trying to fuck me over, Binah?! We had a deal, remember?!"

Binah: (teary) “Brandon, please. You already married her. So, why do you want to make her life a living hell? This is not what I signed up for.”

Ghadaffi: “You saw what I can become, didn't you?”

Just thinking about whatever he changed into made me cringe.

Ghadaffi: “Your silence means it is a definite yes. Your fucking daughter is messing with me. I have people awaiting her presence here and she is out there clubbing with men at Club Coco! You'd better do me a favour and try to get hold of her since she's ignoring my calls! You'd better make sure that she doesn't set foot at Polsmoor any more, if you know what's good for you.”

Binah: (crying) “Please, just kill me, Brandon! Just do it.”

Ghadaffi: “No, I'll kill those you love most. I'll start with Bella, but no, that wouldn't make too much impact. How about I start with pretty little Jenny?”

Binah: "You wouldn't dare!"

Ghadaffi: "Try me. The beast in me loves feasting off little children's blood. You'd better do what we agreed on, Binah, if you know what's good for you."

He hung up on me while I just cried. I cried so much that no tears came out of me any more. My body was in so much pain, it felt as if it was literally being split into two. I had nothing further to do, but to pray. Illness is something else, it forces you to become closer to God. It forces you to do what you have been avoiding, it forces you to face your fears and your demons all at the same time. One minute you see the light at the end of the tunnel, the next you can feel yourself slipping away.

Binah: (crying) "Oh, God, why? Why me? Why now? Why all the suffering? Yes, I've wronged you so many times, but why? Why not kill me?"

I could see my parents before me. They didn't hesitate to appear before me. For so many years my father had been like a silent angel – he never even bothered to appear in my dreams. Now that I was suffering, there he was, alongside my mother, but he never said a thing. He always appeared so angry.

Dimakatso: “I have told you, Binah. How many times have I told you? How many times have I told you that you would reap what you have sown? Look at your children now. Look what life has become for Hazel, you've ruined her life.”

Binah: (crying) “Mama, I can't take it any more. Don't you see?! I'll never be able to walk again!”

Dimakatso: “That is your own fault. Do you honestly think that monster would have broken your back had you not introduced Hazel to him in the first place? Do you think you would be lying here had you accepted Beast as her husband? You have failed as a parent, as a daughter and as a person, and now evil is following your children and grandchildren. You haven't changed, Binah. You know what to do if you want to heal and if you want your life to take a different turn. You see how angry

your father is? I've had to calm him down and beg him continuously not to kill you. He has had it with you. You chose to become something we didn't raise. The ball is in your court, Binah. It is only about to get worse from here onwards.”

They left me crying there, all alone on my hospital bed. Not even Bella had bothered to visit me. She could have made plans for someone to look after those babies, just to see me, but she didn't even bother. The only person who cared was Hazel, the very daughter I never loved – out of choice and out of bitterness. I was so broken, that I created broken children and I was paying the price for that.

Hazel

After all my emotions sky rocketed, I ended up having so much fun. We didn't go home three hours later as we promised each other, instead we only got to Mathilda's place around 3am. Pleasure went to his place, but was nice enough to drive behind us until we got home – despite Mathilda having so much protection around her. By the time I got up, it was around 10am. My head was pounding. Perhaps I shouldn't

have had so many drinks. By the time I got up, Mathilda had already been up, preparing us breakfast.

Mathilda: "Good morning, Sunshine!"

Hazel: "Oh, please, not so loud."

Mathilda: (chuckling) "You should have listened to me when I said don't take the shots."

Hazel: "My goodness, did I take shots as well?"

Mathilda: "Yep, after midnight, you were on a roll, baby girl. I don't blame you for having a hangover. Come, I've prepared us breakfast."

Hazel: "Oh, I don't think I can stomach anything right now."

Mathilda: "You will be able to after having my famous hangover cure. Come."

We sat down and I had her horrible hangover cure. It was horrible, but after a few minutes, I managed to stomach some food, although my head was still pounding.

Mathilda: “We should do that again. It was lit. I've never seen you dancing on top of a table before. I mean, goodness, I'd love to see that again.”

I was so embarrassed because I hardly remembered any of that.

Hazel: “What else did I do? Did I do anything bad?”

Mathilda: (chuckling) “No, babe, apart from telling Ghadaffi off over the phone.”

My heart fell right through the pit of my stomach and then went back up again.

Hazel: "I did what?"

Mathilda: "He called you countlessly, and you blatantly told him that you weren't coming home because he had forgotten your birthday, and that he shouldn't rush you because you were having the time of your life with your best friend."

I suddenly grew weary of my choices. I quickly went to the bedroom and took out my phone. I went back to the kitchen and switched it on again. I saw so many texts from him, and countless Voicemail messages, including a message stating that my Voicemail was full. Ghadaffi was swearing at me in literally every single message that I read on my phone that morning. I was trembling so much, I decided to check what kind of messages he had left on my Voicemail.

Ghadaffi: "You'd better bring your ass back home, if you know what's good for you, Hazel. Did I marry a whore who dances on tables for men she doesn't even know?! Wang febela (are you cheating on me), Hazel?! You'd better not be taking after your mother because I will make sure you regret it!"

I couldn't stomach listening to any further messages. My face became bleak and Mathilda noticed the fear written on my face.

Mathilda: "Babe, are you okay? You look like you've just seen a ghost."

Hazel: (trembling) "Please, take me home."

Mathilda: "No, not in the state you're in. Sit down."

Hazel: (shaking head) "You don't understand. Ghadaffi's - "

I couldn't even finish my sentence when his call came through. It was almost as if he was literally calling me non-stop until I switched my phone back on again.

Hazel: (shakily) "Hello?"

Ghadaffi: (Shouting) “Nyello ya masepa! What the fuck do you think you're doing, Hazel?! How do you go mute and decide to ghost your husband?!”

I looked at Mathilda who seemed unimpressed by Ghadaffi's behaviour.

Hazel: “I... I'm sorry. My phone was off and - “

Ghadaffi: “I don't give a fuck. Get ready, your driver is coming to fetch you. I'd better find you where I think you are – if you know what's good for you!”

He hung up, leaving me fearful.

Mathilda: “I don't think I should let you into that car, at least not until he has calmed down, Hazel.”

Hazel: “I'll be fine, friend.”

Mathilda: (shaking head) "No, I don't think so. I'm very worried. He sounds very angry."

Hazel: "I promise you, I'll be fine."

I was dreading the moment Dave came, but within minutes, I got a call from Ghadaffi again.

Ghadaffi: "Get the fuck out, he's outside."

He was so disrespectful, I was actually scared.

Mathilda: "Promise me you'll call me the moment you land there."

Hazel: "I promise."

Mathilda: "I'm serious, Hazel. If you don't, I will call the police."

Hazel: (nodding) "I promise."

I just grabbed hold of what I could, and I remembered I couldn't leave with the new burner phone I had bought.

Hazel: "Please, keep this phone for me. I'll let you know what to do with it."

Mathilda: "Okay, be safe."

She gave me a hug and followed me down all the way to the car. She wanted to look the guy who came to fetch me in the eye, and surprisingly, it wasn't Dave. He was a lot friendlier than Dave, though, and actually managed to smile.

Driver: (smiling) "Hi, I'm Paul. I'm your new driver."

Hazel: (frowning) "Where's Dave?"

Paul: "Oh, he got fired. It's my first day on the job and boss strictly instructed me that I shouldn't be late. Let's get going, please."

Mathilda: "Just so you know, if she comes up missing tomorrow, I've seen your face."

Paul: (chuckling) "I can assure you, ma'am. I'm purely harmless."

Mathilda: "Remember to call me the moment you get home."

I nodded and got into the car immediately and he drove off. I scrolled through my phone and saw the horrific messages that Ghadafi had spent the entire night and early hours of the morning sending to me. The further we drove, the more agitated I got.

Paul: "I'll be your new driver, ma'am. You have nothing to be afraid of."

Hazel: (nodding) "Alright."

Paul: "I can assure you, I'm only here to take care of you."

He started telling me about himself, while my mind slowly drifted away and thought about what one earth awaited me back home. I didn't have a good feeling and my headache wasn't making me feel any better about the situation at hand. I shouldn't have gone out or slept out and now, I was about to pay the price. When we finally arrived, Paul opened the door for me and walked me into the house. That was something Dave was strictly instructed not to do. He was told not to even look my way. The moment I got home, I saw Melita in the kitchen, with Ghadaffi smoking with a glass of whiskey in his hand right in the lounge area. He looked so pissed, his eyes were bloodshot. I knew right there and then that I was in deep shit.

Ghadaffi: "Paul, thanks so much for bringing her home."

Paul: (nodding) "Any time, boss. I'm starving. Mind if I grab something to eat?"

He wasn't like Dave. He was much calmer and out spoken.

Ghadaffi: "Help yourself. Wena (you), let's go."

He told me to go upstairs, and my heart was beating faster as I took further steps up to the bedroom. He was walking right behind me and I could smell the rage from behind me. The moment I walked in and he got in after me, he closed the door so hard, I could hear the floor tremble. It only took a second for me to turn and look at him, and I got a glimpse of his enraged face.

Hazel: (trembling) "I can explain -"

I felt such a hard slap across my face. No man had ever lay a hand on me like that. I fell so hard onto the floor, I saw blood coming straight out of my nose, and I thought that was the end of me. I looked at Ghadaffi and he looked nothing like the Ghadaffi I knew. He didn't look very human.

Hazel: (scared) “Brandon, please, I'm sorry...”

He didn't even want to hear me, but instead, he kicked me a few times, which felt like death. Just when I thought he was done, he knelt right on the floor, with my legs in between his and he started punching me. He punched me so hard, that every blow felt like I was right in hell. I was screaming so loudly, but no one came to my rescue. After a few minutes of being beaten to a pulp and my screams falling on deaf ears, I heard a stern knock and someone entering the room.

Paul: “Boss, a little reminder, Mr. Ferreira is on the phone. He says he wants to speak to you – urgently.”

Ghadaffi: (breathing heavily) “I'll be out in a second.”

Paul took a glimpse at me, and I was so embarrassed. He nodded and walked out. I truly had no idea, but I felt he did that deliberately to save me from dying. I felt so much burning pain everywhere on the body, and my entire body was embraced with my blood. I had no idea where all the blood was coming out of, but I knew I was bruised, badly.

Ghadaffi: "Don't ever fuck with me like that again."

With that said, he walked out. I cried all by myself on that cold carpet, while my phone rang. Mathilda kept calling me endlessly, but how was I going to tell her that my own husband had just beaten me to a pulp all for enjoying my birthday?

Ecclesiastes 6:10 - "Whatever has come to be has already been named, and it is known what man is, and that he is not able to dispute with one stronger than he."

“Do not be afraid; our fate Cannot be taken from us; it is a gift.” — Dante Alighieri, *Inferno*

Hazel

I didn't remember much after being beaten like that, but I woke up right on the bed, being hooked to IV drips with pillows elevating my head. I looked around and I didn't see anyone, up until Melita walked in with a tray in her hands. She looked at me in such a disgusted manner, I couldn't comprehend what was happening to me.

Melita: “How are you feeling?”

I wasn't sure if she was being rhetoric or plain genuine. I tried speaking, but every part of my body was painful.

Melita: “This is what happens when you try and cross my son by whoring around the entire town. You really think you're one of a kind, don't you? My son chose you out of everyone else, so

rest assured – he did you a favour. Take this as a lesson learnt. I've brought you some soup and pain killers. Eat up.”

She just let me lying there in astonishment. I had no tears left within me, but all that was gathered was just fear consuming me. Ghadaffi was a monster, and I couldn't understand why he had to beat me up so severely. My friend was most probably beyond worried about me. I couldn't even begin to explain to my mother that I just got beaten to a pulp by a man I had just married a few weeks ago. Perhaps it was my punishment for just letting go of faith in finding Beast so easily. He would never have lay a hand on me like that – no matter what. That man loved me – all of me. All I had to do was pray, and what did I do?

I chose to think the worst of him – the very worst. Perhaps I did deserve the situation I was in. I looked around and I could see my phone was at least on my bedside. I asked myself why he didn't even take me to the hospital, and who even got the time to hook me up onto those IV's. I saw countless messages and missed calls from Mathilda, and I just sent her a short text letting her know that I was okay. I switched off my phone before she could even call again. I didn't even dare try to eat the soup that Melita had supposedly made for me. If she could

support her son beating the shit out of me like that, what else was she capable of? I started questioning so much, Norah's death for starters. Had she really killed herself, or did Ghadaffi drive her to do it? My heart was palpitating at such an abnormal speed. I had started fearing Ghadaffi. I panicked and flinched a little when I heard him open that door. He looked so different, so cold, he had changed completely and his eyes looked permanently red.

Ghadaffi: (coldly) "I see you're awake."

I kept quiet as I was so afraid to even answer him.

Ghadaffi: (sigh) "Look, you made me beat you. I didn't want to do it, Hazel, but do you see the kind of person you're trying to turn me into? I've been nothing but good to you – even when Beast left you. You decided to repay me by doing what you did. I surely went overboard with what I did, but it is all your fault. Just don't cross me like that ever again."

I swallowed hard. I didn't even expect his next move.

Ghadaffi: “By the way, if I ever hear that you were at the prison again, who knows what I might do to you?”

With that said, he walked out, leaving me feeling completely helpless. The room felt so cold, as if there was no life in it. I was a Psychology student yet there I was; being abused emotionally, physically; I was a victim of bulldozing; my own husband had forced me to marry him; he was then forcing me to comply by his rules – completely trampling on boundaries. I was a slave – I had officially belonged to him with no escape route. I needed help, desperately. I decided to switch on my phone and the only person that came to mind that might have had an idea on how to help me, was Dr. Zwide. I dialled her number right away, only for her to tell me devastating news.

Hazel: “Doctor, hi.”

Dr. Zwide: (Panicking) “Hazel, where are you? Does he know you're calling me? Who am I kidding? Of course he knows.”

Hazel: (surprised) “Doctor, what are you on about?”

Dr. Zwide: “Look, you can't call me any more. I've warned you about him and the next time he hears of this conversation between us, I'll be a dead woman. Forget about me and just find a way to leave that man. I don't know how you'll do it, but I pray to God that you find a way. Good luck.”

Hazel: “Doctor, wait.”

It was too late. She had already hung up on me. To make matters worse, Mathilda was so worried about me, she figured that I couldn't talk and also delivered a rather devastating message to me on WhatsApp.

Mathilda: “Friend, I'm so worried about you. I've called you so many times and when I couldn't reach you, I decided to call the cops and go with them to your house. Of course, your husband refused to let us in. He has everyone on his pay roll, Hazel. I'm talking cops, magistrates – everyone. I wouldn't be surprised if he has something to do with Beast's disappearance. I didn't want to tell you all this on your birthday, but when I saw his bloodied knuckles, I knew something had happened to you. Ghadaffi is a serious drug dealer, Hazel. Behind those expensive suits, he deals with drugs. I know this because I saw

him handing cash to my father that time. They are in business together. I feel like complete shit for not telling you earlier. Now, I have no idea how I will get you to leave him. I fear your life might be in danger, Hazel. I'll find a way to get you out of there, I promise. Just find a way to keep talking to me – please.”

My head was spinning out of control. What Pleasure said matched exactly what Mathilda had told me in that text, except that Mathilda went all out to tell me a lot more than I expected. What had I gotten myself into? I feared for my life. While I was about to reply to her, I received a WhatsApp text from Brenda, Beast's sister. Of course she felt the need to unblock me, just to tell me shit.

Brenda: “You have some nerve, you know. To think that I actually stood up for you at one time because I genuinely liked you for my brother. How the fuck do you stoop so low and give us hope, only to lie to us? I went to Polsmoor, there's no record of my brother even being there. Thanks so much for fucking with our emotions. I pray God punishes you with everything that is bad. I wish for you and your dirty husband to not have the privilege of being parents to any child.”

I was so hurt. My day just went from bad to the worst. I felt like dying, to be honest. The tv was on, I was so oblivious to whatever was happening around me that I didn't even realize, but the headlines caught my eye. "University lecturer and Psychologist Dr. Zanele Zwide involved in near-fatal accident." I increased the volume immediately.

Reporter: "It has been reported that prominent lecturer and psychologist Dr. Zanele Zwide was involved in a near-fatal car crash earlier on today. Police say that traces of alcohol were found in her blood, and that she was lucky enough to survive the crash with just a broken neck. A case has been opened against the prominent Doctor, as it was believed that she was indeed driving while under the influence."

I was battling to comprehend what on earth was happening to me. Ghadaffi walked in with a tray in his hands, and when he saw the news, he smiled at me in the most vile way possible.

Ghadaffi: (chuckling) "Funny thing to have happened to your friend, huh? I had to send a little message to her. I mean I

couldn't have her filling your pretty little head with all those lies.”

My eyes grew weary and I stared at him in shock.

Ghadaffi: “Switch that thing off so that I can feed you.”

I had no idea what to even do. He forcefully sat next to me and started stirring that soup. I was so afraid, I was thinking that perhaps he was starting to drug me or something.

Ghadaffi: “Open your mouth and eat. The doctor said that you need all the strength you can find.”

I forced my mouth open, although it was so painful.

Ghadaffi: “Rest assured, baby girl. I have eyes and ears everywhere. Yes, you think I wouldn't find out that you went to visit your shady ex in prison? I know all about it. I know everything.”

My stomach turned as he said that. I was married to a thug, the worst kind.

Ghadaffi: “See Hazel, you're stuck with me. I am only doing this because I love you. I know you don't see that now, but you eventually will. Your little doctor friend wanted to get in between us, so I solved that problem. If you want your friends to live at all – you'll stay away from them. That way you will get to see just how happy I can make you, Hazel. You just have to believe me.”

I swallowed that food so painfully. I literally forced my tears back, but they just wouldn't co-operate. He wiped them away, and his touch grossed me out so badly. I felt as if I was literally staring at an ogre, a fucking monster. There was surely no way he was human at all. That concluded everything I had suspected. He put my Beast in prison and he married me knowing what he did. I felt so ashamed of myself for even selling my soul to that man. Why on earth did I do what I did? When I looked back at the choice I had made, it wasn't worth it at all. I chose to carry the world's problems on my shoulders, when it wasn't even necessary. Isaiah 40:31 says;

“But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.” At that point in my life, I felt like my soul had died. I felt like God had every right not to even listen to me, because I had stopped praying, I couldn't pray in that house, I couldn't even think of God. I never understood what was wrong, but I concluded that I was married to the devil himself. There seemed to be no way out for me. I was trapped in a situation that I had created for myself.

One week later...

I couldn't go to school for a few days, for obvious reasons. It took me a while to recover for one, and Ghadaffi ensured that no one saw me during that week. I couldn't be seen by anyone, because they'd obviously see that I was a victim of an abusive marriage. He was nice to me; bringing me breakfast in bed and running me a bath every chance he got. He would massage me, and everything felt so forced. I loathed him so much, and facing him each and every day made me hate my life even more. Besides the fact that he would literally get up after midnight and come back smelling weird, I just appreciated every moment he was away from me. He even took a week off work just to “be there for me”. His mother would insult me

every chance she got, but I just clung onto the little piece of hope I had within me. I kept thinking of Beast. I had to find a way to see him again, but how was I to do that? I was trapped in a loveless marriage, an arrangement per say and my husband blatantly told me that if I were to be seen visiting him ever again, I'd be dead. I couldn't even speak to Mathilda, I was afraid of what might happen to her. I was living in so much fear, I could hardly recognize the person I had become in the mirror. I had a new driver, and I also didn't trust him. I trusted no one. It felt like I was being watched everywhere. I had to beg Ghadaffi to go back to school because a week alone meant that I was behind with my studies.

Ghadaffi: "Remember, my love. The moment you knock off for your last class, you call Paul and he will bring you straight home. I don't want any funny business, okay?"

I nodded. He forcefully kissed me

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which just made me want to vomit right there and then. I walked out and found Paul smoking. He switched it off the moment he saw me and opened the door for me. Oddly, he preferred that I sit next to him, unlike Drew.

Hazel: (panicking) “Uhm, I don't think my husband would like it if he saw me sitting in front with you.”

Paul: “Come on, I'm not an Uber. I prefer you sitting in front, but if you're really uncomfortable with it, then I totally understand.”

I took a good look at him and his face seemed rather friendly and inviting. I was so afraid that he was testing me. What if that was just a test to see if I would spill the beans and then he'd run off to Ghadaffi and tell him everything?

Hazel: (shaking head) “Thanks, but I'll sit at the back.”

Paul: “No problem, my lady.”

He opened the door for me to sit at the back and respected my wishes. I was still limping a bit and walking was a bit of a struggle. I had to wear long sleeved shirts to hide my bruises. Thank goodness it was nearly winter, so no one would

have suspected much. I was even wearing make-up to hide the left over bruises on my face. They were taking forever to go away. It was about 26 degrees outside, which meant it was quite hot to be wearing a scarf, but what was a girl to do? Paul kept staring at me through the rearview mirror, which worried me a bit.

Paul: "It's a bit too hot to be wearing winter attire, don't you think?"

Hazel: "Hmm, I'm sorry?"

Paul: "You're wearing a scarf yet it's about 26 degrees outside."

Hazel: "Oh, I'm feeling rather fluish."

Paul: "You're sweating. Are you sure you're okay?"

Hazel: (nodding) "Yes, I'm fine."

Paul: "Okay, you can talk to me if you need to, just so you know."

I didn't trust that at all. That seemed like a trap to me. I just nodded and pretended to be busy with my phone. I needed to be sure I could trust that guy. He worked for Ghadaffi in any case. Before I knew it, I had arrived at Campus. Oddly, he was about to drive away. I thought perhaps he would have come back and hover around Campus like Dave. I went straight to Dr. Zwide's office, just to check on her, only to find that she had resigned. Upon leaving the building to proceed to class, I found Mathilda. She looked so worried that she attacked me with a hug, making me flinch.

Mathilda: "Oh, thank goodness you're here! I thought you had died! Are you okay?"

Hazel: "Ouch."

I quickly pulled away from her and she frowned.

Mathilda: "What's happening?"

Hazel: "Nothing."

Mathilda: (frowning) "You look unwell. You're wearing a scarf. You don't even like scarves – not even in winter."

Hazel: "It's nothing. I'm just feeling a little fluish."

She wasted no time and grabbed the scarf and pulled it from my neck, exposing my bruised neck. The horror on her face made me feel so weak, so vulnerable.

Mathilda: (horrified) "What the fuck happened to you?! Did he do this?!"

I could see people stopping around us and staring at us in shock. I needed to get away from all the attention. I hated being looked at so badly. I grabbed her and went straight to the female toilets. I locked us in one of the cubicles. When I showed her all my bruises and narrated the entire story up to

what had happened to Dr. Zwide, and what he said about her and Pleasure, she just burst into tears.

Mathilda: "Oh, friend. Why didn't you tell me? This is all my fault. I should never have allowed you to marry him. What kind of a friend am I?"

She felt so guilt-ridden, which broke my heart.

Hazel: (teary) "I made the choice, willingly, Mathilda. Please, don't blame yourself."

Mathilda: "I'll help you. I'll ask my dad for help."

Hazel: "No! I mean, they do business together. You can't do that. You can't tell anyone, Mathilda, please."

Mathilda: (shaking head) "I knew that fucker was no good, but this. This is beyond me."

Hazel: "I'll find a way, just please, keep it to yourself and don't contact me at all whenever I'm not around otherwise he'll know."

Mathilda: "Okay. And Paul? What's he like?"

Hazel: "I don't know. He keeps trying to initiate conversation with me. What if he is trying to trap me or something?"

Mathilda: "I don't know, but there's only one way to find out. If he doesn't lurk around Campus all day, then perhaps you could trust him. Just don't open up to him just yet, until we find a solution, okay?"

Hazel: "Okay. I'm so scared, though, Mathilda. That man is inhumane."

Mathilda: "Rest assured. You will get out of this situation. There's no use crying about spilled milk. You just need to get your strength for prayer back. You used to be such

a prayer warrior, Hazel. This man has changed you so much. It's like he is a demon himself.”

Hazel: “I know, I just don't feel any spirit within me. I feel so dead inside, Mathilda.”

Mathilda: (shaking head) “For as long as you're breathing, you still have a lot to do on this earth. You can never stop hoping.”

She was right. I could never stop. She was my anchor, and with Ghadaffi taking her away from me, I had no idea how I was going to keep my spirits up.

Paul

After dropping off my boss's daughter, I decided to check in with him at our secret location.

Phillip: “You're late today.”

Paul: "Harde (sorry), boss. I had to drive a little slower."

Phil: "Has she told you anything yet?"

Paul: (shaking head) "No, boss. She is reluctant to trust me. That fucker must have done something really bad to her. I found him beating her up a week ago. She only returned to school today."

Phil: (angrily) "And you're only telling me now?!"

Paul: "What difference would it have made, Boss? The situation is still fresh. You know we don't kill and you can't just walk in there and tell her all about you."

Phil: (sigh) "I fucked up really badly, and now my only child on this earth is suffering."

Paul: "What do you want me to do?"

Phil: "Keep an eye on him. I still have to sort out the mess he created. I'll think of something by the end of the day."

Paul: "Cool."

Phil: "And Paul, you'd better not keep anything from me ever again. If something else happens, you let me know immediately."

Paul: (nodding) "Sure, boss."

Beast

It didn't take too long for me to be transferred to Kgosi Mampuru Prison, the prison I never wanted to serve at – no matter what. I still hadn't been able to contact my family, and Hazel was weighing heavily on my mind. I felt as if she owed me a lot of explaining, but I was starting to resent her. How could she marry that man? I was processed within a day, and taken to a cell that I didn't want to be in at all.

Sol: (cheerfully) “Well, well, well, if it isn't my long lost son. Didn't I tell you that you'd be back one day? Welcome home, son.”

He tried to hug me, but I stopped him right there.

Beast: “Get the fuck away from me. I'm not your son. You're dead to me, remember?”

I saw two of his little boys wanted to attack me, but he stopped them.

Sol: “No, boys. This is my son – my own flesh and blood. You don't touch him unless I say so. Okay?”

They nodded but I could tell they were unhappy about me being there.

Beast: “You two can relax. You can all relax. I have no business in joining your gang or even being a part of your little

family. This man is no father of mine. In fact, if you stay out of my way, then I'll stay out of yours.”

Sol: “You think you can survive alone in here without any affiliation?”

Beast: “The only affiliation I need is with God. So, please. Leave me alone, just like you have done for the past thirteen years.”

I could see he hadn't changed one bit. He was still cold, ruthless and unapologetic. What kind of man leaves his son to fend for his mother and sisters, while he goes to live with another woman? Then he welcomes his own son with open arms in prison? I'd never seen a man so hateful like my own father. I had no idea what God had in store for me, but I had made my bed and I had to lie in it. I had hope and faith to keep me going, and I wasn't about to lose it then.

Binah

I had been feeling so weak, mostly spiritually. My body felt as if it was about to give up on me. I couldn't stomach anything, which meant I had to live off IV drips daily. I felt so hollow inside, but Hazel worried me most. I could only think about her and the dreams of Ghadaffi doing the most inhumane things to her kept haunting my mind. I had tried calling her, but my calls wouldn't go through. I couldn't help it any more, I had to try something. I felt it was a bit late, but I had to try. I decided to call the one man I had hated for so many years – two decades to be exact.

Phil: "Phillip Ferreira."

Binah: "Hi, Phil, it's me – Binah."

Phil: "What do you want, Binah?"

Binah: "That's no way to greet the woman who's been caring for the daughter you abandoned."

Phil: (sigh) "How sure are you that I haven't been taking care of her? What do you want?"

Binah: "I need your help. Hazel is in trouble."

Phil: "I know, I'm on it."

Binah: (shocked) "What do you mean?"

Phil: "I have eyes and ears everywhere, Binah. If it hadn't been for you forcing her to marry that asshole, all for a mere 100k, she would still be fine."

Binah: (panicking) "Are you playing with me, Phil?"

Phil: "Why would I? Unlike you, I love Hazel. Yes, I might not have been physically involved in her life, but that will all be explained to her when the time is right. Right now, I need to sort out the shit you've created. Rest assured, if that asshole hurts her again, I'll blame you."

Binah: (shocked) "Hurts her again? What are you talking about?"

Phil: "I'll come see you when I get the chance so you can explain to me properly. Right now, I have some serious work to do."

He hung up on me leaving me panicked. What on earth did he mean? Had Ghadaffi been hurting my child? Oh, lord, what had I done?

Job 11:18-19 - "You will be secure, because there is hope; you will look about you and take your rest in safety. "

“They say a person needs just three things to be truly happy in this world: someone to love, something to do, and something to hope for.” – Tom Bodett

Beast

Prison wasn't something new to me, but I thought I had left that life behind me years ago. The last time I served time at Kgosi Mampuru, I was a juvenile. I had sworn to myself that I'd never serve time ever again and most definitely not with my father. Now, I was sharing the same cell with my father and his measly crew. My father, Solomon Sibiya, one of the notorious has-been gangsters that ever lived; was still operating his little drug syndicate from within prison. He had wardens and warders on his payroll. A man with a big crime syndicate, but failed to take care of his ex wife and children. For the longest time I'd been angry at him. I told myself that I'd never forgive him for the pain he had caused me. Seeing him brought back all those emotions, and all I needed was to be alone and to focus on God. After supper, we went back to our cells, while I meditated on my bed and focused on the word of God. I received a Bible when I walked into that prison. In fact, I

requested one. I just closed my eyes and opened it, I fell onto the scripture Jeremiah 29:11-14; “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you,” declares the Lord, “and will bring you back from captivity.[b] I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you,” declares the Lord, “and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile.” I felt so relieved, the moment I closed the Bible. I knelt down and started praying.

Beast: “Father God, I thank you so much for this wonderful day. It may not be so wonderful, for I have been held captive, but I trust you, lord.”

While I was busy praying, Potra and Rizzler, my father's so called side kicks, decided to interfere with my spiritual journey.

Potra: “Eh, man, bafo (bro). Uyasirasela lana (you're making noise), man. We're trying to sleep.”

Rizzler: “Ucabanga ukuthi unkulunkulu wakho (you think that your so called God) will save you? You're here because you killed a man.”

Potra: (laughing) “All for a bitch who chose to marry another man.”

They both laughed and so did my father. I was so hurt, yes, I was mad at Hazel. I was disappointed, but I didn't enjoy hearing someone insult her. I still loved her.

Beast: (angrily) “Keep her out of your mouth. Go call your mother a bitch.”

Potra got angry and stood up. He thought that I'd back down, but I didn't. I looked him straight in the eyes. Of course, everyone else was afraid to say anything, but they chose to look at us instead. Amazingly, even in the dark, they could see everything.

Potra: “What the fuck did you just say?”

Beast: "You heard me loud and clear. Do you want me to repeat it? Are you slow?"

Sol: "Bethuel, come on. You don't have to fight us. We're on the same crew."

Beast: "I'm nothing of yours."

Sol: (chuckling) "Everyone in my cell is something of mine. I mean, you were brought here because you are now part of my crew."

Beast: "I didn't ask you to."

Rizzler: "Hlonipa uBabakho wena, snai (Respect your father, you moron)."

I walked up closely to his face and looked him dead in the eye. I may have been broken at that point, but fearful, I was not.

Beast: "I hate dealing with slow learners. I told you, I don't have a father."

Sol: "Well, then, you leave me no choice. I can't protect you in here. I don't protect enemies."

Beast: "I don't need your protection. I'd rather die than be indebted to you."

Sol: "So be it. Boys, do take care of him. He's our enemy after all."

Of course, they did the expected; they both ganged up on me and beat me up. Potra was thin, and tall, while Rizzler was a bit on the chubby side. One of them tripped me and I fell to the ground, while Rizzler started kicking me. Potra knelt down and started punching my face. I wasn't one to go down without a fight, so I managed to flip Potra over and I started punching him non-stop. I didn't even feel the pain from Rizzler's kicks on my back. The adrenaline rush had taken control of me. When they

both realized that I was beating Rizzler to death, I could hear my father shout something.

Sol: "Finish it off, but don't make it fatal!"

I felt something sharp enter my back; then the object was pulled out and pushed back into my back. I must have been stabbed more than ten times, when I heard my father shout.

Sol: "That's enough!"

But Rizzler didn't stop. By then I was flat on the ground, with my back feeling as if it had been poured with acid. I felt like I was on fire. He was ordered to stop yet he didn't.

Sol: (shouting) "I said stop!"

I felt my body giving in on me, with my blood surrounding my entire body. Only then did I feel the pressure lessening from my body. The stabs stopped.

Sol: (shouting) "I told you to fucking stop, but you didn't listen!"

Rizzler: "Sorry, boss. You did say I should teach him a lesson."

Sol: (shouting) "Vader! We have a situation!"

I must have blacked out because I woke up in the prison hospital. I was hooked onto machines, while my entire body was on fire. I could barely move. The bright lights were blinding me, while I could hardly feel my neck. I tried moving my hands to feel my neck and then I realised I was wearing a neck brace. I was laid on my, yet my body felt like I was hit by a truck. Not even a gunshot wound was that painful. I saw a doctor in the room and I tried to call out to him because I felt my throat was incredibly dry.

Beast: (clearing throat) "Doctor."

He quickly turned around and gave me a brief smile.

Doctor: (smiling) "Oh, you're finally awake. How are you feeling?"

Beast: "May I have some water?"

Doctor: "Oh, of course."

He aided me with taking a sip of the water, and I felt so relieved while I gulped down the entire glass.

Doctor: "You must have been quite thirsty, huh?"

I just tried to nod.

Doctor: "Well, your vitals are pretty good and you're responding well to the medication. Unfortunately, you've received over 50 stitches. You were stabbed quite vigorously."

I just kept quiet. There wasn't much to say, really.

Doctor: "Well, then. I'll be leaving you with these pain killers. You're supposed to take about two pills, three times a day, but then that's all I can give you."

I looked at the sachets and I thought he was being ridiculous.

Beast: (frowning) "iBuprofen? Is that all you can give someone in my condition? You're a trained medical professional aren't you?"

Doctor: "Yes, but my hands are tied. You'll return to your cell first thing tomorrow morning."

That didn't seem very right. He was insane. He looked rather dodgy to me, though. While I was about to give him a piece of my mind, in walked someone rather familiar. I just couldn't pin point him yet as I was in a rather dismal state of mind. He was dressed so well; in a very stylish DeFacto Turkish suit. I could tell because I had style, you know. The doctor didn't seem too pleased about that white man's appearance.

Doctor: (frowning) "Excuse me? Can I help you? Are you even supposed to be here?"

Phil: (chuckling) "Good evening, my name is Phillip Ferreira. I'm Mr. Sibiya's attorney."

The doctor was so displeased that he just refused to shake that man's hand. I was rather concerned at the fact that he introduced himself as my attorney when I didn't even contact one.

Phil: "Well, then, please update me on my client's status of health."

Doctor: (annoyed) "Well, he has sustained minor injuries. I have prescribed him some pain killers and he should return to his cell tomorrow morning."

Phil: (frowning) "Then you surely won't mind me seeing his medical report, would you?"

Doctor: (nervously) "It's against prison policy, Mr. Ferreira."

That surname rang such a faint bell in my mind.

Phil: "It's either you let me see it, or I will bring my own doctor in here to assess him myself. We all know you government doctors are incompetent. Don't make me embarrass you in front of a mere prisoner."

The doctor could see that he was not playing any games and he handed the file to him, reluctantly. Mr. Ferreira browsed through it briefly and sighed unimpressed.

Phil: "You must be joking. Where did you get your medical degree, sir?"

From doctor to sir. What a downgrade.

Doctor: (angrily) "Excuse me?!"

Phil: "You stated in here that he sustained over 30 stab wounds, a broken neck and a sprained arm, yet you only prescribed iBuprofen to him and you want to discharge him already?! I might just be a lousy lawyer to you, sir, but I have many contacts. I can get you fired on the bloody spot. Who do you work for? How much do those measly prisoners pay you? R5000 a month? What a shame. All because you were too busy spending your money on whores that you decided to over indebt yourself. You should be ashamed, playing with my client's life like that."

I could tell that man knew his story. He got the doctor sweating like a crazy man.

Doctor: "Who are you really? I've never even seen you coming to represent anyone in this prison."

Phil: "Do you know all lawyers? I don't think so. Give my client and I some space, please."

He was so annoyed, but he left without any dispute. The moment Phil came closer to me, I got to remember whom he actually was.

Phil: (brief smile) "Hello, Mr. Sibiya. We finally meet."

Beast: "How... how did you find me?"

Phil: "It's not every day that I get to defend the man whom my daughter is in love with. You and I have plenty of work to do."

Only then, I remembered part of the scripture I read earlier that evening; Jeremiah 29:13 - "You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you," declares the Lord." I sought him, called upon Him and He answered. I might not have finished my prayer that evening, but He was found.

Hazel

A few days passed and I had recovered, slowly, rather. My body was still aching and my heart was aching even more. Ever since I found Beast, I couldn't stop thinking about him. My heart longed for him; my mind was so broken, because I was living in fear. I needed an escape, yet my so called husband had me under house arrest. I had to refrain from using my phone, more especially for contacting Mathilda, because I feared that her life was in danger. Ghadaffi had me right where he wanted me. I wasn't even fully recovered, yet he managed to have his way with me – every single night. I didn't even participate. I'd block out everything and just focus on happy days, until he was done. The good thing was that he never lasted more than 3 minutes max. That was his tap out time. He was acting so much like a doting husband, that it was scary. I just needed to find Beast, because Ghadaffi told me that Beast was no longer a prisoner at Polsmoor. I wasn't even sure if he was lying to me or not. I had no one to call and ask about Beast in there, and Dr. Zwide had just vanished on the face of the earth. I had managed to try and pray, but only during daylight. I couldn't pray at night, and I could pray when I was on campus only. The moment I walked into the house, I failed to even think about God in a good light. While I was trying to silently pray within my heart, Ghadaffi walked in on me and came with good news.

Ghadaffi: “Hey, so I'll be going out of the country for a few days. I have this new business partner that is helping me rise to greater heights. I can't wait to be an official Billionnaire.”

I was so excited, suddenly. I couldn't even explain what was happening in my mind.

Hazel: “I see. How long will you be gone for sure?”

Ghadaffi: “I don't know, but two weeks max. It's a big business deal. You could come with me if you want.”

Hazel: “Oh, my studies and everything.”

Ghadaffi: “I see. Well, once you're done studying, I'll be sure to confine you to our house.”

He chuckled while I just found nothing he said funny – ever.

Hazel: “Okay. When are you leaving?”

Ghadaffi: "Tonight."

My heart was beating for so much joy, that I was secretly hoping he wouldn't ask his mother to come stay with me.

Ghadaffi: "Don't worry, Paul will be here to take good care of you."

I was so elated, I tried so hard to fake it.

Hazel: "Okay."

Ghadaffi: "I will miss you so much, my baby."

His scent was so disgusting. I detested just looking at him. His touch made me cringe so much every time, that I had to force vomit down my throat.

Hazel: "Me too, but you have to go and pack because two weeks needs quite a lot of clothes. You're a professional man, so you need to look your best at all costs."

Ghadaffi: (smiling) "See why I love you? You're just so thoughtful."

He kissed me, and the moment he went back upstairs, I wiped my lips off. I hated him so much. At least I knew that I could start planning everything. I had no idea how I was going to do all that, but I knew that I was going to try. I went outside to take a breather, when I found Paul smoking.

Hazel: "Oh, hi, Paul."

Paul: "Hi, ma'am. Sorry, I just come out here to smoke every once in a while. Let me switch it off."

Hazel: "Oh, no. No need to do that for me."

Paul: "Oh, no. My mother taught me to respect a woman. What would she say if she sees me smoking in a woman's presence?"

Hazel: (smiling) "Seriously, I don't mind."

Paul: "Well, I do."

I just chuckled briefly and let him be.

Paul: "Is something puzzling you?"

Hazel: "Well, not really, apart from my pathetic life."

Paul: "Want to talk about it?"

Hazel: "Not really. It's just that... My boyfriend, well fiance, or is he an ex? I just don't know."

Paul: "Yes?"

Hazel: "Ag, I don't want to bother you with my pathetic life."

While I was deep in thought, Paul just confessed something I hadn't really expected.

Paul: "What if I told you that I could help you?"

Hazel: (frowning) "Excuse me?"

Paul: "What if I told you that I know everything you've been through and that I could help you?"

I was confused, but moreover startled because he seemed as if he was telling the truth.

Hazel: "I..."

Paul: "Go back inside and act normal. Wait for your husband to leave and I'll tell you everything."

My heart skipped a few beats and I went back in as told. Was he about to trap me? Was he reporting to Ghadaffi? What on earth was happening there? Perhaps God was finally listening to me and He had finally heard me. Perhaps the end of the tunnel was no longer so dim.

Romans 8:28 - "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose."

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“There's nowhere you can be that isn't where you're meant to be...”

— John Lennon

Beast

I couldn't believe that Hazel's father was my saviour. Just thinking about it made me unsure. I started contemplating that perhaps she had sent him to me, because she knew that I finally found out about her marriage. But then, how would she have known? Besides all that, how on earth did a powerful man like Phil find me when Ghadaffi had everyone on his payroll?

Phil: “You seem rather surprised to see me. I totally understand, judging by the dire predicament you're in.”

Beast: “I just want to know. How did you find me?”

Phil: “I am a powerful man, with powerful resources, Bethuel. I can find anyone I want to find. Besides all that, I'm Hazel's

father. Which means that whatever and whomever concerns her, concerns me.”

Well, he was a fine one to talk.

Beast: (chuckling) “Really now? Where were you all those years? I mean, she literally grew up like a poor maid while you were having the best time of your life.”

Phil: “What makes you think I haven't been involved in her life?”

Beast: “Is that a rethorical question? Were you there when her mother treated her like trash? When she had to rely on Mam'Rose for everything? She couldn't even ask her mother for pads. I saw everything; I was there. Besides all that she has done to me now, I still care about her. I have seen her on her worst and you were not there, Mr. Ferreira.”

Phil: (firmly) “Yes, I might not have been physically there, Bethuel.”

Beast: "Please, call me Beast. You pronounce my name in such an awkward manner – no offence."

Phil: "Paul never lied when he said you were an honest man."

Beast: "Who's Paul?"

Phil: "Never mind that. Anyway, I know, I haven't been physically involved in Hazel's life, but I was there, you know. Who do you think paid for her school fees? Who do you think is paying for her fees as we speak? For her accommodation? Who do you think is giving her a monthly allowance? Who do you think took care of Malachi? I loved that boy so much like he was my own. I really loved their mother, once upon a time. Had she given me time, I was going to fix everything, but she just wanted everything to fall into her lap. She refused to work for anything, which frustrated me. I couldn't introduce a girl from the township who didn't have ambition. They already hated the fact that I loved black women, now imagine bringing someone to meet your parents who has absolutely no desire to further their studies. But, that

is a story for another day. I am here because I want to help you.”

Beast: “How will I know that your daughter didn't send you?”

Phil: (frowning) “That's your biggest concern right now?”

I felt a little ashamed by his question.

Phil: “Look Beast, I might not know you personally, but what I know about you is that you are a proud man, but you love my daughter – very much. I know she loves you too. I don't want to get involved in whatever it is you two are going through, but my biggest priority is getting this case solved. It will take time; your fucked up father has everyone on his payroll. I will need a miracle to overthrow this case. One thing I will do is solve it, one step at a time; starting with getting you your own cell.”

Beast: (shaking head) “There's no need for that. I can protect myself.”

Phil: "This is not the time to be proud. You need your own cell, at least while you recover. Then, I'll let your family know where you are so that they can start visiting. I'll get to the bottom of this; starting with the person at the very bottom of your father's payroll, to him. I hate criminals, and I hate those who just make life harder for others. By the time we are done with this case, you'll be a millionaire – rest assured. I'll sure the shit out of this entire state."

Beast: "I see. I just need time to process all this."

Phil: "While you're doing all the processing, I'll be dealing with the rest. Sleep tight. By tomorrow morning, your cell will be ready. If you need anything, my number will be in the cellphone that will be hand delivered to you personally. As of now, I will have to pay the warden a visit."

Beast: "The warden is not here. It's 2am."

Phil: "As I told you, Beast. I have my ways. Rest now, we'll talk tomorrow."

Hazel

I was so anxious when Ghadaffi was dragging his feet. He seemed to be rather hesitant about leaving.

Ghadaffi: "Maybe I should postpone, you know. So that you and I could spend more time together. I don't have a good feeling about this trip."

My heart was palpitating at such an abnormal speed. He was about to put a damper in my mood.

Hazel: (nervously) "What do you mean? You've been so hyped about this trip. You said your new business partner even offered to lend you his jet."

Ghadaffi: "Yes, but I don't feel like leaving you all alone."

Hazel: "I have Paul. He'll update you of my whereabouts every chance he gets. I just want you to not regret this opportunity passing you by."

Ghadaffi: (smiling) "You see why I chose to marry you? You always say the right things. I love you so much."

I had to fake a smile. The way his scent made me nauseous whenever he came closer to me. He kissed me and finally took his bags. The moment he walked out, I wiped my lips clean. I heard him start the car and finally he left the house. The moment he left, Paul knocked before entering the house.

Paul: "May I come in?"

I was nervous for some reason, I don't know what for.

Hazel: "Sure."

He came in and sat down on the couch opposite me.

Paul: "I know, you must think I'm crazy, but I can assure you that I'm only here to help you."

Hazel: "Why?"

Paul: "I was sent here to be your driver, to keep an eye on you, by someone who holds you very dear to his life."

That really shocked me. I mean who on earth held me dear to their life? Malachi was gone, so it couldn't have been him. Could it have been Beast?

Hazel: (surprised) "Who is that?"

Paul: "I'm not liable to say at the moment. He'll tell you himself when he is ready."

Hazel: "Okay, how will you help me? You have seen just how ruthless my husband is."

Paul: "Well, I have the go ahead from my boss, so if you agree, I can get you space at Tuks. Just say the word and I'll do it."

Hazel: "I was hoping for Wits."

Paul: "You can't travel all the way from Jo'burg to Kgosi Mampuru. That would be too strenuous."

Hazel: (wide-eyed) "What would I be doing at Kgosi Mampuru?"

Paul: "Firstly, you'd be doing your practicals, and secondly, you'd be visiting the love of your life – Beast."

I felt my heart drop right to the pit of my stomach.

Hazel: (shocked) "What do you mean?"

Paul: "Your husband had him transferred there right after he learnt that you went to see him."

Hazel: (panicking) "So, he is really behind all this?"

Paul: (nodding) "That's all I can tell you right now. So, are you game?"

Hazel: "But, my husband... He'll come back."

Paul: "Leave him to me. I'll ensure he stays in Europe for as long as possible."

Hazel: "Just one more question."

Paul: "Yes?"

Hazel: "Is there a possibility of him being released?"

Paul: "Yes, but it is so complicated. It's a long shot. Just give it time."

I honestly wondered who that person was, but I chose to let him be. Paul didn't give me any negative vibes. He seemed trustworthy.

Hazel: "Okay, I choose to trust you. So, when will I be able to apply for a transfer?"

Paul: "No need to do that. By the end of the day, you'll be transferred. Leave it all to me. You can go pack so long."

I was a bit sceptical, but then, if he said he had connections, then it meant he was absolutely right. So, I went to pack in my room, while thinking about my life. I felt like such a fugitive on the run; I was running away from my husband, but I feared the day he had to come back. I had to leave Cape Town so that Mathilda and Pleasure could be safe. Dr. Zwide's career might have been ruined, hence she decided to disappear. I couldn't help but wonder if she was still alive or not. I tried calling her a few times, but it said the number didn't exist anymore. My heart was heavy because I wanted to know if she was okay, really. I packed my clothes with a heavy heart, knowing that I'd have to leave my friend Mathilda behind. I took a few moments to reflect on my life since I had left high school. I got

there with my two best friends, only for them to turn their backs on me. It was life, but it was still heartbreaking. I had to go adjust to a whole new Campus with new people, while trying to deal with the whole Beast issue. I had no idea what I was even going to say to him. I was married to his arch enemy and I never told him. His family hated me to the core. And I had to face my demons. I guess only time would tell.

Phil

After two decades of not seeing Binah, my sins were catching up on me. I'd been through hell and back, and all because I wanted my father's approval. After he handed over the family business to me, I decided to get another degree and that's when I decided to study law. I admit it, I am not proud of what I did. I truly loved Binah, and yes, it was really selfish of me to expect her to hold on while I had to marry another woman. Not just any woman; a white woman. I had to learn halfway through my marriage that my own father threatened Binah and told her to abort my first child. Once I learnt that she never aborted, I could never bring myself to face her after everything I had done. I didn't want to risk anything in my life. I had lived a lie for so long that I decided to live my own life, although it was a bit late. I never stopped taking care of

Binah and Malachi, even though it was not enough. My heart bled when Paul told me how Binah had raised my daughter. The audacity, but then, I was partially to blame. She loved me and I promised her the world, then I dumped her while she was pregnant with my child. It was unfair to her, but I needed to sort her out. Before I did that, I needed to sort out someone who was seriously starting to piss me off. After my brief meeting with Beast, I arrived at the Warden's house. I couldn't care less about the tight security around her house. Mine was better. Of course, they gave me a hard time before entering.

Security: "Can we help you?"

Phil: "I'm looking for the Warden."

Security: "And you are?"

Phil: "Just tell her Phillip Ferreira is here to see her. It's urgent."

He looked at me rather annoyed, but I wasn't bothered. I saw him take out his two-way radio and heard him page her.

Security: "Ma'am, there is a certain Mr. Ferreira to see you."

Warden: (annoyed) "Ag, at this time?! Who does he think he is?! Tell him I'm busy."

Security: "You heard her."

Phil: (loudly) "Okay, then. I guess the commission will be very pleased to see the latest financial report."

Warden: "Wait! Let him in."

He opened the gate without hesitation, while I drove in. The moment I parked my car, she was already waiting for me outside the house.

Warden: (angrily) "How dare you?! You come to my house at this time of the night and threaten me with that?! You think you own everyone, Phil, don't you?"

Phil: "Hello, Vivian. How lovely to see you again. May I come in?"

Warden: (shouting) "No! You say whatever you want to say now and fuck off!"

Phil: (chuckling) "You forget who I am and what I am capable of, Vivian. Well, I have a prisoner who's just been transferred to your prison. Bethuel Sibiya. I need you to fix your prison and get your wardens to stop doing their shit. I've been warning you about the drug trade you have going on in your prison."

Warden: "I don't know what you're on about. You drove all the way here to tell me that?"

Phil: "I'm giving you a week, just one week, Vivian, to sort out all this shit. You and I both know that someone higher than you

was paid to keep that boy there. I am here now, and I'm going to single you all out – one by one. If you don't fix it, I'll tell you exactly what's going to happen; you will lose your job and be investigated for fraud and money laundering. The case won't drag judging by all the evidence I have against you. You are going to lose your husband because he is going to know about your secret love child that you have with the infamous Solomon Sibiya.”

I saw her shaking. That's what I loved to see with corrupt people – seeing them squirm and beg for forgiveness. I hated people who put themselves first all at the expense of innocent people.

Warden: (panicking) “Wait, surely we can figure something out.”

Phil: (shaking head) “I don't fuck whores. One week, Vivian. One week.”

I left her begging and squirming right there, but I was done with what I had come to do. From there

I had another person to visit.

Hazel

While I was deep in thought after packing all I could, Paul came knocking on my door.

Hazel: "Come in."

Paul: "It's done, ma'am. You should have received your acceptance letter and transfer letter by email."

I quickly checked my phone and indeed, I had been accepted and transferred all in matters of one hour. How on earth did he get it right?

Hazel: "That was fast."

Paul: (nodding) "As promised. Are you ready to go?"

Hazel: "Yes."

I wasn't sad about leaving the house, but I was sad about leaving the life I had gotten to know and make in Cape Town. I decided not to tell Mathilda yet about my decision, but she'd understand that I had to do it. Paul helped me with my suit cases and we left. For the first time in a while I felt a little relieved, like I could breathe without anyone watching me. It didn't feel like there was a huge burden on my shoulders. I was crying silently; it felt like a new beginning was awaiting me. I had felt so lost for a very long time, that it honestly felt like there was something heavy within that house. Yes, I used to leave the house daily, but I'd never feel so relaxed after leaving. I honestly felt like Ghadaffi was walking around with something unnatural. He'd go out of the bedroom at midnight and come back smelling a little awful, almost like blood. I couldn't ask him about it, because I was afraid of getting another beating. I didn't want to risk getting my ribs broken. I felt myself shaking, and the more I thought about Ghadaffi and that house, the harder I cried. I didn't notice how much I was crying, until I started feeling like I was choking on my own tears. I couldn't explain what was happening to me, but I felt

like my chest was closing in on me. The harder I cried, the harder it was to breathe.

Paul: "Are you alright?"

I tried responding to him, but words failed me. I held onto my chest tightly, and that's when he noticed that something wasn't right. He quickly stopped the car and got to my side.

Paul: "Relax, calm down and try to breathe slowly."

I could hear him well, but my body wasn't responding. The more I tried, the more I failed and that was frustrating me even worse and making me panic much more.

Paul: "Spread your legs a little further apart and put your head in between your thighs."

I did as told. Slowly I started regaining my breath again.

Paul: "That's it. Breathe, slowly."

I did that for a good five minutes. As soon as I regained my composure again, he seemed very relieved.

Paul: "Get in the car. I'll stop by the nearest garage and get you something to drink."

I just nodded in relief. It didn't take us long before we stopped at the nearest garage as promised. Paul was nice enough to get me some water, a powerade and some snacks. I gulped that water down so fast, I myself was amazed.

Hazel: "Thank you so much."

Paul: (worried) "What happened?"

Hazel: (sigh) "I honestly don't know. I was just thinking about everything that happened in that house, specifically Ghadaffi. The next thing I just couldn't breathe as I was crying."

Paul: (firmly) "Did he hurt you that badly? What else has he done to you?"

He asked that as if he wanted to show him a lesson or something. I was afraid of what he was capable of, more especially when I had no idea whom he was reporting to. I had no guardian angel in my corner, so I had to wonder whom it was. Something told me that everything was about to fall into place, slowly but surely. If he could pull off my transfer so quickly, then he could most definitely do much more than that.

Hazel: "Nothing. It's just that he's a really impossible man to live with at times."

He just nodded and drove off. I had even forgotten about the airport. I mean, I was sure he had booked us tickets on the next flight to Pretoria, but I was amazed when we walked through the airport like it was nothing.

Hazel: "Aren't we going to fly back home?"

Paul: “We are, but in a private jet.”

I was truly amazed. I had never even been on a private jet – let alone such a big one. It was my very first time seeing one at hand like that. I'd always heard that people name their jets and yachts. That one had what looked like initials on the side “PF”. I had no idea whom it belonged to. Paul's name started with a “P” and I had no idea what his surname was. I figured it belonged to his boss, but well, I didn't complain. The leather seats were so white, and everything smelled way better than Business class even. The pilot was ready for take off and the waitress was very polite, offering me anything and everything I could eat and drink. I loved food, so I never said no to any. I was terrified of flying, it just never got any better for me, so a glass of champagne never hurt anyone. I tried so hard to hide my panic from Paul, but the moment we took off, I couldn't hide it any more. I grabbed hold of my seat after gulping down that champagne. He saw me and was rather worried.

Paul: (frowning) “Are you afraid of flying?”

Hazel: (embarrassed) "I've been flying for so long, but it just doesn't get any better."

Paul: (nodding) "Take a look behind your seat. There are earphones and an iPod. Connect them, close your eyes and listen to the music loaded on it."

I'd try anything just not to think about being up in the air with the possibility of crashing down and burning to death. After a few minutes of listening to the music, it actually did calm me down. I managed to think of anything else other than Ghadaffi. I started thinking of my Beast. I didn't want to be negative, so I thought of all the good times we had together. I started thinking of the possibility of a future; the future he had always promised me. Not once did I think he was incapable of giving me that future, but I failed to have hope when he went missing. That was something that would most probably haunt me forever.

Binah

After my phone call with Phil, I just couldn't sleep. Of course, I didn't think that his old number still worked and I most definitely never thought that the next time I'd speak to him was going to be that depressing. He said something about Ghadaffi hurting my Hazel. I had no idea that I'd have hurt my children so badly. Honestly speaking, life was far better when I didn't have a conscience and I just kept drinking. It was a dark hole, but I just blocked everything out. Now that I was trying to make amends, it was a rather shit road for me. I'd been undergoing chemotherapy for so long – despite the doctors saying they were seeing results, I was losing weight, I hardly could keep anything down and going to the toilet was impossible. I couldn't feel my legs at all and with each day that passed, the doctors reassured me that I'd never be able to walk again. That was the most painful thing to hear; even worse than hearing you have cancer. I thought of my Hazel, and how her life would have turned out if I hadn't been so against her dating Beast. My heart was literally aching each day. And just when I felt as if I was leaving earth, I'd unfortunately wake up again the following day – full of life. It was truly God's punishment. At times, I'd wet myself or even shit myself. I felt as if I was living in such an indecent manner; an inhumane manner. I was a living dog, a vegetable. All I wanted to do was die. While I drowned in my own pit of misery as usual, I heard a

rather familiar yet faint voice. A voice I had thought had left my mind a long time ago.

Phil: "Hello, Binah."

Binah: (shocked) "Phillip..."

Phil: "How are you?"

Binah: "I could be better, as you can see. How are you?"

Phil: "I could also be better."

Binah: "What brings you here?"

Phil: "I've come to face my demons."

Binah: (chuckling) "Oh, so I'm a demon now?"

Phil: “You and I both know you're smarter than that – way smarter.”

Binah: “That could be true, but what's being smart going to help me with now?”

Phil: (sigh) “Binah, I'd like to start from the start – if you give me the chance.”

Well, the old Binah would have been so bitter and angry at seeing Phil standing before me; the very same man who had promised me the world yet left me pregnant all for a white wife. But, I had bigger problems to deal with.

Binah: “Okay.”

Phil: “Firstly, I'd like to apologize for what I did to you. I know, it's a little too late, in fact, 20 years too late, but for what it is worth, I'm so sorry, Binah. I didn't mean to leave you. It is just that, at that point in my life, I expected you to carry out your big dreams. You were no longer Binah, the big and ambitious

dreamer that I met. You became lazy and in turn it made you stagnant. If it hadn't been for my dad pressuring me into marrying her, I honestly would have tried again with you. When I wanted to reach out to you, I felt too embarrassed to try – more especially after my father tried to force you to abort Hazel.”

Binah: “Well, I must say that I have been bitter all those years, but I am trying to change now.”

Phil: “I'm not happy with the way you've treated her for all these years, but this is not the time to throw stones. Yes, you were a horrible mother, and you allowed your pain to dictate the kind of mother you became. I am here to fix everything. I want to do better – be better. I've been there for her, financially, but I know that's not enough. Ghadaffi has been hurting her so badly, and I shouldn't have let it get so far.”

Binah: (teary) “What do you mean he's been hurting her?”

Phil: (sigh) “Despite him forcing her into marriage – all thanks to you by the way, he's been ill-treating her. He beat her up a few weeks ago.”

I felt my stomach turn and I became nauseated immediately.

Binah: (crying) “Oh, no. What have I done?”

Phil: “I'm sorting it out. You just focus on getting better – for Hazel. She won't cope without you.”

Binah: (shaking head) “My daughter has sacrificed herself for me, Phil. What kind of mother does that make me?”

Phil: “I admit, you weren't a good mother, but you are trying now and that is more commendable than anything. It is no use crying over spilt milk, Binah. A lot of shit is going on – so much shit that you don't even know about. I don't need you to pity yourself right now. I know you're ill and bed-ridden and I'm sorry about that, but I need you to get your act together, for our daughter's sake.”

Binah: "What about your other children?"

Phil: "Hazel's my only child."

Binah: "But everyone knows you - "

Phil: (interrupting) "Story for another day. I need you to just get your act together, please. I can get you the best specialist in the world, way better than this hospital. I just need you to hang in there, for Hazel. She has never had you in her life even though you've always been there. I need you to step up to the plate and show her you are her anchor. I know you have it in you, Binah."

Those were the kindest words anyone had said to me. I felt so touched and motivated to just do better. I had to, for Hazel.

Binah: (nodding) "What about Ghadaffi?"

Phil: "He's small fry to me, but I have to tread carefully. He's dealing with way more than we know. Black magic."

He didn't have to tell me twice. The way he turned that day he broke my back, was something else. I became paralyzed because of it. What made me think he wouldn't do that to Hazel?

Binah: "Okay, I'll do it."

Phil: "Good, I'll start with the proceedings. You just hang in there. We'll figure it all out."

I was actually glad to have some kind of support from Phil – despite it being years later. I guess it is never too late to change, although I had always known it in my heart that it was him who had been paying for Hazel and Malachi's school fees all along. I was raised according to God's word, and I had always known that God gave second chances, yet we people found it so hard to do it. I guess that was Phil's second chance. He got a chance to be a father to Hazel, I mean, she had nothing to lose to accept him with open arms. I just

needed to be honest with her and tell her the entire truth. It had been eating at me, and I was about to risk losing her – forever, but I was Binah Makwetla, and I didn't give up without a fight. I never used to be a coward – ever.

2 Peter 3:9 - “The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.”

“It was written I should be loyal to the nightmare of my choice.”

— Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*

Hazel

The flight wasn't that long, and I eventually managed to fall asleep. I was so grateful I didn't have to stay awake the entire flight through. I had a rather odd dream while on that plane; perhaps it was the little champagne I had or just euphoria, but it happened. Mam'Rose came to visit me after me not dreaming of her for a very long time. “All I recall her saying was that I was facing tough times ahead, but the rewards shall reap themselves”. I was so happy, and honestly, I was just happy to just see her face again and hear her voice. Life was truly not the same without her. I missed her words of wisdom, and her ability to see positivity in every situation – no matter how bad it was. I was under the impression that I'd have to move back to Atteridgeville, back home. I missed Jenny so much and I was sure that the twins had grown so much. Paul got us into another black car. Now that I thought of it, all the cars he drove were black, with dark windows. Was he some kind of

bodyguard who dealt with assassins? I had no idea, but it did cross my mind.

Hazel: "Paul, I thought I was going to go back home."

Paul: "Boss strictly instructed me to take you elsewhere. Your house is not conducive nor safe for you at the moment."

Hazel: "What about my nieces and my sister? My mother?"

Paul: "They'll be with you soon. Your sister is not in any kind of danger, and besides, her lifestyle will derail your progress and she might just let your location be known."

He was really speaking spy language.

Hazel: "Am I in deep trouble or something of the sort?"

Paul: "I can't really say, but all I can say is that your husband is a dangerous man. He's a lot more dangerous than you think."

I got chills right down my spine. I wasn't even sure if I should ask what he meant by that. I chose not to. At times, what you really don't know won't hurt you. I just nodded and let him be. He took me to a very beautiful, modern and luxurious Town house. It was quite big, and it didn't seem like anyone lived there. I didn't see any pictures of people around the house, the only things on the walls were beautiful, and rather expensive-looking paintings and a few sculptures here and there around the house. There was quite a lot of white colours; the couches were white and a few rugs were white as well and so was the bedding. It was a little too white for me, but I wasn't complaining. It must have been quite hard to keep that house clean at all times.

Hazel: "I'm even too afraid to ask who lives here."

Paul: "It's one of my boss's houses. He actually bought it for his daughter. Get comfortable and feel at home. I'll be sure to pick you up from here and drop you off whenever you need anything. Just don't call an Uber, okay? You need to rely on me at all times if you have somewhere to go. Please."

He sounded very serious and I could tell by the look on his face that he was being dead serious.

Hazel: (nodding) “Sure. I will make a note of that.”

Paul: “Everything you should need from food, alcohol whatsoever is in the kitchen pantry and fridge. If you need anything else – text me.”

Hazel: “Thank you, Paul.”

Paul: “Oh, by the way, you have your first meeting with the Dean and Chancellors tomorrow morning. In the mean time, get comfortable and rest.”

I thanked him once again and he left. The house felt so peaceful, so serene. For the first time in quite a long while, I could feel the holy spirit within me. I could feel God's presence and odd enough, I didn't know that house, nor did I know whom it belonged to. I went to the kitchen to look for something to drink, and I found some really nice bottles of

wine. From Avondale to Delaire Graf. Those bottles go for about R1000 a pop upwards. I must say, Paul's boss had such good taste in nearly everything that was there. I couldn't complain about much, to be honest. It was just beauty galore. I didn't really have much of an appetite, so I found myself eating popcorn with a glass of red wine, watching Netflix, which was already installed onto the tv. I missed Beast so much. It sort of looked like the type of house he would have been into. I decided to update Mathilda about my whereabouts and plans. Of course, she was a bit upset that I didn't tell her in time, but she understood that my life had taken a drastic turn. I needed to sort everything out, but it would have happened all in due time. After watching a few series episodes, I found myself slowly dozing off. It must have been for a few hours, because I woke up around 11pm, with a few missed calls from Ghadaffi. Usually, I'd get really afraid and worried that I had missed his calls, but I felt so safe in that house, and I didn't even get worried one bit. I read a few of his hideous messages to me as always, which I decided to ignore. One particular message caught my eye. It was from Brenda, Beast's sister. "I'm sorry for being so mean to you. You honestly didn't deserve all of that. I know, your intentions were pure and rest assured, I will never bother you ever again." That didn't feel very genuine to me. Something must have happened for her to change her tune like that. I couldn't help

but wonder if it hadn't been Beast who perhaps got in touch with her? I had no idea, but I grew weary and anxious daily. All I wanted was to just be in his arms, but I knew that wouldn't have happened without me explaining everything I had done. For the very first time since I got married to Ghadaffi, I managed to kneel down in the bedroom I had chosen for myself in a stranger's house, and I prayed.

Hazel: "Father God, I humble myself before you. First and foremost, I thank you so much for the wonderful gift of life, for being able to experience yet another day on this earth. Secondly, I would like you to please forgive me for not being very consistent in my prayer and faith in you. You have been so good to me, lord. Your grace remains sufficient to me at all times. Thirdly, I ask you to please bless me with a better life. Help me to get my Beast back; my life is such a mess right now. I ask you to please heal my mother and protect her, protect Jenny and the twins and let all fall into place for us all. I ask this in Jesus' Mighty Name. James 1:5 says; "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him." Right now, lord, I don't have the wisdom to go forward, I lack the knowledge to move ahead and I am asking for your guidance. You can move mountains, you can do anything. All I ask is that my life fall

back into place. I have made so many bad choices, and all I ask of you is to heal me. Amen.”

I managed to sleep the entire night through, after a very long while.

Phil

After dealing with the Warden, I wasn't done yet. I did say that I had quite a long list of offenders whom I needed to deal with. Yes, not all of them were offenders of the law; some offended my daughter and though I wasn't there to sort them out when she needed me to be, I had to stop that shit. I decided to kill two birds with one stone when I finally arrived at Bethuel's mother's house in Atteridgeville. That place hadn't changed one bit since the olden days. As soon as I parked my car right outside the gate, his mother became a little aggressive without even knowing whom I was.

Ma Sibiya: (angrily) “Who are you and what do you want?”

I was warned that she was rather fiesty.

Phil: "Good day, ma'am. My name is Phillip Ferreira. I've come to speak to you about your son, Bethuel Sibiya."

Ma Sibiya: (shouting) "What do you know about my son?! Are you one of the people who've killed him?! Leave my house!"

I saw one of the siblings come out.

Brenda: "Ma, yini (what is it)?"

Ma Sibiya: (crying) "This man has come to rub salt in my wounds. He is telling me about Bethuel. Why would he do such to me? Why, Brenda? Tell him to leave, please."

Brenda: "Excuse me, sir. Who are you?"

Phil: "My name is Phillip Ferreira. I'm your brother's lawyer."

Brenda: (shocked) "Did you finally find him?"

Ma Sibiya: "Let him leave!"

Brenda: "Wait a moment, Mama."

Phil: (nodding) "Yes, please, allow me in so we can talk. I don't do such things in public."

Brenda: "Of course, do come in."

She let me in while the mother was sobbing. She was quite dramatic, if you ask me. I thought she'd have been relieved that her son was finally found and alive at that. I was permitted to sit down and I took out my files soon after.

Brenda: "Would you like anything to drink?"

Phil: "No, thank you. I've actually come to speak to you, amongst other things."

Brenda: (frowning) "Me? Do you know me?"

Phil: "I make it my business to know everyone. Firstly, I'd like to tell you that Bethuel is safe and he is at Kgosi Mampuru Prison."

Ma Sibiya: "Oh, thank God! My son is alive!"

Brenda: "How did he get there? Who arrested him when we weren't even informed? It's been months."

Phil: "It's a very long story, Brenda. A lot of corrupt people are involved in this, but I'm working on it."

Ma Sibiya: (clicking tongue) "Mxm, you are quite useless for a white lawyer. Are you sure you're even a lawyer? I want my son back here by tomorrow!"

Brenda: "Ma, Please."

Phil: "Look, as I have said, his case remains complicated. He did kill Raymond and there is quite an amount of substantive evidence against him which was used in the court of law."

Ma Sibiya: "I knew it! I knew it the moment he brought that harlot into my house! She has brought nothing but bad luck onto my son!"

That pained me so much; my daughter endured hardship at home and even out in life.

Phil: "Well, I've actually come to address both of you. I am sure you are quite aware that it is Hazel who managed to locate Beast's whereabouts."

Brenda: "I don't want to talk about her. She is just going to break my brother's heart all over again. While we were out

here worried sick about him, she ran off and got married to the very same man who put him there!”

Phil: “I don't think either of you are in a position to judge Hazel at this moment. I am the one in charge here. I make the plans and I call the shots. So, if you do want to visit Beast, you need to be kind to Hazel, you need to promise me that you won't insult her in any way and you will start by apologizing to her via sms, Brenda.”

Brenda: (firmly) “Why do I need to do that?”

Phil: “Because Beast loves her and she loves him. If you want me to win this case, Beast needs to be 100% focused. He can't do that if he has Hazel and all negativity on his mind. Are we clear?”

Brenda: “Fine, but why are you so concerned about her? She's Ghadaffi's wife.”

Phil: "If you know what is good for you, you will take my advice. I mean, I am doing this out of the goodness of my heart. Show me anyone who'd be willing to take on his case pro bono. Show me any of those useless P.I's who have enough evidence for you? None of them managed to find your brother, but Hazel did. So, do me a favour and spare me the pettiness. If I so much as hear her cry because of you – I'm done. Got it?"

They were both displeased, but they didn't have much of a choice.

Brenda: "Fine, when can we see him?"

Phil: "Give me a day to sort out his paperwork, including his visitor's list and I'll let you know. I do have your number. I'll be in touch."

I left them both flabbergasted. I might have been a dead beat dad, according to everyone, but I was there to make up for all time lost. Hazel needed me more than ever. I had so much on my plate, including the biggest pest I'd ever dealt with –

Ghadaffi. He was pestering me day in, day out about his time in London. He was considering coming back because he couldn't trust Hazel to be left alone. I needed to do something to stall him from coming back home.

Hazel

I had such a beautiful night's sleep, that even my body couldn't believe it. I didn't wake up feeling like something was pressing on my shoulders the entire night. I felt rather blessed, more especially when I dreamt of a woman I had never met in my entire life. She had beautiful, golden brown curly hair and she just smiled at me in the dream. She didn't look harmful at all, instead

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she just smiled at me until the dream ended. I had no idea whom she was, nor did I have any idea whom to ask about her. She was white, of course, and we all knew that I didn't have any connection to my father nor his family. I got up and took a shower, and just after I got ready, Paul called me to tell me that he was right outside waiting on me. I couldn't even eat anything, since he was already outside. I figured I'd get something on campus.

Paul: "Good morning. Slept well?"

Hazel: "Hi, Paul. Yes, thank you. I had the most pleasant night's rest ever. I even had a pleasant dream."

Paul: "What kind of dream?"

Hazel: "Nothing weird, just a beautiful, curly-haired woman who was smiling at me throughout the entire dream."

Paul: "Hmm, I see."

Hazel: "Perhaps she is or was the owner of the house. I don't want her to strangle me one night in my sleep."

Paul: (laughing) "I doubt she'd do that."

He drove further while I continued to find something to do on my phone. Paul was nice but he wasn't my friend. I had a new environment to get used to and I didn't have any friends. It was about to suck even further. Upon arrival, Paul suggested that he'd wait for me right in the Campus parking lot. I didn't even spend that much time in the Dean's office. I was welcomed formally and introduced to the Chancellors and other lecturers who were going to be part of my year cycle. It was almost exam season, but we were going to be doing almost the same modules. Luckily, I had to do practicals as well, and so, they chose Kgosi Mampuru Prison for me. Well, I didn't complain because that was where Beast was. I was going to shadow my lecturer, Dr. Mpho. She insisted on us calling her by her name instead of surname, so it wasn't that bad. I had to start that very day, which wasn't really bad, but that meant I was going to meet Beast – one way or another. I was so anxious, and I had no idea why.

I explained to her that I had my own transport, of which I was strictly instructed by Paul not to take any rides from anyone. I didn't understand why, but it was better for me not to know yet. I made a mental note to ask him to drive me straight to the hospital right after the practicals. The closer we got to the prison, the more anxious I became. We got in and were

searched as usual, and luckily I was wearing a jean and sneakers and just a normal top, as if I sort of knew I was going to go to the prison. Upon arrival at one of the rooms where the session was going to take place, we were kept waiting, which was not very unusual in prisons. I wasn't used to Dr. Mpho, but she seemed nice, young and looked like someone I could relate to.

Hazel: (clearing throat) "Dr. Mpho, if I may ask, who is our patient today?"

Dr. Mpho: "Oh, I'm so sorry, I forgot to brief you. I keep thinking that you were once here, you know. Well, our patient today is a man who killed his mother. She had been quite toxic pretty much from the moment he was born. He just lost it one time and struck her with an axe."

I immediately lost interest, however I had to keep my focus because that was part of my year mark. I mean, that obviously wasn't Beast, and I was a little disappointed that he wasn't going to be our patient. What were the odds going to be, though? I couldn't expect everything to fall right into my lap, right? Our patient finally walked in and he looked nothing like a killer, but no one walks around with that sign on their

foreheads, right? He seemed so broken, so ashamed of what he had done, but at the same time, he told us he wasn't sorry he did it. As far as he was concerned, the world was better off without his mother. She would constantly criticize him and ridicule him even in front of her friends. He was never good enough and he never denied killing her. His trial didn't even take that long, because he pleaded guilty and received a 25 year prison sentence, with the possibility of parole after serving only 13 years, and he would have had to be kept under constant psychological analysis. I kept wondering if Beast would have actually spent so much time in prison. He was serving time for Murder as well. It was a rather daunting and draining two hours. I had to listen to some gruesome details of how he killed his mother, and he didn't even mind that a stranger like me was sitting in and making notes. I had to be discreet and sign an agreement that I'd never tell anyone outside of what was spoken about in those sessions. Once we were done, I couldn't wait to get out of there. I had no other classes that day, and once I was in the car, Paul noticed just how weird I acted.

Paul: "Is everything okay?"

Hazel: (nodding) "Yes."

Paul: "Are you sure? You seem a little disappointed."

Hazel: (sigh) "It's just that, I was hoping I'd see him, you know."

Paul: "Oh, you mean your fiance or ex. Beast, right?"

Hazel: "I'm not even going to ask how you know that, but yes. I just want to be sure that he is okay."

Paul: "Okay, hold on a second. Let me make a call."

He left me in the car and I could hear a few muffled words. He was probably talking to his boss. After a few minutes, I heard him give me some rather good news.

Paul: "Okay, I just spoke to my boss. You can't go in and see him today, because he has not recovered yet, but he will call you later on."

My heart nearly jumped out of my chest.

Hazel: "Recovered from what?"

Paul: "Uhm, nothing serious. He'll tell you himself if he calls you."

I was a bit saddened. He raised my expectations and hopes, and that is always dangerous. A life with expectations often leads to disappointments. I knew that somehow, Beast was angry at me, of which he had every right to be. I started questioning the kind of person I was. I was married and there I was, hoping to see my fiancé or ex. I was not even sure what to call him yet. My life was surely a movie. I decided to go back home and try out a new recipe I saw online. I hadn't been in the kitchen in a very long time. I received quite a few calls from Ghaddafi himself, of which I ignored, and then a few calls from his mother and then obviously, his father. I ignored them all for a good few minutes. I even thought of changing my number. I had to go see my mother later on, but something was just making me drag my feet. That really odd feeling that struck me out of nowhere. I tried baking, which I was not really good at, but my croissants came out really well. I was inspired after I

ate those at that beautiful, secluded lodge Mathilda had taken me to on my birthday. After making them, I decided to eat them with some cream cheese, strawberries and a glass of wine. While sitting on the couch, I was reminiscing of the good old days, and I received a call from a number I couldn't recognize. I answered it blindly, without even thinking.

Hazel: "Hello?"

The person went dead quiet for a while. I even looked at my phone screen again, trying to see if Truecaller had picked up who it was, but nothing.

Hazel: "Hello?"

Beast: (shaky voice) "Hazel... Is that you?"

I felt my heart jump, literally. I wasn't even sure how to feel; happy, or heartbroken or guilty?

Hazel: (nervously) "Yes, it's me."

Beast: (deep sigh) "I wasn't told that I'd be calling you. Please, delete this number. I won't be calling you ever again."

I was about to ask why when he just hung up. I tried calling that number and it didn't seem to go through. He had just blocked me without even giving me a chance to speak. I felt so torn, that I just burst into tears. My day was about to go from bad to worse, really. Another call came through. I answered it quickly as I thought it was Beast calling me again, you know, I thought he had come back to his senses.

Hazel: "Hello."

Nurse: "Hi, is this Hazel Mashile?"

I kept forgetting that was my new surname. That was how much I loathed my life choices.

Hazel: "Uh, yes, how may I help you?"

Nurse: "Well, I'm sorry to tell you this, but your mother has been discharged today and you need to come pick her up."

Hazel: "Oh, is she alright? Has she recovered?"

Nurse: "Unfortunately not. We had to stop her chemo sessions, because your husband hasn't paid the next round of her bill. He has even reversed the past few payments made to the hospital."

I was so confused.

Hazel: "I'm sorry, you must be mistaken."

Nurse: "No, we're not. He reversed all the payments and when we called him, he instructed us to call you as he said you'll be the one who'll take care of it."

My throat felt like it was about to close up. I could feel my eyes burn and my chest felt like I was dying.

Hazel: "H... How much do I need to pay?"

Nurse: "Well, amongst other expenses, you owe the hospital just over R365000."

If I didn't die that day, it was most probably a bloody miracle. Yes, Ghadaffi was punishing me because he could no longer control me for the shortwhile he was in London. He couldn't get hold of me, so he decided to take away the only comfort I had in place for my mother. He knew that I had a weakness for her, and he used it against me. He wanted my attention, he wanted me to beg him to pay for the bill, in exchange for something else. I was a prisoner in that marriage, and I told myself that I refused to be one any further. I had no idea how I was going to take care of her, but I couldn't be his prisoner any longer. I was trapped at that age, of which was not right at all. I grew up believing that the Lord would provide, and I needed to have that faith back. If I had been living in Ghadaffi's house, I wouldn't have been able to think of a solution without begging him. But, I was saved and I was living in a peaceful house. God was speaking to me; I knew that everything was going to be alright. I had no idea how it was

going to get better, but that was the beauty of trusting in God. The same way we trusted people who told us that they loved us. We weren't very sure and we most likely wouldn't have seen the outcome, but we relied on faith and their actions. God was going to act in my life. I just needed to hang on a little while longer.

Hebrews 11:6 - "And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him."

“Fate is like a strange, unpopular restaurant filled with odd little waiters who bring you things you never asked for and don't always like.”

— Lemony Snicket

“Faith is not the belief that God will do what you want. It is the belief that God will do what is right.” - Max Lucado

Beast

I was not discharged from the Prison Hospital quarters as the doctor had told me that I would, but instead I managed to get proper medication which really assisted me, all thanks to Hazel's father. I got so much better, that I decided to discharge myself. I hated being nursed and imagine being in a prison hospital. The warden approached me just as I had asked the doctor to discharge me. She looked quite big and rude, much like any other female warden I'd seen – especially on tv. She was wearing ridiculously high heels along with her brown uniform. I didn't trust her one bit, she just didn't look trustworthy at all.

Warden: "Doctor, please leave us."

Doctor: "Sure, Warden."

Warden: (smiling) "Hello, Bethuel. My name is Vivian and I'm the Warden here."

Beast: (nodding) "Pleased to meet you."

Warden: "Apologies for never getting the chance to properly welcome you, but I've been rather busy."

Beast: "I see."

Which way was there to properly welcome a prisoner, though? It was not home to anyone.

Warden: "I've come to inform you that if you ever do want to open a case, my office is always open."

I was no snitch.

Beast: “Thanks, but there’s nothing to report.”

Warden: “Hmm, I see you and your father are very much different.”

Beast: (firmly) “How do you know that I’m his son?”

Warden: “Oh, we have you on prison records and word flies by very quickly, you know.”

Beast: “For future reference, do not compare me to my father. Please.”

Warden: (nodding) “Forgive me for that.”

Beast: “Is that all you came here for?”

Warden: "Oh, I've come to inform you that you'll be in your own cell from now on. We do suspect your life may be in danger, and that this incident is only the beginning."

Beast: "I don't need your protection."

Warden: "It's policy. You'll be going to your cell from now on. If you need anything, don't be afraid to shout."

Beast: "Okay then."

Warden: "By the way, here's your new cell phone. Your lawyer strictly instructed us to hand it to you."

I guess Phil was really serious when he said that he could make things happen. That woman refused to let me go back to the communal cell. I was given a smart phone, nonetheless. I guess things were finally about to pick up, although I had no idea what was in store for me. I was led to my own cell, just around the corner of my father's cell. I had everyone staring at me; some were good stares and some were not. I couldn't tell, really, it was prison. All I knew was that they had already heard something about me. People will always conclude their own

theories about you, based on what they hear. I was yet to experience a whole lot of unwanted drama. I figured they were most probably staring at me because of what had happened the previous night; with me being beaten and stabbed near-death by my father's boys, or was it because they all knew I was his son? Or perhaps it was the fact that the Warden was walking right behind me. It annoyed me so much, but I just chose to keep quiet. The cell was clean and I could see a few things, such as a small laptop and tv, and a few snacks in there. I never asked for VIP treatment – from anyone. That could have made me an easy target. I wasn't ready to die just yet. I still had quite a lot of things to get done in life. The Warden was rather pleased with herself for organizing that cell, as if it was a luxurious place to be in.

Warden: (smiling) “Well, this is your new home. I hope you'll enjoy the little perks I got you.”

Oh, she got those for me? I assumed Phil had done that.

Beast: “Thanks, but it wasn't necessary.”

Warden: "I was taught that it is rude to refuse a gift."

Beast: "And I was taught that nothing comes for free in here."

Warden: (chuckling) "You're so funny, just like your father."

I gave her a stern look yet again. I didn't want any reference to my father whatsoever.

Warden: "Oh, forgive me once again. Do enjoy. If you need anything, you know where my office is."

I just looked at her and she finally left the cell. A few prisoners were heard whistling at her, and she just casually told them off. Something was off about that woman. My gut feeling was never wrong. I was still trying to recover from the fact that I ignored it and I got arrested. I knew that Ghadaffi was the person who had done that to me, but to find out so late, was exasperating. I couldn't even cope with the fact that Hazel chose to marry him, for whatever reason. All along I had hope that she was even growing thin because of worrying about me

and my whereabouts, meanwhile she was sleeping with my enemy. I was her first, and knowing that she had slept with him, made it even harder for me to try and forgive her. A lot was going through my mind, and I might have survived the very first physical attack on me in there, but I knew that mentally, I was slowly breaking down.

While I was trying to get settled on that uncomfortable mattress, a strange man, one of the prisoners knocked on my cell, sternly. It took me a while to get my head up, as my neck was still stiff from being broken and my arm was not functioning at that moment. He looked rather old, like he had been there for years, but he didn't look scary or mean. He gave me a faint smile, and I swear he looked just like Moses in the Bible with his oddly long beard.

Prisoner: (smiling) "How are you, Bethuel?"

I wasn't really surprised that he knew my name. I mean, everyone knew my name. I was the son of the infamous and most-feared prison gangster, unfortunately.

Beast: (smiling) "I'm good, Baba (father), how are you?"

Prisoner: (chuckling) "You are so humble and respectful, unlike that man you call your father. It is so unfortunate."

I just smiled briefly. I didn't want to be rude to him. He was most probably just trying to make conversation.

Prisoner: "Hmm, nice tv you got there."

Beast: "Hmm, I didn't even ask for it."

Prisoner: "Well, be careful of things given to you without you asking for them in here. Anyway, I'll see you at dinner time. Have a nice day."

He left without me even getting to know his name. Something was really odd about him, but he had this radiating aura around him. He was just giving me positive vibes. A while later, I received a text message coming through my new prison phone. "Call this number urgently." I didn't even take a look at

the number, so I just dialled. I was not even surprised the phone was loaded with airtime. The moment I heard the person's voice, I knew it was the voice I had been dreading to hear. I wasn't ready to talk to Hazel, I just didn't see her in the same light as I did before Ghadaffi told me everything. My heart curled into a ball the moment I heard that voice. I just told her not to bother calling me back. I wanted to talk to her so badly, but at the same time, I was a little disgusted. I could never blame her for whatever she did without knowing her reasons, but I couldn't help but feel disgusted. How was I ever going to look at her the same way again?

Hazel

I was so broken when I heard Beast tell me not to even attempt calling him. He had never rejected me like that. The last time I felt such pain was when I was left alone on my lobola negotiations. I was so hurt, that I just cried. I mean, I was hoping that he would give me a chance to explain myself. If he didn't even want to speak to me over the phone, what made me think that he would have wanted to speak to me in person? I was crying even more over the fact that Ghadaffi had done me so dirty. So, he literally took his time to reverse all payments over the previous three months?! Knowing very well

that we had a deal and I basically sold myself to him in exchange for my mother's medical bills. I couldn't stop crying, and I felt the onset of a very powerful and stubborn migraine. I couldn't call an Uber, I was told to rely on Paul for everything, so I dialed his number.

Paul: "Hazel, is everything alright?"

Hazel: (crying) "Hi, Paul. I don't mean to disturb you, but can you come pick me up? I need to go to the hospital."

Paul: "Is everything alright? Are you hurt?"

Hazel: "Oh, no, my mother... I have to go fetch her."

Paul: "Okay, not a problem. Give me about 5 minutes. I'll be there."

Hazel: "Thank you."

I hung up and I burst into tears. That fucker played me. Had I been so stupid? I contemplated calling him, but then what good would it have done? I had no idea why he did what he did, so I decided to call him in any case. Of course, he answered almost immediately.

Ghadaffi: "Well, that took you long enough."

Hazel: "Brandon, hi."

Ghadaffi: "Hello, my wife."

Hazel: "What's this I hear about you reversing payments for my mother's chemotherapy?"

Ghadaffi: (chuckling) "That's the only reason you called? Wow. No wonder you fought so hard for me to go for on this trip. Why on earth would I pay for your mother's bills when you ignore my calls, Hazel? I thought we were a team."

Hazel: "We... We are..."

Ghadaffi: "If you say so. I have some business to attend to. We'll talk later."

He just hung up on me like that. He wanted me to beg him, to dehumanize myself and beg. I was not going to do that. Paul arrived and it was a bit late to wipe away my tears. My face had already turned red at the time.

Paul: (worried) "Is everything okay?"

Hazel: (nodding) "Yes, I'm just going through a really hard time. Can we please go fetch my mother? I'll explain along the way."

Paul: "Sure."

I got into the car and he drove off. I couldn't bring myself to tell him everything. He was most probably going to look at me like I was insane. I had no idea where to start. Although the hospital was a little far from us, Paul really didn't mind. The

entire drive, I kept thinking how on earth I was going to pay all that money? I was going to be blacklisted before I even got a job. I wanted to explain everything to Paul, but where was I even going to start? He was my driver, though, not my therapist. My life was slowly hitting a brick wall. The moment we arrived, I got out for some fresh air. I felt like my throat was closing in on me while he was driving. I didn't want to have another panic attack. I found my mother on a wheelchair, already waiting for me in the foyer. It was the most embarrassing and saddest moment of my life. One of the admin workers was so pleased with herself the moment she heard that I was the Hazel Mashile.

Employee: "Oh, are you Hazel Mashile?"

Hazel: "Yes, I am."

Employee: "We've been waiting for you. Oh, I hope you didn't come here via taxi or anything."

Paul was right behind me and looked rather annoyed.

Paul: "What does that have to do with anything?"

Employee: "Oh

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I'm sorry. You are?"

Paul: "Her driver. Now, give her the fucking papers so she can sign and we can get out of your face."

I'd never seen him swear at anyone, let alone get so mad before. She could see he wasn't about to play any games, so she lowered her tone and dropped the attitude. I never understood why it was always necessary for black people to feel the need to belittle you, even when they are supposed to help you.

Employee: "Okay, sign here and there, and Initial on every page please."

I didn't even bother reading, I just signed and she dropped me a bombshell.

Employee: "It states that if you fail to pay the money within a month, our attorneys will be giving you a call. Here's your copy."

I wanted to die right there. I could feel the onset of tears, but Paul was right there.

Paul: "I'll push Mama, you go on right ahead."

I couldn't even look at my mother. I felt like such a failure; she was bed-ridden and ill and I couldn't do anything to help. Paul put her into the car, and I sat in the front passenger seat. I couldn't face her, and the more I heard her calling out my name, the more I just cried. The more you try not to cry, the louder your cries become.

Binah: "Hazel, my baby..."

I kept quiet and cried, silently. She could hear me sniffing, though. And that to me, was so painful.

Binah: "Hazel, it's okay. I'll be okay. We'll be okay. I promise you."

I felt a little selfish right there, but I just couldn't stop crying. My mother was indeed going through the most and there I was, crying. Paul was outside on a rather long call. Once he came back, he chose not to say anything. All he said was that we'd be home in no time. I liked the fact that he had empathy and he knew when to speak. He never forced me to tell him what my problem was. I was rather embarrassed; I was humiliated over my mother's hospital bill right in front of Paul; a man I hardly knew. He drove us off in perfect silence, while my mother was most probably heart-broken. I had no idea how I was going to face her once we got to the new house. I still hadn't called it home yet, although it really felt like it. Once Paul entered through the gate, I could feel my heart pounding, and the migraine just wouldn't disappear. Paul was enough of a gentleman to take my mother out of the car and put her in the wheelchair. He strolled her into the house and I let out the last bit of my tears. It felt like my entire chest was being split into two. It was so painful, both physically and emotionally. Paul came back after a good five minutes.

Paul: (sigh) "Are you sure you're okay?"

Hazel: "I don't know, but I'll be okay."

Paul: "Listen, go and be with your mom. There's some pills on the kitchen counter. Take one whenever you feel overwhelmed. I'll be back soon. I'll sort out this situation for you. I promise."

I hardly knew him yet he made me feel like whatever he said he could do, he really could do, you know. I nodded and stepped out of the car, although I felt as if I had been hit by a massive car, I still had to go into the house and face my mother. I had failed that woman. Paul was nice enough to put her on the couch with a light blanket over her thighs. She was staring at the tv, but I could tell that she wasn't focused on it. The moment she heard my footsteps, she couldn't turn her face entirely, but I could tell she could see a glimpse of me.

Binah: "Hazel, can we talk, please."

I walked towards her and I could see the tears threatening to fall down her worn out face. I hadn't seen her in such a long time, that I failed to see how much weight she had lost. Her beauty was almost gone, and she looked ten years older. I could barely see the meat on her face. The cancer had eaten away at her body mass. It made me want to cry even further. The tears just fell down yet again.

Binah: (teary) "There's something I've been meaning to tell you. It's been eating at me for so long and I don't know how you're going to take it, but I need to confess."

At that point, nothing she could have said could ever be as bad as seeing her in that state.

Binah: "I should have never introduced you to Brandon in the first place. He... He came to me and approached me. I was so angry that you were dating Beast, I thought that he was not good enough for you and that you most definitely deserved better than a gangster. I feel horrible for toying with your fate, my child, and look now, I'm paying for my sins."

I couldn't understand exactly what she was confessing to.

Hazel: (crying) “What are you talking about, Mama?”

Binah: (crying) “I... I made a deal with him. He offered me R100 000 in exchange that he could marry you. I was desperate; you and Beast were busy in your own bubble and you had no time for me. I was broke and miserable and I ended up making a selfish, evil mistake.”

That was a shock to me, but I mean, I sold myself in exchange for her. It wasn't a big deal to me, honestly. It was done but she didn't force me to marry him – he did.

Hazel: “Mama, you're not the one who forced me to marry him; he did.”

I thought that was it, but she kept dishing it out. What was to come really set my migraine on level 100.

Binah: "That's not all. I knew everything he had done. I knew what he had done to Beast. I knew all along where Beast was, I just couldn't tell you."

I felt quite a loud thump in my stomach. My mother had done a lot of things to me, and they were forgivable, truly, but that. That was just something else.

Hazel: (shocked) "You did what?!"

Binah: "I wasn't thinking, Hazel. I mean, I had started to change and I truly wanted to be the mother I never got to be to you. I honestly regret what I did."

Hazel: (crying) "You mean you knew all along the kind of man Ghadaffi was, and you failed to rescue me? You pretended that Beast left me at my own lobola negotiations, knowing very well what that man did to my fiance!"

Binah: (crying) "Baby, please. I really didn't mean to do that. I wasn't thinking straight, I wasn't the same person I am now."

Out of everything she had done to me, withholding that information about Beast; watching me go through all of that with a man whom I didn't love, with a man who was clearly obsessed with me and who abused me, was the hardest news to digest.

Hazel: "Mama, do you honestly know what I've been through just so you could get the best treatment?! I literally sold my soul for you! I wanted the best for you."

Binah: (crying) "I know, that's the part that has been eating at me, Hazel. He did this to me. Please, forgive me."

Hazel: "I can't deal with this right now, I'm sorry."

I just got up without even thinking of her and I went straight to my bedroom to cry. The last time I cried like that was when Beast was missing. Now, I realized then that I had sold my soul to the devil; the devil my mother had been concocting with. I did all that for her, now I was in so much debt – all for her! Beast was pissed as fuck at me of which he had every right

to be. He didn't want to talk to me; I knew then that I might have lost him - forever. That was something I wasn't prepared to live with.

Phil

I was busy sorting out the logistics of the case, trying to find loopholes, but it was honestly a long shot. I couldn't cope with all the fraud Ghadaffi and Dragon had pulled off just to get Beast into prison. I was not planning on sleeping one wink, until I got all the people involved behind bars. Yes, he killed Raymond, and he didn't deny it, but what they did would erase all his charges. While I was going through my case file, Paul came storming in looking like death itself.

Phil: (frowning) "Since when don't you knock? Were you drinking?"

Paul: (sigh) "No, but at the rate things are going, I wish I were drinking."

Phil: "Talk to me."

Paul: (sigh) "You need to tell your daughter who you really are, dude. Jokes aside, she needs her father right now."

Phil: (frowning) "What happened?"

Paul: "Apart from the shit stunt Ghadaffi pulled with the hospital bill, your daughter is on the brink of depression yet again."

Phil: (sigh) "I told you, it's not that easy."

Paul: "If you don't do something now, you'll find her in hospital this time. She's been crying all day. I'm telling you, she's not well. You saw all the previous therapy reports, and if you want her to heal, you need to act – fast!"

I honestly didn't want to formally introduce myself to Hazel under such circumstances. Yes, I was partially ashamed for never really being present in her life, and once my family and

the whole world knew about her existence, all hell was going to break loose. I wanted to protect her from them – from the world. I didn't want her to be known as the secret, black love child. People could be cruel, and I just wanted her to get to know me first, under much different circumstances, but life doesn't always go according to plan. I had to act fast, and Paul would never have lied to me. Yes, I did read all her reports and I must say, I was unimpressed by what Binah had done to her. I was willing to forgive and just start over, I was not perfect at all and I just wanted to be the best father I could be. Time was not on my side, Ghadaffi was a danger to her and I needed to get her to trust me and to trust that I did what I did – for her. It was time to face my daughter once and for all.

Isaiah 55:7 - “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.”

“None of us knows what might happen even the next minute, yet still we go forward. Because we trust. Because we Because we have faith.”

— Paulo Coelho

Beast

After a while, it was finally dinner time. Sadly, I spent a few hours going through my pictures with Hazel. My account was deleted, and I couldn't see any of our pictures on her Instagram, but thank goodness for technology, I managed to save everything on the cloud each time I took pictures of us. I was slowly dying inside, thinking of how happy I once was, but I threw everything away for the woman I loved, or still loved rather. I hid my phone in my cell, I mean, I was still in prison, so I couldn't exactly be on my phone freely amongst prisoners and guards. As I went out, the stares began yet again. I ignored it, I was used to being judged and looked down upon from when I was younger. While I was in the queue for food, the strange, old man came to stand right behind me and started a conversation yet again.

Prisoner: "We meet again, Bethuel."

Beast: "Oh, Sawubona, Baba (Hello, father)."

Prisoner: "I never gave you my name. Please, call me Job."

Beast: (shaking head) "No, Baba (father). I could never call you by name. You're my elder. At least let me call you Malume (Uncle) Job."

He nodded with a smile. I proceeded to get my tray of food, that was literally tossed to me and nearly fell to the ground. I could tell the guy did that intentionally and wanted a reaction out of me, but I was bigger than that. I no longer wanted to participate in useless fights, so I looked him right in the eye and let it go. Job took his tray and it wasn't shoved towards him, so it was clearly done on purpose. Once we sat down, my father and his little crew walked in and they were saluted and respected so it seemed. It was more feared than respected. He gave me an odd look of which I couldn't understand; he was smirking at me and I didn't like that look at all. Once I sat down, I just looked at the food and had a very weird feeling. A

voice inside of my head told me not to eat the food. I stared at the food for a few minutes, while Job was eating his. A few of his other cell mates came to sit with us.

Job: “These are my fellow cell mates. We do most things together and we've been in here for quite some time. We pray together and hold church service together on Sundays. You should join us some time.”

Beast: (nodding) “I'd love it.”

I just picked up my spoon and my stomach felt off the moment I did that. I didn't even attempt to eat the food.

Job: “Why aren't you eating?”

Beast: “I don't know, I just don't feel like eating all of a sudden.”

Job: (chuckling) “Hmm, I see. If you don't feel like it, by all means – trust your instinct. You've always been good at that, until you let your guard down.”

He spoke to me as if he knew me from somewhere.

Beast: "I'm sorry, do you know me from somewhere? I mean, have we met before?"

Job: (shaking head) "No."

There came my father just to try and ruin a perfectly good dinner, though I wasn't even eating.

Sol: "Well, well, well. Job, are you trying to steal my son away from me?"

Job: "You're a very funny man, Sol. No one is stealing anyone from you. You drove him away yourself."

Sol: "Hmm, well, you know I have eyes and ears everywhere in this place."

Job: “And you know I have those of the Lord. Is there anything important you would like to tell me? Because you're disturbing my meal.”

Sol: “Hey, son. Why aren't you eating?”

Job: “That's a funny question coming from you. Why don't you tell him what you did?”

He looked so edgy as soon as he was asked that question.

Sol: “What the fuck are you on about?”

Job: “Just as you have eyes and ears everywhere, so do I. I am protected by the Lord and so is your son. Look at him, he walks around with ancestors surrounding him and the light of God. You can't do anything to him, Sol, no matter how hard you try. Keep doing what you're doing and your own little crew will turn on you. You are digging a grave for yourself.”

Sol: (laughing) “You've been saying that ever since I came here. Are you even sure you're a real prophet?”

Job: “God can give you a long rope to hang yourself. In your case, your rope is almost finished.”

That was enough to send him away. He moved away from us so quickly, I got the idea that he was really afraid of Job.

Job: “Your father has always been a bitter man, but you're much better than that, Bethuel.”

Beast: “Forgive me for asking, Baba, but how do you know all this?”

Job: “Haven't you been paying attention? I saw you in a dream; and I knew that I had to see you. You radiate the room when you walk in, Bethuel. You walk around with the Lion of Judah right beside you. God has got you so protected, it is amazing.”

Beast: “I don't feel protected at times.”

Job: "Yet you never lose your faith. I see you; I can see your heart. I'm a prophet. You were destined to come here for a reason. There are so many things you don't know, but all will unravel themselves to you. Why on earth do you think you suddenly lost your appetite as soon as you got that spoon in your hand? Your father and his crew poisoned your food."

I was so shocked; I mean I heard a voice inside my head telling me not to eat the food, but I didn't expect food poisoning. That was just cruel. My own father had tried to poison me. It was better when he wanted nothing to do with me nor my sisters, but to try and poison me? That was absolutely heartbreaking. I didn't want to mend any fences with him, but I expected him to at least try and win back my affection. That for me, was the last straw. I was torn, but I decided right there and then, that I had officially written him off. I had said it before, but at that time, there was so much finality in it. I didn't have any hope nor faith in him any more. I tried by all means to hide the coarse tears from streaming down my face. You know when you feel so heartbroken, that your throat feels as if it is dry and the saliva that is forcing its way down your throat feels like it is doing more damage than

good? That was exactly how I felt. Job could probably see past my hurt.

Job: “I know how you feel, but take it with a pinch of salt. Your father is broken – beyond broken. He will never change, but you are about to change so many people in here.”

I just forced myself to listen while my stomach became even more upset. I just felt like being alone at that point.

Beast: “Please excuse me, I'd like to be alone in my cell.”

Job: “You can go now, but consider coming to my cell and staying there for the duration of your time here. You're safer around people – around us.”

I suppose he knew what he was talking about and why he said that to me.

Beast: (frowning) “What do you mean by that, Baba (father)?”

Job: “I told you; I see everything that happens in here. If you sleep there tonight, you won't make it til tomorrow morning.”

Could there have been a hit out on me for that evening? I looked towards my father's direction and the smirk on his face had confirmed everything Job was saying to me.

Beast: (sigh) “If I do that, I'll seem like a coward.”

Job: “Not everything in life has to be braved out, Bethuel. You're much bigger than that. The day you leave here, you'll be a completely different person, you'll barely recognize yourself.”

Beast: (sigh) “Okay, what do I have to do?”

Job: “I'll speak to the guard and get your bed ready. You can sleep right next to me.”

I nodded and continued sitting down. After they all ate, it was finally time for us to go back to our cells. When I wanted to go

to my cell, I noticed how my father's two skivvies were cutting the line

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trying to get closer to me, but Job was already one step ahead of them. He quickly got behind me and didn't move an inch.

Job: (whispering) “Leave your things, I'll get someone to bring them to us.”

I just nodded and continued walking. The moment Rizzler and Potra had to return to their cell, I noticed both of them putting something back into their pockets, and looking at me in such a vile way. I knew then that I had dodged a bullet – yet again, all thanks to Job. I felt as if God had deliberately placed him in my life, at that time. I had barely recovered from my broken neck, broken arm and hundreds of stitches, and yet they were trying to finish me off. I was there for barely a week, and they had wanted me dead. I knew that I was a bigger threat to them than I thought. They didn't just want to kill me for fun; I intimidated my father. I had a purpose, and I would fulfil it – no matter what. Job got me into his cell and indeed, the bed right next to his was already prepared.

Job: "What do you need from your cell?"

Beast: "Everything; including my cell phone under the pillow, the tv, laptop and snacks in my cupboard."

He nodded and went to speak to one of the guards. After everything I had been through, I trusted no one. Within minutes, all my things were brought to me and Job personally handed me my cell phone. The prisoners in our cell were very excited to get a Smart TV and laptop. I wasn't really bothered by it, and they asked me if they could use the laptop a bit. They took turns logging into Facebook and checking in on life. Perks of having money behind bars. The moment the tv came, they found themselves logging into Netflix, it was such a beautiful sight to see. They weren't violent and noisy like the prisoners in my father's cell, but they just enjoyed seeing something different for a change. The lights weren't switched off yet, so they got to enjoy something small. I couldn't help but smile at that; everyone was in there for whatever sin they had committed, while some didn't even do anything yet they were held captive, but seeing them become excited over just a mere tv, showed me that a lot of us took life for granted. I loved Hazel so much that I committed a crime for her, but I wasn't so sure any more if I had done the right thing.

Beast: “Baba (Father), I thank you for doing all this for me, but why are you being so nice to me?”

Job: “It is my job, Bethuel, besides, like I said, I saw your heart. You are pure-hearted and one of these days you will see it. You have a purpose here, and you won't leave until you fulfill it.”

Beast: (nodding) “You never told me why you're in here.”

Job: (chuckling) “I'm glad you asked me that question before your father told you lies about me.”

It seemed as if the two of them had a real history.

Job: “Well, your father and I were once friends, back in the day, in Kwazulu-Natal. Your Uncle Sfiso knows me very well. My father owned a lot of taxis and when he passed on, they were automatically handed over to me as the first born of the family. Your father started becoming greedy once I handed him

one taxi so that he could make a living for your mother and all of you. When he gave me an ultimatum that I needed to hand him my entire taxi business or else he'd make me regret it. I refused; by that evening; the police were at my house. I still remember all that blood flowing right until the doorway. All my children were killed and I was to blame. They said they had concrete proof; and I was given three life sentences; one for each of my children.”

He tried by all means to swallow hard and hide his tears, but they just flowed voluntarily.

Job: (teary) “I tried explaining to my wife, but she wanted nothing to do with me, and in turn, she divorced me and that was it. It took me a long time; ten years to be exact to forgive and finally allow God back into my life. Little did I know that I'd be serving time with the very same man who killed my children – your father.”

I didn't expect that at all. I had heard that my father was a low-life gangster from my mother, but a cold-hearted killer? That was unexpected. He killed innocent children just to prove a

point and put an innocent man behind bars. It was concluded; my father was a monster.

Beast: "Baba (father), why didn't you appeal or something?"

Job: (voice breaking) "It's for the very same reason that you couldn't do that either; all channels were closed for me. No one wanted to touch me; no lawyer was even prepared to listen to me. I was dubbed a monster by my family; my in-laws; my community and there was nothing I could have done. I endured pain for ten entire years before accepting my fate. I've been happier ever since and I've helped so many people believe in the word of God."

Beast: (teary) "But what good is doing what you're doing knowing that you could have a life out there?"

Job: "I've been in here for over 25 years, Bethuel. I got in here when I was 30, I'm 55 years old now. My story is similar to Job in the Bible, but except for the fact that I lost everything and I don't think I'll ever regain it."

Beast: “Surely the ancestors show you something about your life?”

Job: “Sadly, when you're a seer, you can't tell what is about to happen in your life. It rarely happens, unlike your best friend who foresaw his own death.”

His story pained me so much, but I believed that there had to be a way out – there just had to be. My father couldn't win all the time.

Beast: “But my father can't win all the time, Baba (father).”

Job: (shaking head) “He is not winning at all; the walls will be closing in on him very soon. You just wait and see.”

Job had given me a small sense of faith. He remained diligent in prayer and hope in the Lord even though he had done no wrong. There I was, guilty of murder yet I failed to accept my situation. How selfish of me.

Hazel

I was still crying on my bed, until the tears just couldn't come out any more. My mouth felt so dry that it felt like death itself was consuming me. My heart felt like it was breaking in a million pieces with each minute. So many thoughts were running through my mind. All I kept thinking of was my mother's betrayal. I had given so much of myself to my mother; ever since I was born; yet she just kept taking and taking. She had hurt me, badly before, but what she had done concerning Beast broke me to the point of no return. I felt as if there was nothing else to live for. My life was over; I made a terrible choice and my Beast wanted nothing to do with me. His sister was right; I didn't deserve him. He committed a horrific crime – for me and I repaid him by marrying Ghadaffi. I could just smell the end of me; I wanted to die. I had the pills Paul had given me in my Jean pocket. I took out the bottle and it clearly stated “Trofanil, take one at night before bed time”. They were used for anxiety and it must have been about 20 if not more pills in there. I just couldn't see a way out any more. I took a bottle of water which was at my bedside and I took the entire bottle of pills. I knew that it was wrong of me to even think of doing that, but at times, one just doesn't see a way out of any situation – no matter how silly their problems

may seem. I just wanted to end it all right there and then. While waiting for the pills to work, I slowly started drifting off to sleep. My vision was getting blurry by the minute, and I saw a brief vision of the very same woman I had dreamt of the previous night.; the curly-haired woman. I saw her walking closer to me and I felt someone brushing my hair. I thought perhaps I was hallucinating.

Woman: (whispering) "It will be okay, Hannah. I will never let anything bad happen to you. I've been waiting for you to come here; I have been dying to connect to you. Just hold on and wait. Your father is on his way."

Binah

I was so drained, so helpless; I just felt like dying. I had no tears left within my body; I had no energy to do anything except to think. I felt like a useless vegetable; only my upper body worked yet I couldn't even lift my toes. I had since been on that couch and since I had no one there to help me, I wet myself countless times. I felt so humiliated; it was no way to live for me. After all the pain I had caused my daughter, all I wanted was God to take me, but after begging for months, it

was clear that He didn't want me to die at all. While I was just deep in thought, the door flung open and I heard Paul's voice. I couldn't really see whom he was with because I couldn't turn my entire neck around. I still needed to undergo massive physical therapy.

Paul: "Binah, where is Hazel?"

Binah: (teary) "She... she went to her bedroom. She was crying right after I told her everything."

Phil: (frowning) "You told her everything?! Right now?!"

Binah: "I couldn't take it any more. I just had to tell her. You advised me to do it."

I heard him clicking his tongue and he went towards the direction of her bedroom.

Paul: "What's that smell? Are you okay?"

Binah: (teary) "I couldn't get on my chair. It was so far from me, so I... I wet myself."

I felt like a child that needed care at all times day in and day out. I couldn't even look Paul in the eye.

Paul: "It's alright. We'll sort it out."

I heard Phil shout and call out to Paul in such a manner that left me panicked.

Phil: "Paul! Paul! Get in here!"

Binah: (panicking) "What is it? What's happening?"

I saw Phil carry my daughter in his arms. She looked so lifeless at that point, which left me so worried. I thought I had killed my child.

Paul: "I'll get you sorted just now, Binah. Please, give me a few minutes to help Phil get Hazel in the car."

Binah: "Is she going to be okay?!"

He just rushed out, leaving me feeling so useless. I had no idea what to do; my entire body was heating up, and the urine on that couch wasn't doing me any justice. It was burning my entire bottom. My throat was closing up and I felt my vision temporarily leaving me when the tears finally came out. My heart was beating so fast, I thought it would just jump straight out of my chest.

Binah: (shouting) "Oh, God! Why?! Why not me?! I know, I don't deserve your mercy, but why my child?!"

Ezekiel 18:20 - "The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not suffer for the iniquity of the father, nor the father suffer for the iniquity of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself."

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“Fear is only temporary, regrets last forever.” – Unknown

“Regret us the most tiresome of companions.” – Richard Paul Evans

Hazel

I saw myself standing in the middle of a very bright, white room. I could recognize nothing and there she was – the very same woman I had been dreaming of the past few days; the same woman I saw just after taking those pills.

Hazel: “Where am I? Who are you?”

Woman: (smiling) “Hannah, I’ve been dying to connect to you.”

Hazel: “Where am I? Am I dead?”

Woman: (shaking head) “No, you are not going to die any time soon. It is not yet your time.”

Hazel: “Who are you?”

Woman: “I’m your grandmother.”

Hazel: (Frowning) “I don’t understand.”

Woman: “Ask your father. It is time for you to go back now.”

Hazel: “Wait.”

Phil: “Hazel! Hazel! Can you hear me?”

I opened my eyes and I saw a man I had never met before, standing before me. The bright light in the room was burning my eyes so badly, I could feel the onset of a headache. I looked around and the room was no longer bright white, and I realized I was dreaming and then, I was back to reality. I saw my hand

hooked onto drips, while my stomach felt so painful and my throat felt extremely dry.

Hazel: (frowning) "Where am I?"

Phil: "You're in hospital. I was worried sick about you."

Hazel: "Who are you?"

Phil: (nervously) "I'm your father."

I felt so much shock within me, but I couldn't react. My entire body was so painful.

Hazel: "I don't understand."

Phil: "Should I get you some water before I tell you everything?"

I took a good look at him and I actually saw myself in him. I recall seeing his photo's online a few years before. Phillip Ferreira, the prominent son of Andries Ferreira and heir of Ferreira Industries. The last time I checked he was married, with two children. So, why on earth was he right there before me?

Hazel: "Why are you here?"

Phil: (nervously) "I'm here because I want to be here. You're my daughter. I want to be a part of your life."

I had never felt so much rage within me. It felt as if all the rage I had felt my entire life had come back in a split second.

Hazel: (angrily) "So, you just decided to pitch up out of nowhere?! How convenient of you! Where were you all those years when my mother was treating me like trash?! Where were you all those years when I was the only one amongst my friends who couldn't wish her father a Happy Father's day?! Where were you when I was being bullied for looking white?! Did you even care?! Why are you even here?! Is it because your sins are finally catching up with you?! You and my mother sure know how to fuck someone up! I just wanted to die!"

Phil: (teary) "Hazel, please just listen to me."

Hazel: "I don't want to listen to you. I have the world on my shoulders. I owe the hospital more than the quarter of a million rand and I married the worst man in the world, while the love of my life is in prison. He hates me now; everyone hates me. I just want to be alone. So do me a favour and leave me alone too."

Phil: (teary) "Please, at least hear me out."

Hazel: "Just go, please."

He was hurt, but I didn't care. Anger is one of the most dangerous weapons one could ever use. The tongue can kill a person's spirit; which is way worse than killing the flesh. The moment Phil left that hospital room, I just cried. It was even painful to cry because so many pills had been pumped out of my system, that it would have taken a while to get back on track. Apparently I was a danger to myself, so I had to be under constant surveillance. I had no idea who was even paying for

the hospital bill, but it must have probably been Phil. He was feeling guilty as fuck, which was the reason why he had finally decided to show up. What else could there have been? My mind was filled with negative thoughts while my heart was overridden with negativity. I felt as if a dark cloud was all I could see and there seemed to be no way out.

Phil

I expected that Hazel would be angry at me, but I didn't expect her to be suicidal on our first encounter. I partially blamed myself at first, but after seeing her outburst, I decided that it was only fair to take on full responsibility for what I had done to her. I was a mess; she was even more than a mess. She was only 20 but I had hurt her so badly, I doubted she was going to recover. All I had to do was pitch up when she was younger and tell her the whole truth; I just had to be a present father, perhaps she wouldn't have ended up that way. Maybe she and Beast would have still been together and of course, she wouldn't have married Ghadaffi. I watched as my own daughter sold herself to a man with money to save her own mother, while I had all the money in the world. She has so much money that I had put away for her, which I had planned on giving her the day we were to meet, but I just allowed her to marry that

fucker while I was still alive. It really hurt me. I was a shitty father. I deserved all I got and I had no idea how to even fix it. There I was, trying to solve Beast's case, but I was reaching dead end after dead end, while my own daughter, my only child, was in hospital after an attempted suicide. Only God knows what would have happened had I arrived there a minute later. I went to my car, locked the door and started praying.

Phil: (praying) "Father God, You have been so kind to me. I know I am not the most deserving person on your list, but all I ask for is that You heal my daughter. If all else does not work, then allow me to take all the pain and hurt she is going through. I know, I have done a lot of things in this world, but I have tried to be a good person. My biggest wrongdoing in this world is that I failed to be a present father to Hazel. I failed to follow her even when my own grandmother was crying for her on her deathbed. If this is my punishment, then so be it, Lord. All I ask is that she is to be protected against further hurt and heartache in this world. She has been through so much, and she does deserve some happiness. Ecclesiastes 3:1 says; "There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens." I trust you to change this situation from bleak to a fortunate one. I have hope in You indeed, Jeremiah 29:11 says; "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to

prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” I had hope in You even when I was going through the darkest time; I had hope in You when I finally chose to live my life without needing the approval of my father; I had hope in You even when You showed me what my wife had done to me. For this is the reason why I will rely on Psalm 62:1; “My soul finds rest in God alone; my salvation comes from him. He alone is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will never be shaken.” I trust in You, Lord. I believe that the outcome of this situation will be a positive one. Hazel still has a long life to live, by Your will and your Grace it shall indeed happen. In Jesus’ mighty name. Amen.”

I felt my body shake, and I didn’t even realize how much I had been crying. It was only then when I realized that I had loved Hazel my entire life, though I loved her from a distance. I had been so unfair to her, but I was so afraid of losing her.

Beast

I had a rather unpleasant night’s sleep. It was most probably because of the uncomfortable prison bed, but Hazel kept playing in my mind. I truly felt as if something was wrong with her. I got up and checked my phone and realized it was almost

midnight; 23:45 to be exact. I looked around and noticed that Job wasn't sleeping.

Beast: "Baba (father), why aren't you sleeping?"

Job: "It is almost time to pray, besides, I have a bad feeling about tonight."

Beast: "What kind of feeling?"

Job: "If you are called by a guard for any reason, do not leave with him."

I nodded as I had complete trust in him. He was sent to protect me after all, and I had all faith in him. I heard the rest of the cell mates move around and I gathered they were preparing themselves to pray. They were diligent in prayer, which I truly loved about them. I anxiously waited for midnight, but I could feel uneasy. It seemed as if I was going to be called out by one of the guards very soon. Indeed

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one minute before midnight, the Warden came with two other guards, guards I had seen converse with my father. I didn't trust them at all.

Warden: (smiling) "Sibiya, come with me, please."

Beast: "Where are we going at this time of the night?"

Warden: "Just come."

Beast: "No."

Warden: (frowning) "Excuse me?"

Beast: "I said no."

Warden: (annoyed) "I gave you an order. Guards, take him."

I then witnessed an immense act of brotherhood I had never encountered in my entire life. The rest of the cell mates,

including Job all stood before me, blocking the Warden and the guards from coming at me.

Job: “You heard him. He said no. You can’t force him to go with you. It is illegal and we don’t know if he will come back or not. If he goes, we all go.”

She looked at each one of us and realised they were indeed outnumbered. None of the cell mates were even violent, but I could tell that they were ready to lay their lives for me. They didn’t even know me yet they were willing to do that for me. For me, that was the most beautiful thing anyone had ever done for me – besides my friend Malachi. It brought tears to my eyes. The Warden left with the guards, highly annoyed and I just couldn’t help but cry. I felt Job’s soft and loving hands pat my back.

Job: “You are one of us, Bethuel. No one will touch you.”

It truly felt as if my father had orchestrated something against me. Why else would I have been called at such an odd time of the night? It didn’t make sense. Was I that hated by him? It was

really painful to digest and process. Job acted like a real father, though he had met me just two days prior. I just cried as I sat on my bed.

Job: “Men, surround him and let us pray for him. He needs our support right now.”

They gathered around me and started praying. I felt so moved, so touched and so loved. I had no idea that strangers could love someone like that without even expecting anything in return. It was a beautiful sight. I felt something move within me. I knew that God had indeed loved me because I survived the worst. After that prayer session, we got up and 3am again. I could feel that Job was alert and didn't want to sleep a wink. I knew he had stayed up all night to protect me from them coming at me for whatever reason. Hazel was still on my mind, and this time I had an odd dream about her. I dreamt she was in a very dark hole and I couldn't reach her, I could only see her. She had all her ancestors surrounding her, while my mother was trying to attack her, and something really dark that looked like an unknown animal's shadow, was also trying to attack her. I couldn't reach her, no matter how badly I tried. That was not a good dream. It unsettled me and I battled to sleep ever since. The morning finally came and when it was time for us to leave

and get our showers just before breakfast, our cell seemed to be the only one that wasn't unlocked. We saw everyone leaving, while my father and his two sidekicks stared at me briefly before moving on. Job decided to ask one of the guards what was happening.

Job: "Vader (Guard), what's happening? Why aren't we being let out?"

Guard: "I'm only following the Warden's instructions. You all are presumed dangerous since you were part of a cell riot last night. So, take this as your punishment."

I felt so horrible about that. It felt like my fault. Had I been in my own cell and Job hadn't tried to save me, they wouldn't have been punished. Perhaps I should have gone out the previous night to save them. I felt so guilty, I could barely look him in the eye, but he was so relaxed, and so were the rest of the cell mates.

Job: "Don't worry, Bethuel. We're used to this. Don't you feel bad about anything."

Beast: "This is all my fault, Baba (father). I'm sorry."

Job: (smiling) "This won't end well for everyone concerned. You just relax. Gentlemen, we are part of an injustice, you know what to do."

They all nodded and proceeded to sit on their beds. They closed their eyes and started meditating. I was rather surprised.

Job: "You can join us if you wish, Bethuel, my son. All shall be well. You are one step closer to fixing all the wrong done by your father."

I had no idea what he meant, but I battled concentrating while thinking of Hazel. I had no idea what to do. After about half an hour of trying to meditate, I couldn't take it any more. I called Phil and he picked up after a few rings.

Phil: "Beast, is everything okay?"

Beast: “Hi, Phil. Sorry to bother. Oh, nothing really. My cell mates and I are being locked down. We can't go shower nor eat like the rest of the prisoners, but other than that I'm fine.”

Phil: (angrily) “What?! Why? I thought you were supposed to be in your own cell. Who authorized that shit?”

Beast: “Apparently the Warden, but that's not why I called you.”

Phil: “Give me half an hour. I'll sort this shit out.”

He hung up even before I could ask about Hazel. I contemplated calling her phone, but I did any way. It rang unanswered, and that already made me quite uneasy. I knew something was wrong with her, but the worst part was not knowing what was wrong. I started fidgeting and as much as I tried to be quiet, Job noticed.

Job: “Don't worry, you'll get to see her.”

Beast: "Is it that obvious?"

Job: "I can feel your soul, Bethuel. I know you had a horrible dream about the love of your life."

Beast: "I'm not so sure if she's still the love of my life."

Job: "She is, deep down you know it too. Have you given her a chance to explain her actions?"

Beast: (shaking head) "No."

Job: "You both are going through so much, but united no one can fall. The duration of your time spent here depends on the time frame you give yourself to forgive her; to be one with her again."

Beast: (confused) "I don't follow."

Job: "She's been through so much, all at the hands of that ruthless man she married, Bethuel. She didn't do it deliberately. Yes, she has done some mistakes, but are you perfect?"

I started panicking even more thinking of what he said about Ghadaffi. What the fuck did he do to my wife? I could feel my blood boiling. I hadn't been so angry in a very long time.

Job: "Breathe and meditate, you'll get to see her before the sun sets today."

Beast: "I'm really sorry about what happened."

Job: "Fear not, for I am with you; Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand. Isaiah 41:10"

Just like that, he went back to meditating. Yes, I was going through a whirlwind of emotions, but I knew better than to forget everything I was taught. I chose to rely on the Lord, for He knew all that was best for both Hazel and I. I just hoped she was okay.

Psalm 34:4 - "I sought the Lord, and he answered me and delivered me from all my fears."

“Sometimes God allows what he hates to accomplish what he loves.”

— Joni Eareckson Tada, *The God I Love*

Phil

I was such a mess for a few moments. All I wanted to do was just hold Hazel in my arms. I wanted to comfort her and be a father to her; it really hurt me knowing that I was a father all those years to someone who didn't deserve me – they both didn't deserve me. I wasted all that energy and time on them, instead of putting in some effort in Hazel's life. She was grieving a relationship she never had with me and if anything, I owed my life to Mam'Rose, Malachi and most of all, Beast. Beast stepped up even when I couldn't. I chose to be a coward and hide behind the scenes. I knew everything that was happening, but did I stop it? No. Why? Til date, I still had no idea. I found myself smoking in the hospital parking lot, while trying to think of a way forward. I had to attend to Beast's matter before shit hit the fan. I was already pissed at the Warden. Vivian knew better than to mess with me, so I had to send out an

unforgettable message. Paul's call came through while I was thinking.

Paul: "Boss, how is she?"

Phil: "Doctors say she will be fine."

Paul: "Did you tell her?"

Phil: "I did, and she's so angry at me. She doesn't even want to see me."

Paul: "Boss, this is not the time to crumble. Get your head together."

Phil: "Sure. Sort out the bill issue at that hospital. Any news on Ghadaffi?"

Paul: "He's getting impatient. I got word that he tried coming back home today."

Phil: "Get Interpol to keep him there. Do something to stall him from coming here."

Paul: "On it. What about Vivian?"

Phil: "It's time for Phase two. Send a message to her husband. He'll be on the first flight back home from Cape Town."

Paul: (nodding) "On it. If I may ask, what's your plan with Hazel?"

Phil: (sigh) "Honestly, I don't know. I'm still trying to think of an idea."

Paul: "Be yourself. Give her time yet don't shut her out. If I were you, I'd get the one person she trusts in to speak to her."

Phil: "Who?"

Paul: "Beast."

Phil: "He's in prison, in case you forgot."

Paul: "You're a rich man, boss. You can't get him out of prison now, but you can get Vivian to do what you want her to do. You have leverage against her. You can do anything."

Paul gave me the most brilliant idea I myself couldn't even think of.

Phil: "Paul, you're a genius. I'll talk to later."

I hung up and got into my car. I headed straight to the prison. It was high time I started havoc, that was the only way Vivian would listen and do what was right.

Sol

I was deeply irritated when my boys went to Beast's new cell only to find him not there. He had officially joined Job's cell

mates. He had brainwashed my son and turned him against me. All I wanted was for him to take over my legacy. He was after all my only son, but he acted like he was better than me. I just wanted to teach him a lesson at first, but he just wouldn't budge, so I wanted him gone – for good. Vivian was starting to get on my nerves; she was starting to slack and business was running slow ever since Beast had come to my prison. Perhaps I should have just left him back in Polsmoor. Right after breakfast, I was called to her office as usual. I went in and saw her sitting on her office chair, giving me that mischievous smile of hers. I loved how light she was and that big, beautiful ass of hers made me love fucking her. The moment the door was closed, she spread her legs wide open and I knew what she wanted me to do at that point. I smiled and rushed over there. I got on my knees and licked her pussy. She always enjoyed me doing that. I always loved fucking whores; they always knew just what I wanted, unlike my ex wife, Beast's mother. She was so stiff and rural. After so many years of marriage and she still wouldn't adjust to spontaneous methods in the bedroom. I just had to leave her. While Vivian was screaming and she was about to cum, I stopped. I didn't want to give her that much satisfaction.

Sol: “Your turn.”

Warden: "Not fair. I was nearly there."

I took off my uniform and underwear and shoved her head right on my dick. She could always suck cock like a pro. That was one of the reasons why I also never left her, although she was one of my many whores. After our steamy session, it was time to talk business.

Sol: "That was great. You just don't lose your touch."

Warden: "I always aim to please."

Sol: "How's my daughter doing?"

Warden: "Perhaps it is time for you to ask her yourself. She is 21, Solomon."

Sol: "It's not that easy and you know it, Vivian. I can't just rock up and say "Hey, I'm your dad."

Warden: "Why not? I mean, I can get you out of here and we can live the life we always wanted."

Sol: "We can talk about that a bit later. You tell me why business is so slow nowadays and why Beast was moved that loser's cell."

Warden: (sigh) "I have powerful people on my case, Solomon. He knows everything and he gave me an ultimatum. If I'm not careful, he is going to tell my husband – everything."

Sol: "Who's this person you're talking about?"

Warden: "Phillip Ferreira."

Sol: (frowning) "That white asshole lawyer? He can't get Beast off on shit. I made sure of that
you did make sure of that, didn't you?"

Warden: "Trust me, this case is water tight. He can't get it open, even if he tried, but we need to be careful, Solomon. Lie low for a while."

Sol: "Fine, but only for a few days. I'm losing money and you know I hate that."

Warden: "It will get better. You'll see."

Phil

I got to that prison within half an hour as promised and I was not impressed by what I saw when I went straight to Beast's new cell. The guards tried to stop me, but they knew better. I found him and the rest of the cell mates meditating or praying.

Phil: "Beast, what happened?"

Beast: "It's a long story, but Job here and these cell mates helped me escape a possible death last night. I was going to get killed in that cell."

Phil: "So because of that, they decided to let you go hungry and without a shower?"

Beast: (nodding) "Yes. How's Hazel? Is she okay?"

I could tell by his response that something wasn't right.

Phil: "I'll tell you a little later. For now, let me sort this shit out. I'll be right back."

I headed straight to Vivian's office, only to find her getting dressed alongside Solomon. That bitch just never learned.

Warden: (shocked) "Phillip! Just because you have leverage over me it doesn't give you the right to just barge into my office like this!"

Phil: "Well, I'm sorry to ruin this little Rendezvous of yours, but I warned you, Vivian. I told you to stop messing with the

prisoners, more especially my client or else there'd be hell to pay, but you just had to, didn't you?"

Warden: "I didn't do anything. I swear."

Phil: "Beast nearly got killed last night. If it hadn't been for Job moving him to his cell, he wouldn't exist as we speak right this moment. Don't act like you don't know."

Warden: "I swear. I have no idea."

Phil: "There's a lot you don't know about your little prison. Perhaps you should ask your boyfriend next to you. I warned you, your husband is about to find out what you've been up to in this prison and him being mayor, I wouldn't be surprised if he reports you."

Warden: (crying) "Please, don't do this to me, Phil. I'll fix it."

Phil: "You can fix it by listening to me from now on. Get those prisoners out and give them shower time. I've ordered them food. Make sure they're protected, and I want all your little

guards who were on duty last night fired – by the end of the day. Solomon needs to be in solitary, and I need my client in a police van on his way to a hospital right now.”

Sol: (angrily) “Are you going to let him make you squirm like this, Viv?! Come on, you're not a child.”

Phil: “Let me remind you, Solomon, that I can add more years on your sentence. You don't own this prison. I'm waiting, Vivian. Tick tock. I'll be in my car. Beast needs to be in my car within the next ten minutes, or else I'll tell your husband that one of his children isn't his. You can just imagine what that would do to him.”

I left her crying there with Solomon insulting me, but I didn't give a fuck. I needed everything to fall into place. I was so tired of playing nice. I had warned that bitch and she chose not to do what I had asked. I went outside to smoke. I felt so overwhelmed, but I needed to get my shit together. I watched the clock without fail and indeed, within ten minutes Beast was on his way to the parking lot, with two guards behind him. It was time to save my daughter, and perhaps that way, I'd be able to save the love of her life in the process and myself.

Deuteronomy 31:6 - “Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the Lord your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you.”

“Faith is the bird that feels the light and sings when the dawn is still dark.” – Rabindranath Tagore

Beast

I was very confused once one of the guards came to my cell and ordered me to take a brief shower. My cell mates were still in the cell; I was starting to think that my time had come and that I was finally going to be killed by my father’s skivvies, but luckily, it wasn’t that at all. It was a move organised by Phil himself. Afterwards, instead of returning back to my cell, I was cuffed and two guards escorted me out of the prison. There I was, thinking that Ghadaffi had gotten me transferred yet again, but once I saw Phil right outside the prison, I became so relieved. He was smoking; he looked way too good to even look like a smoker, but I guess that was how he released his stress. Once he saw the guards walking alongside me, he approached them; looking very displeased.

Phil: “I need a report from the both of you on what happened the whole of yesterday, up until last night. If I don’t receive it

by the end of today, consider the two of you fired. I am capable of so much more.”

I could see them both tremble. The corruption in our country’s prison was just so alarming and plain inhumane. Once I was at the back of the van, I grew more anxious with every turn the guards made. We drove for about 20 if not 30 minutes. The moment they drove into a parking lot and I saw a Hospital sign, I grew wearier. No wonder Phil was so frustrated. What on earth was Hazel doing in a hospital? I had hoped that Ghadaffi hadn’t done something to her, or else I was more than prepared to serve a life sentence for his murder. Once they took me out, I was walking in between the guards, with Phil right in front of us. I didn’t pay any attention to all the stares and glares; all my focus was on Hazel. They most probably assumed I was there for treatment. I still had a broken neck and arm. Once we were in the elevator, my heart started palpitating faster. We made it to the 7th floor; thank goodness we weren’t going to the ICU. That was a good sign. Before we went in, Phil instructed the guards yet again.

Phil: “You two, wait outside. Uncuff him.”

They were so afraid of him as if he himself was the Warden. They did as told and he signalled for me to follow him into the room. I was so nervous. I wasn't afraid of a lot of things, but facing her was very dreadful that day. I took a deep breath and went in first. The sight was alarming; Hazel looked so numb, as if she was just staring at nothing; at an empty space. It looked as if nothing was happening in her mind.

Phil: (clearing throat) "Hazel, I've brought someone here to see you."

Hazel: "I told you to leave."

Phil: "I'll leave you two to it. I'll be right outside."

He tried so hard not to cry, but I could tell she was angry at him. I understood it all, though. It wasn't easy to process all those negative feelings from all those years. Phil had abandoned her to a certain extent and she felt neglected. Looking at her so broken really broke my heart. It reminded me of the last time she was that broken. I made a

vow to both myself and her that I'd ensure that she would smile each and every day from that day onwards.

Beast: (nervously) "Hazel... It's me."

She took a moment to process it all once hearing my voice. She most probably thought that it was surreal. She turned around and stared at me in disbelief.

Hazel: (surprised) "Beast... What are you doing here?"

I wanted so badly to get close to her, to touch and caress her. I wanted to tell her that everything was going to be alright, and that she had nothing further to worry about because I had arrived. But, I was a convict dressed in that horrible prison uniform. I didn't look as handsome as she was used to seeing me.

Beast: (teary) "I came to see you."

Hazel: "Why?"

Beast: “Because... Because I...”

I wanted to say that I loved her so badly, but the words just wouldn't come out of my mouth. I myself wasn't ready to just get over all the betrayal and hurt I felt within me.

Beast: “I was worried about you. I had a horrible dream about you. I knew that something wasn't right.”

Hazel: “So, you came here all because of a dream?”

Beast: “No, I – “

Hazel: (interrupting) “I think it's best you leave.”

I was shocked. I honestly didn't expect her response. In fact, it hurt me beyond the word itself.

Beast: "Hazel..."

Hazel: (crying) "I know, you hate me now. In fact, you detest me. I don't want you to feel like you owe me anything. You're free to live your life. I'm sorry for all I've done to you. I know that you hate me for it. It was never my intention to get over you or make it seem as if I no longer loved you. You refusing to listen to me when I tried to explain really showed me that you just hate me. I don't blame you for that, Beast. You're free now."

Beast: "Hazel, don't be like this, please. I'm sorry for not wanting to listen to you. I was broken, and –"

Hazel: "I know, hence I'm letting you go. It's not an easy decision to make, but I feel as if we can never go back to the way we were."

I was gobsmacked. She was dumping me before we could even get back together.

Beast: “What happened to you, baby? You used to be so strong; I taught you not to give up on yourself. What did that fucker do to you? Why have you become like this?”

I stepped closer to her and tried to touch her, but she just refused.

Hazel: “Please, don’t come any closer to me. Just leave.”

I wondered why she was even in the hospital to begin with. I saw no signs of bruises or marks on any part of her body, but all I could see was that she was depressed.

Beast: (teary) “Okay.”

I just walked out slowly, hoping she was going to change her mind, but she didn’t. It really hurt me, badly. Once I was out, Phil was waiting for me.

Phil: “So? Any progress?”

Beast: (shaking head) “Why is she here? What happened to her?”

Phil: (sigh) “She overdosed on some pills and tried to commit suicide.”

Beast: “Why?”

Phil: “Because of Binah, and Ghadaffi, and I. Everything was just getting too much for her.”

Beast: (firmly) “One of you need to update me on what happened to her because she herself won’t tell me.”

Phil: “Can we do it later?”

Beast: “No, I’m not leaving until I get the full story. The woman I love tried to kill herself and she doesn’t want me near her. I need to know why.”

Phil: (nodding) "Fine. Let's take a drive to my house

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but you can't be seen looking like this. You two, drive Beast to my house. I'll get you something to wear while we're there."

I nodded and we walked out of the hospital and back to the Police Van. It wasn't very long until we arrived at a house I didn't recognize, but it was a splendid house, in a complex much like where I used to live. Prison does so much to a person; I appreciated smelling the fresh air beyond the prison. It just smelled different; it smelled like freedom. It was a lot smaller than what I had anticipated Phil's house would look like. Once we were inside, the guards were instructed to wait outside in the yard. I saw a man I didn't recognize, but he must have been Phil's bodyguard or something.

Phil: "Paul, this is Beast. Beast, Paul. He is my right hand man and Hazel's driver."

He gladly shook my hand and I his. He didn't judge me for being in his boss's house dressed in a prison uniform.

Phil: "Beast, make yourself at home. Care for a drink?"

Beast: (shaking head) "No, thank you."

Phil: "You are going to need it after you're about to hear."

That made me so worried. I ended up agreeing to the drink. He poured me a glass of fine cognac. I couldn't remember the last time I appreciated a simple glass of good alcohol.

Phil: "Paul, please bring her out here."

Paul nodded. I wondered whom "she" was, but after a few minutes, I was rather shocked to see Binah in a wheel chair. She looked so frail and nothing like the feisty and disrespectful Binah I knew. She couldn't even look me in the eye.

Phil: "I assume you have met your mother-in-law before, right?"

I just nodded with suspense.

Phil: "I think we should start from the beginning, don't you think, Binah?"

Binah: (ashamedly) "What is it that you'd like to know?"

Phil: "How about you start by telling him the truth about Ghadaffi? Tell him how he ended up with our daughter."

I could see her starting to tremble in fear.

Binah: (deep sigh) "Firstly, I'd like to say that I never meant any harm, Beast. Yes, I was a horrible mother and a very bad person, but I have changed my ways. Ghadaffi and his father came to me one time after church and approached me. Hazel was still in Stellenbosch at the time. This was not long before you disappeared. They suggested that Ghadaffi make Hazel fall

in love with him, in exchange for providing me with money. I... I didn't want to take it at first, but what was I to do? Bella had a baby and we had no income other than the SASSA she got for Jenny. I had to do something. So, I took the money."

I saw her crying, while the rage was slowly increasing within me. Did that bitch actually sell her own daughter to my enemy?

Binah: "I had no idea what he had planned, I swear. Weeks passed and I heard that you had disappeared. That was when he told me what he did with you; that he got you in prison and that you wouldn't come close to Hazel any longer. I didn't find out about him imprisoning you to the point where you weren't even allowed any visitors until later. I was starting to regret my choices when Hazel and I started being close. I didn't like what I had done to her at all; seeing her so broken about you made me regret my choices. When I tried to confront him, he changed into something I can't even explain; something so supernatural and scary. He rushed into my yard and threw me onto the ground, that was how he broke my back and I became paralyzed."

Her story was sad, sure, but that was nothing compared to what I was feeling within me.

Beast: (angrily) “How much? How much did Ghadaffi give you?”

Binah: “R100 000.”

That blew my mind; it enraged me even more. I found myself jumping out of my couch so fast that I grabbed her throat and tried so hard to squeeze the life out of her. I just saw red; I saw her as the devil herself that nothing and no one else mattered at that point. I could hear the panic in Paul and Phil’s voices, but I didn’t care.

Phil: (shouting) “Paul! Stop him! Get him away from her!”

I could feel Paul trying so hard to get me off of her, but I didn’t even feel a thing.

Phil: (shouting) “Beast! You’re better than that! You’re not a monster! You’re not a killer! Do you honestly want to lose Hazel forever?! Because if you kill her, she will not look at you the same way ever again! This won’t make her love you!”

I heard Phil’s faint voice, but it clicked into my head. I found my hands slowly releasing themselves from her throat while she was coughing and gasping for air.

Phil: “Please take her away.”

That was directed to Paul, while I found myself trying to regain my sanity. I had turned into a monster for a short while, something I thought I had gotten rid of. I was no killer.

Phil: “Have a drink and calm down, please.”

I took the glass of cognac he offered me and I could see my hands tremble. I found myself wiping the hot tears flowing down my cheeks. I wasn’t crying because I could have killed my

woman's mother, but I was crying because of what she had endured while I was gone.

Phil: "I totally understand your frustration, believe me, I do. I am also not perfect. When I told her whom I really was, she just completely lost it."

Beast: (teary) "What happened to her? Why does she look so broken? It seems to me as if there's more to this story."

Phil: "I'll let Paul tell you everything."

Paul came back from the bedroom and started telling me everything; from the moment Hazel got married to that fucker, to him beating her to a pulp. That send me to the edge. The more he continued, the more I cried. My heart was literally being squeezed with every word Paul got out of his mouth. How could Binah allow that to happen? No wonder Hazel felt so alone. I made it all worse by not even affording her an opportunity to explain herself that night she called me. I promised to be there for her no matter what and I betrayed

her. What kind of man was I? I felt so horrible, that I myself wanted to die. I had failed her.

Phil: "Please, Beast, don't feel bad. It is not your fault. You can still fix this."

Paul: (shaking head) "No, you both need to fix this. You both need to work on earning her trust back. Hazel is broken; and she needs to recover by knowing that neither of you have given up on her."

Beast: (teary) "How can I do that while behind bars? How can I do that when she doesn't even want to speak to me?"

Paul: "She will want to speak to you, in due time. I think I know just the person who might get through to her."

It was at that point where I was starting to see some light regarding Hazel and I's relationship. I was even more determined to focus on her and to get her to come back to me. I needed to do something – anything.

Peter : - "And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast."

“Hope is the last thing ever lost.” – Italian Proverb

Beast

I was taken back to the prison, with a very heavy heart. All I could think of was Hazel’s state of mind. Things were so bad that she just wanted to end her life. She was only 20, yet she felt as if the entire world had rested on her shoulders. She had practically sold herself just to take care of her mother, and when she learnt what she had done to her, all hell broke loose. I knew then that she had stopped attending her therapy sessions and taking her medication. Once I was in my cell, my cell mates were so happy and excited that they got extra shower time along with Chicken Lickin’ delivered specially for them.

Job: (smiling) “I saved you some food.”

Beast: “Thanks, Baba (father), but I’m not hungry.”

Job: (frowning) “You don’t look alright. What’s wrong?”

Beast: (sigh) “Hazel is in hospital. She tried to commit suicide. I went to see her today, but she won’t even speak to me.”

I started crying all over again. The pain I felt was just immense.

Beast: “What I found out about what happened to her; why she actually got married to Ghadaffi really hurt me. I feel like such a failure of a man; I was so selfish to not even want to listen to her. Now, she is lying in that hospital bed because she feels so betrayed by all of us.”

Job: “Beast, you are only human and so is she. Trauma and hurt does that to people. You were also going through your own trauma, but not everyone can handle it well. She will get through it, you just have to believe and keep praying for her.”

Beast: (shaking head) “I don’t think I can. I don’t think I can.”

Job: “Sure, you can. You are her other half, she was made for you. Why on earth do you think you keep dreaming of all those things? Your ancestors and hers are so aligned, that your prayers saved her. Keep on praying, and you will see miracles. The first one will be heard tomorrow. Just ensure that you charge your phone.”

I heard him and yes, he was being as positive as always, but I just wasn't processing all he was saying to me. I decided to lie down for a little while, while he prayed for me. Job was always so positive, despite what happened to him. He lost his children and his wife, and there I was, crying over Hazel whom I could still win back. I needed to put myself together and get a grip. For as long as I was still breathing, it wasn't over for me as yet. And for as long as Hazel was still alive, it meant the same for her.

Hazel

It had been about three days since I'd been admitted to hospital. I was so over being there that I just wanted to go home. Home, huh. I didn't even know which place I was going to call home. So many things were going through my mind and

all I could think of was that my own father felt that I wasn't good enough, so he chose to be a father to two other children; two white children, while I myself was struggling at the hands of my mother. I was finding it so hard to forgive her for what she had done to me; to Beast. I felt that I just didn't deserve to be loved anymore and that Beast would not look at me the same way ever again, hence I told him not to come back any more. I don't know how Phil managed to do that; to get him to come to the hospital, but it meant he had some serious connections. I was so tired of the hospital, that I demanded to be discharged. They refused, saying that I had to be referred to a psychologist first before leaving. I was so drained, to be honest. I didn't want to eat and nothing excited me anymore. I was missing out on school and I wasn't even bothered. While I was just deep in thought, Paul came in. I actually trusted him more than Phil at that point.

Paul: "Hi, Hazel. There's someone here to see you."

Hazel: "I told you, I don't want any visitors."

Mathilda: "Hey, babe."

The moment I heard her voice, I just cried. She rushed towards me and hugged me tight for quite some time. It was the first time since my attempted suicide that I just cried in someone's arms; someone I trusted. It was very emotional for me because she cried too. It was for a good few minutes, before we broke the hug.

Mathilda: (teary) "Why didn't you tell me? Why didn't you call me the moment she told you?"

Hazel: "I assume Paul told you everything, huh?"

Mathilda: "Actually, your dad did. I was a bit shocked, but he put me in his jet and I came straight here."

Hazel: (sigh) "I didn't want to bother you, Mathilda. You've heard enough of my baggage."

Mathilda: "It's not baggage at all; I mean we both have problems. Friends lean on one another, Hazel. You shouldn't struggle all alone."

Hazel: "I'm sorry I never told you, but I didn't know where to even start."

Mathilda: "Well, I'm glad God didn't take you as yet. I still need you."

Hazel: (chuckling) "I'm too broken. I don't want you to be friends with a maniac."

Mathilda: "You're not a maniac and broken people can always be fixed. It is not a crime to be broken."

Hazel: "I hear you."

Mathilda: "Now, tell me; why are you pushing people away?"

Hazel: "Because... I don't know. I don't think I am ready to process it all. I feel like I have failed; I have failed to be loveable. My father never loved me enough to be a part of my

life. Beast is most probably so tired of me and my problems, hence he wants nothing to do with you.”

Mathilda: “Well, I contacted Dr. Speelman.”

Hazel: “Why did you do that?”

Mathilda: “Because someone needs to get you out your misery – fast. You can’t keep living in self-pity, Hazel. You need to get up and live. I know I can’t do enough to get you to do that, so a professional will do it.”

Hazel: “I don’t know. Therapy isn’t for me anymore.”

Mathilda: “You will do it because you want to get better. Do it for yourself; not for anyone else, but for you.”

Hazel: “Okay, I’ll try my best.”

Mathilda: "That's all I needed to hear. Now, get up and go take a shower. We have some brunch to eat."

Hazel: "I can't leave this room. They told me they won't discharge me without a Psychologist's approval."

Mathilda: "Dr. Speelman has already sent it to the hospital. You're all mine for the day."

I was so glad that she was there. That was the perfect opportunity to forget about what was happening in my life. I just needed a break from thinking. We went out to eat some food, and for the first time in a very long while, I tried to enjoy my food. It was a little hard to stomach it, since I barely ate for those past few days, but I was happy. We walked around the mall just for a breather until she drove me back to Phil's house. I still hadn't been able to call it home yet. I didn't even know how to react once I got home. Luckily, Phil was not there. I only found Paul in the kitchen making himself some food.

Paul: "Oh, hi. I wasn't expecting you here. Why didn't you call me to come fetch you?"

Hazel: "It's okay, Mathilda brought me here."

Paul: (nodding) "Thanks for that, Mathilda. I need to make a few calls. Excuse me."

He left us in peace.

Mathilda: "This is such a nice house. Whose is it?"

Hazel: (shrugging) "I don't know, but I assume it is Phil's."

Mathilda: "It's so nice. At least you'll be able to have peace of mind. Take a swim when you want to relax. You used to be so sporty."

She was right; I needed an outlet for stress.

Hazel: "Or I could read."

Mathilda: "See? You are going towards the right direction."

Hazel: "I feel so bad that you had to fly all the way from Cape Town just for me."

Mathilda: "I know that you'd do that for me, most definitely."

I really appreciated seeing Mathilda and all her efforts most definitely did not go unnoticed. I myself was angry, very angry at everyone including myself. By everyone I meant Beast, my father and my mother. I just had no clue on how to control that rage within me, but all I knew was that I was just so fed up with life itself at that point. I found my mind straying and actually thinking what was the point of staying alive? Even after the attempted suicide. Mathilda couldn't stay the entire day as she had exams the following day. I myself had exams to write, but the faculty had already heard of my hospitalization, and they gave me extended leave; about a week extra to sort myself

out. Once she was gone, I was forced to think yet again and re-evaluate my life

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and I just didn't want to. While I was in deep thoughts, I heard my mother crying out from her bedroom. I didn't even want to enter or go see what was wrong; rage is a very dangerous emotion. It wasn't too long when Paul came back with a Nurse who was hired to take care of my mother. He introduced us to one another and once they heard my mother cry out for help yet again, the Nurse went ahead and started her duties. Phil must have organised that for her. How thoughtful of him. Both he and my mother actually deserved each other, I thought to myself. I thought I was going to have the day to myself, so I decided to go outside and relax on the patio, just beside the pool. The view was so beautiful and I was amazed at how well maintained the garden was. The lillies and sunflowers planted there were just so beautiful. While I was sitting there, a rather unexpected text message came through on WhatsApp.

It was from Beast's new number. My heart was beating so fast, I had no idea why I was so nervous. It started off with the very first picture we took together, in his old VW Kombi, when he used to take me to and from school. "My dearest Hazel, words cannot explain the pain I feel right now. You must feel the

worst; because you have been through the most. I don't blame you for how you feel nor for what you did, honestly, you did what felt was right for you. Firstly, I'd like to get right into it and apologize. Our relationship was so good and we never had a fight, up until everything was broken. Yes, I committed a crime for you and I don't ever want you to feel guilty about that. If given the chance, I'd do it all over again for you.

That's how much I love you. I'd like to apologize to you; firstly for not taking my gut seriously. When I was on my way to you on your lobola negotiations day, I truly felt that something was off. I should have been more careful and despite even Malume (Uncle) Sfiso warning me of what was to come, I still didn't heed his warning. Secondly, I'd like to apologize for everything you've been through in my absence. No one had the right to force you to marry Ghadaffi – least of all your mother. Thirdly, I'd like to apologize for my behaviour towards you. I should have never pushed you away when I found out about your marriage to Ghadaffi, but when he came to me and showed me your wedding photos and rubbed it all in my face, all I could think of was you betraying me. I thought that you didn't want to be with me any more and that you had gotten over me so quickly. I should have given you the benefit of the doubt because I know you, Hazel. I know you more than you actually

know yourself. If I could, I'd most definitely erase time so that you wouldn't have to deal with all the hurt you're dealing with. If I could, I'd let God transfer your pain so that I could carry the both of us. You are my world, Hazel, you've always been. All this time I felt you owed me an explanation, but I understand what you did and why you did it. It took one huge sacrifice, even though your mother is least deserving of all, but you did what you felt was right.

Yes, part of me felt so betrayed that you let another man touch you, but you didn't do it out of choice. So, this is the first message of many; many of which I'll send you each and every day. From this day onwards, I'll send you a love letter, as a reminder of why I love you. Yes, I still love you; I never stopped loving you. All I ever wanted was for you to achieve your dreams, for us to build a life together and be happy. I swear, I've never loved anyone the way I love you. When you're far away from me, I feel so lost and incomplete. Having to adjust to sleeping alone again was the hardest thing my body ever had to do. I had to learn to eat alone and no longer with you. This picture is a reminder to you; the very first day my heart accepted that you were going to be mine; my wife. The very first day I saw you smile after Mam'Rose passed on. I saw you

light up the entire room whenever you walked in. You'll always be my glow in the dark. I still love you, Ma Sibiya. Love, Beast."

I cried throughout the entire text. I couldn't believe that he had been so thoughtful. He was still the very same Beast; the man I fell in love with. I was so hurt and honestly, it wasn't about that anymore. I felt as if I had become more of a patient than a girlfriend to Beast, and that was why I felt the need to officially end our relationship. It wasn't too long until I heard people walking into the house. I wasn't interested, because I thought that no one had come to visit me. I then heard a familiar voice, one I hadn't heard in a very long time.

Dr. Speelman: "Hello, Hazel."

Great. The therapy sessions had officially begun again. I was a lunatic once again.

Hazel: "Hi, Doctor."

Dr. Speelman: "May I sit?"

Hazel: (shrugging) “Do I have a choice?”

Dr. Speelman: (chuckling) “Not really. Remember how it was when you first came to see me?”

Hazel: “I could never forget that day.”

She sat down on one of the chairs and casually opened her infamous note book.

Dr. Speelman: “Do you mind if I start jotting some notes?”

Hazel: “No, go right ahead.”

I could hear some movement in the house.

Hazel: “Who brought you here?”

Dr. Speelman: “Two of the people who love you dearly; your father and fiancé.”

She still referred to Beast as my fiancé, but I wasn't too sure what to call him any more. I peeped through the sliding door and I could see him sitting right on the couch facing me. He wasn't dressed in his prison uniform, though, and he still looked like my Beast. What on earth was going on in my mind? It felt as if I was constantly confusing myself.

Dr. Speelman: “I think we should start at the beginning, you know, when Beast disappeared and you had to marry Ghadaffi. What do you think?”

I shrugged and I started telling her everything that had happened; from the moment he disappeared and I felt as if my world was falling apart; to when I received a call and it sounded like him calling; telling me to forget about him. It felt as if I was reliving the entire situation all over again. I felt a really tight knot in my stomach and the more I continued with the story, the tighter it became. I occasionally found myself getting a glimpse of Beast staring at me. At times I saw him quickly wipe his tears away, and it made me feel so guilty. There he was

fighting for his freedom yet he still had the time to attend to my issues yet again. I felt as if I was starting to drain him, emotionally. Two hours later, we only had come to the part where I struck a deal with Ghadaffi in exchange for my mother's bills to get settled.

Dr. Speelman: "I think we should stop for now. I don't want to overload you with all these emotions. Do you sleep well at night?"

Hazel: "No, I can't recall the last time I slept well, apart from the first day I moved in here."

Dr. Speelman: "I assume you have stopped taking your medication?"

I was embarrassed. I was literally the epitome of relapse.

Hazel: (nodding) "Yes."

Dr. Speelman: “Okay, I’ll give your father your prescription. It is just anti-depressants. They will help you sleep and be more relaxed during the day. Please, only take one at night.”

I nodded and I actually wanted to laugh at that. It felt like an inside joke, but I let her do her job.

Dr. Speelman: “I shall see you tomorrow.”

I thanked her and she left. I saw her briefly talking to my father and Beast before leaving. I turned to take a moment and look at the pool yet again, and focus on those beautiful flowers. I could smell him from behind me. He wasn’t wearing any cologne, but I still remembered his scent.

Beast: “Hi.”

I turned around and those infamous butterflies revisited my stomach.

Hazel: (nervously) “Hi.”

Beast: “Did you receive my message?”

Of course he knew that. I just didn’t respond.

Hazel: (nodding) “Yes, I did.”

Beast: “Okay. I have to go. I’ll see you again tomorrow.”

That was the end of our conversation. He just took one good look at me before leaving and that was it. I so badly wanted him to hold me. I wanted to cry in his arms and let him know how much I appreciated that message, but my body just wouldn’t let me. I saw him leave the house, and only Phil was left. I decided to head back to my bedroom without saying anything to him. Whenever I looked at him, all I could see was betrayal and rejection. I kept asking myself; had I not been in such a jam, would he have come into my life? I guess only time would tell. The mind is a very powerful weapon as well; it believes exactly what you put in it. I was on the road to recovering from mental illness yet again.

Hebrews 11:1 – “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”

“The past is a source of knowledge, and the future is a source of hope. Love of the past implies faith in the future.” – Stephen Ambrose

Beast

I went back to the prison, with a much lighter heart. I knew that the road to Hazel’s recovery was going to be a rather long one, but I just had hope. My own situation was not weighing so heavily on my mind any more. I had a new swing in my step and a more positive mind. I assumed I would be going back to my cell, when I was taken to one of the visitor’s rooms. I was uncuffed and sat down in my chair. I was a little worried; the last time I was taken there without warning, I was transferred to a new prison. Thankfully, it was authorized by Phil. I saw him walk in and tell the guard to wait outside the room. He put his brief case on the table and opened it. He took out some paperwork and he started talking.

Phil: “I received some new information, hence I asked to meet you here. Sorry, we could have done it at my house in a much more comfortable setting.”

Beast: "It's alright. I'm still a prisoner."

Phil: "You won't be for very long. I need you to write down a statement for me; of your recollection of events on that day, up until when you ended up at Polsmoor. I want you to tell me everything you remember."

Beast: "Well, I can try. What new information have you received?"

Phil: "Let's just say that you're about to see a few changes around here. We're one step ahead from solving this case, and if my source is indeed correct, a lot of high profile people are going to be imprisoned."

That sounded like music to my ears. I started telling him every bit I could remember, and without fail he jotted every single word down as he was typing on his laptop. It was a tedious three hours, but it was worth it.

Phil: "Alright. With that settled, rest assured an incident such as the one of last night shall never occur again. Your father will be sent to solitary for a while, and all the guards involved have been suspended with immediate effect, and the Warden included."

That was music to my ears, although I wasn't bothered much about my father. The only thing that worried me was his crew trying to kill me when I was sleeping. I took that as an opportunity to thank Phil. He had no reason to help me whatsoever, we weren't related – not by blood and most certainly not by marriage as yet.

Beast: "I really want to thank you for offering to help me. No one bothered to even try ever since I got arrested."

Phil: "It's alright. I couldn't turn a blind eye while Ghadaffi is ruining every single thing he touches."

Beast: "If I may ask, what is the real reason you're helping me?"

Phil: (sigh) "Partially because my daughter loves you, but the real main reason is that I owe you more than this. I owe you for taking such good care of her. I feel that you have done way more than I could ever expect from any man. If I don't treat you like gold, then I'd be doing you and Hazel quite an injustice."

Beast: (nodding) "I see."

Phil: "You see, Beast. You have done my job, even when no one expected you to. I owe you everything, and I swear, I won't sleep until I get you out of here."

Seeing him say that with so much affirmation gave me peace of mind. I truly appreciated him being there for me even when he wasn't forced to. I get it, he felt indebted to me in some way, but I could see that he was really genuine and he was doing it out of the goodness of his heart. He was passionate about law, which was most probably why he never chose to even go the other direction. He wasn't much focused on his businesses.

Phil: "Since well we're having a heart-to-heart, allow me to ask. Do you think Hazel will ever forgive me?"

That was a real tough one, to be honest. At that stage, I wasn't even sure if she was ready to forgive anyone.

Beast: (sigh) "To be honest with you, sir, I don't think she hates you at all. In fact, she is just so overwhelmed with everything right now. She has been through so much and I can only imagine what Ghadaffi has been doing to her. Once I get my hands on him, he will wish he hadn't been born. You see, Hazel is so fragile; just before we were about to get married, she was on her way to healing and she was just discovering herself. I myself didn't want to pressurize her into anything, but I ensured that she took her pills and went for therapy. I encouraged her to find herself by doing lots of activities to stimulate the mind, you know. If anything try to get to know her and don't push her. She will eventually let you in, slowly."

Phil: "She trusts you more. She won't let me in without holding her guard. I know, you have so much on your plate, but please, try to talk to her. Try to get her to talk to me; to us."

Beast: "I'm working on it, but we need to be patient. She has a lot to recover from. If you wish, write her a letter. She's not

very good with expressing herself, but if she gets to read a letter or message from you explaining why you did what you did and everything you want her to know, she might have a different perspective of everything. Just do yourself a favour and be patient with her. Don't shut her out as well, but try to talk to her. Even if she ignores you, she will know that you have tried."

Phil: "I know, I might sound silly for asking all these questions, but what does she like?"

Beast: "No, sir, you're not silly at all. You're just a father trying to get to know his daughter and make up for lost time. There's no harm in that."

Phil: "Please, call me Phil."

Beast: (shaking head) "No, sir, out of respect, I choose not to. Hazel will be my wife once I get out of here and I cannot be calling my father-in-law by name. If you must know, she loves the little things; flowers, her favourite colour is undecided between yellow and orange, but she loves food more than

anything. If you want to win her over, give her food. I have seen a few pictures of you in the kitchen, you two might just get along. She has hated her curly hair for so long, but keep complimenting her on it. And, she loves learning about family; so tell her about your family and what your parents are like.”

Phil: “Oh, my parents wouldn’t be interested in knowing Hazel, at least not like that.”

Beast: “Then grandparents or relatives. Take her on mini adventures; she loves exploring. She needs a lot of reassurance in life because she has always guarded herself. She will be okay if we just support her and encourage her to be herself.”

Phil: “I can see why she fell for you. At first I thought you were a little too old for her, but I got to realize that age is nothing but a number. You’re a good man, Beast. Just keep trying; for my sake.”

Beast: “I will do so.”

Phil: “By the way, I’ve scheduled a visit from your family today. I hope it’s okay with you.”

I wasn’t too sure if I was ready to see those ones. They were most probably so anxious and they were going to cry. I didn’t want them to see me like this and leave there beyond depressed. Prison wasn’t a fun place to visit, but I did miss them and I needed them to be reassured that I was okay.

Beast: (nodding) “Of course, it is always okay.”

Phil: “Alright then. If you need anything – call me.”

I nodded and once he left, I took a deep breath. I had to prepare myself for my family, but most of all; my mother. She was the toughest one of them all and I could only imagine what she was dying to say to me. It wasn’t very long until I heard them walk in. It was Brenda and my mother for the moment. Brenda looked so worn out, with massive bags under her eyes. The moment she saw me, she ran towards me and attacked me with a hug. Of course, my mother was the first one to wail and make noise.

Ma Sibiya: (crying) “Yoh (oh)! My ancestors! Is this what I get for leaving your son?!”

Beast: “Ma, I’m alright. uYarasa (you’re making noise).”

Ma Sibiya: “How can you be so calm in such a dire situation, Bethuel?!”

Beast: “It is the only way to stay alive in this place; to have hope. I can’t be crying all the time.”

Brenda: “How have you been? Are you okay? You look so thin.”

Beast: “My body is still recovering from Polsmoor. I’ll be okay.”

Ma Sibiya: “They even broke your neck and arm, mfana wami (my boy).”

Beast: “Prison is no home, Ma. I’ll be alright.”

Brenda: “This is all Hazel’s fault. Had she not married him, you wouldn’t be in this mess.”

As much as they were angry and rather relieved to see me, I was in no position to discuss Hazel’s marriage with them. I also did not want them to bash her for any reason – no matter how angry they were.

Beast: “Please, with all due respect. Leave Hazel out of this topic.”

Ma Sibiya: (angrily) “She has bewitched you! Ukudlisile (she has fed you muthi)!”

Beast: “Ma, I’m serious. I won’t tolerate you doing that. You don’t know why Hazel did what she did and if anything, it has nothing to do with you.”

Brenda: "I'm sorry, but I am going to agree with Mama for once. I mean, surely you can't still say you love her after everything that has happened to you, can you? Her husband put you behind bars!"

Beast: "Hazel has done nothing wrong. You will not speak about her in that manner."

Ma Sibiya: "Oh, I see. That fancy lawyer threatened you to stay away from her too, didn't he?"

Beast: (confused) "What?"

Brenda: "Mr. Ferreira? Your lawyer? He came by our house and gave us information that you were here now. He said that if we dared to say one bad word to Hazel or about her to anyone, we'd sure regret it."

As understood, he had every right to tell them that.

Beast: “No one threatened me to do anything. If you must know, he is Hazel’s father.”

They were both shocked.

Ma Sibiya: (shocked) “That rich man is her father? As in Binah’s ex?! Why is he helping you? Is it out of guilt?!”

Beast: “No one feels guilty of anything, Ma. If anything, I have to thank that man. No one was prepared to touch my case, until he arrived.”

Brenda: “Well, I don’t care if he’s her father, but what she did was unforgiveable.”

Ma Sibiya: “Yes, I agree. I’m sorry, but if you choose to forgive her, we won’t.”

Beast: “Ephesians 4:32 says; “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Colossians 3:13 says; “Bear with each other and forgive

one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. Luke 6:37 says; “Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. For someone who really claims to love God, Mama, you sure are quite bitter.”

Ma Sibiya: (angrily) “Bethuel, how dare you speak to me like that?!”

Beast: “Mama, you know, I’ve never been selfish towards you nor disrespectful. I am not choosing Hazel over anyone, but I am so tired of explaining myself to you all. I am tired of showing you why I love her. I don’t expect you to love her, because my love alone for her will be enough to sustain the both of us. Mama, you are bitter

though you won’t even admit it. You are still angry at Baba (father) for leaving you; not because he chose to desert you with your four children, but because he chose to leave YOU, and go be a father to another woman’s children. Not once did you even try to pray about it and ask God to help you heal. I don’t recall you ever teaching me to treat a woman differently to how his mother treated you. I don’t ever recall you ever

showing me how to treat a woman and that I should never treat any woman the way he treated you. I had to learn that all by myself. Despite it all, you just won't change."

Ma Sibiya: (crying) "That is not fair. I have been through hell and back for you – all of you! All that because of your father!"

Beast: "See what I mean? You don't want to heal. Acknowledge that he hurt you and let it go. I went through so much shit for you – all of you, but have you heard me complain? I have had to step up and make ends meet for you guys because I didn't want you to end up selling yourselves for men, but have you seen me complain? I have been through so much pain but have any of you ever asked me if I was okay? Did you hear me moan about my father leaving me all my life? No. If you have changed as you say, then there is the door. Kindly ask the guard to take you to Solomon's cell; ask him for a divorce – once and for all. Face your demons and maybe then you will see just why I love Hazel. Maybe then you will see the power of forgiveness."

Brenda: "Beast, come on."

Beast: “No, Bee, you come on. I thought you had come here to see how I’m really doing, but instead, you have come to make yourselves feel better by blaming the woman I love. If anything, you should be thanking Hazel. She is the reason you are able to talk to me today. She found me when no one could. So, if you ever want to come here and talk shit about her, then better not come.”

With that said, I left them sitting right there, with so much shock written on their faces. I was dealing with a lot; and Hazel was going through so much. The last thing I needed was them making me feel so much worse. I went back to my cell, and I found that it was court time. No one was in the cells, so I took that opportunity to just sit there and reflect on my life and everything that had been going on. Yes, as much as my life was quite something, I was heartbroken over what was happening to Hazel. All I wanted was for her to get better so that we could just get on with our lives. While I was lying there, I felt a really heavy presence enter my cell. Something told me to just get up and look up. Once I did, I faced him head on. I saw Potra, one of the very men who tried to kill me the night I had been transferred to the prison. It was barely a week and the drama I had encountered could fill an entire book. He stared at me with so much hatred; I looked around and there were no guards in

sight which was odd, because according to my understanding all the corrupt guards were suspended. What I saw was a little horrific and that got me worried, he was wiping the remainder of someone's blood off his knife. He looked me straight in the eye as if he was preparing that knife to enter my body yet again. By the look of things, he didn't want to stab me and leave me alive, no, he wanted to end my life right there and then. I wasn't scared at all, I just felt so much pity for him.

Beast: "What are you doing?"

Potra: "What does it look like I'm doing? I am going to do what I should have done that night – kill you."

Beast: "What good will that do to you, Potra? How will that enhance your life?"

Potra: "I will at least earn the respect I deserve from my Captain."

By Captain I suppose he meant Sol.

Beast: "You mean Sol?"

Potra: "Bra Sol to you."

Beast: "You do know that he is not God, right? You do know that eventually he will throw you away like an old rag and get someone faster and better to replace you?"

Potra: "Bra Sol will never do that to me. I'm his family."

Beast: "Is that so? If he could abandon his children, what makes you think he won't do that to you?"

Potra: "He didn't tell me that. He told me that you'd try and poison me against him."

Beast: "I have no time to poison anyone against anyone. In fact, I am saying that you are going to regret doing what you have done."

I was really hoping that whomever he stabbed was still alive, because that really did look like fresh blood.

Potra: “You know nothing about prison life. You should just die.”

I got up, without fear and I told him to do it.

Beast: “You are man enough, right? Do it. Go right ahead and stab me.”

He was so glad that I was offering myself to him, and I just looked him right in the eye. I had told myself that if it was my time to die, then so be it. He put his arms up and just as he was about to stab me right through my chest with that knife, he froze. He looked at me with so much fear, as if he had seen a ghost. I could feel so much warmth and light behind me and the entire cell became completely bright. It was almost white. I could hear the sound of a lion roaring behind me, but I couldn't see any. Potra was so frightened that he dropped the knife. The entire time he was looking right behind me. He kneeled down

before me and he started praying, consumed with tears; tears that seemed to have been hidden deep within for many years.

Potra: “Oh, Father God, please forgive me. Forgive me, please. Forgive me...”

He kept repeating those words, which made me wonder. I was filled with nothing but faith and I wasn't afraid at all. I couldn't see anything but a bright white light in the entire cell. I saw so many people coming to my cell, one of them being Job. He was also so stunned, but he smiled at me so broadly. The rest of the prisoners, including some of the guards who must have heard that Potra was holding me hostage or something had also witnessed whatever Potra had seen and they knelt down before me. I was standing on my own two feet the entire time. There I was, standing in the middle of my cell just next to my bed, with so many prisoners and guards kneeling before me, praying and crying. I had never witnessed anything like that in my life. I could feel something within me move, it must have been the holy spirit. Nothing felt greater than that – ever. I was still confused as to what had made them so afraid, but the lion sounds were still present. Job was staring at me in such a proud manner, that a tear escaped his eye.

Job: (smiling) “I told you, Bethuel, you were called to come save the people. You alone had to do this.”

It was then, that I had learned that they could all see a big lion standing right behind me with a bright, white light. I couldn't see any lion, although I could hear it and feel its' presence. Some say it was the lion of Judah, while some say it was my ancestors, but all I know is that I was protected and my faith kept me alive. Potra had seen the power of Jesus that day and for that, he chose to change his ways. He immediately went and handed himself over, but God's grace and mercy is so powerful, that the guard he had stabbed chose not to press any charges against him. He was stabbed right next to the heart and Potra had turned the knife inside of that man, but miraculously, he had survived without the need for surgery or a ventilator. Potra had been crying the entire night as I had heard, and he was sent to solitary instead. He was out the following morning, and by then, everyone was looking at me differently. Wherever I walked, people were greeting me so nicely. I no longer had people wanting to kill me; and Potra wanted nothing to do with my father and his crew. Even the kitchen staff were so nice to me along with the guards. I was treated like some kind of God, which was quite alarming. I didn't understand it, but I couldn't

say I didn't appreciate it. From that evening onwards, whenever we'd pray, I could feel that lion wrap itself around me in that cell. That cell felt so godly and so protected, that they even asked to join our church on Sundays. Job was the leader of course, I was just asked to pray whenever prayer time came. So many of the prisoners had already changed their ways; some stopped selling drugs and many mended their ways with their family members. So many were coming to me for advice, but odd enough, I knew just what to tell them.

So many of them just asked me to touch them and pray for them, and I did as they had wished. A week later, I was one of the few prisoners who were getting baptized. It felt so spiritual and so real, that at that point, I was able to feel a person's soul. I could feel whenever someone was hurting and in pain. I didn't understand it, but Job had told me that I had unlocked my true spirit from within. I wasn't really a prophet, per say, but I was able to see things through dreams at times and I was able to sense trouble from a mile away. Job had told me that I had a healing hand. So many miracles had happened that week, including me being given a new name; a name I was supposedly given by ancestors when I was a baby, but my father never allowed it. I was given the name Abraham; just like Abraham in the Bible, I was sent to lead all those prisoners and lead them

to God. It took me quite a while to get used to it, but I loved it nonetheless. And then one of those miracles being the Warden getting fired – officially. A new one was instated, and I received the best news of my life. I remember I was having a prayer session with a few prisoners, when I was called to the Warden’s office. The moment I stepped in, I could tell that she was a good woman, unlike Vivian.

Warden: (smiling) “Hello, Mr. Sibiya, please sit.”

I sat down and listened attentively.

Warden: “I’m sure you’re wondering why you’re here.”

Beast: “Yes...”

Warden: “Well, your lawyer had some business to attend to, but he asked me not to let this news pass you by.”

Beast: “Yes?”

Warden: (chuckling) "Your new trial date has been set. Some new evidence has been found and you are going on trial again soon."

Beast: "On trial for what?"

Warden: "Your appeal, dear. Your lawyer is one tough cookie, believe me. If it hadn't been for him, you were still going to be here until kingdom come."

I was reeling so much, that I couldn't believe it.

Beast: (teary) "When is it starting?"

Warden: "Tomorrow. He'll come by later to brief you. I was just asked to give you the good news."

I was in such disbelief, that I walked out of there with tears streaming down my face. Yes, I had been there for murder and I

never denied it, but I just wanted to get a fair chance of a trial. I knew that there was a possibility of me doing some prison time for Raymond's murder and I was prepared to do so. I was just glad that God had finally given me the chance I needed. I had been sending Hazel one picture of us together with a message every single day without fail and a good night message.

Although she never responded, I chose to respect her space while I focused on myself. Good things were awaiting me, and things were starting to fall into place. It was nearly a year that I had been imprisoned, and little did I know what was in store for me. While I went to my cell to recover from the good news I received, a text from Hazel came through.

"I heard the good news, and if you must know, yes, I still love you. I never stopped loving you. Good luck for tomorrow, I wouldn't miss it for the world."

Isaiah 60:22 - "When the time is right, I, the Lord will make it happen."

“Faith is the strength by which a shattered world shall emerge into light.”

— Hellen Keller

Hazel

I'd been going through so much, but also, I had made so much progress, that I myself was a bit sceptical. It had always been very difficult for me to open up to my therapists, but waking up to Beast's encouraging words of love every morning, gave me more faith and strength to open up to Dr. Speelman again. She already knew me, but I was sort of starting over. It was hell at first, but I got the hang of it. Seeing Phil try and make an effort each and every day, was the best thing to ever happen to me. He woke me up with breakfast, and although I didn't want to say much to him, I chose to have an open mind and I was so amazed at how much we had in common.

We ended up playing so much in the kitchen, that he even taught me how to make his Ouma's (Grandma's) famous melktert. His grandmother, who was my great-grandmother.

The woman who used to live in that house which I was then living in; the very same woman whom I had been dreaming of every single night since I was living there. At times I felt her presence, and I would have conversations with her in my dreams. It was so odd because I had never met her, but it turned out that she had been dying to meet me for years and died with a broken heart.

Hannah, which was my second name was also her name. He and my mother had apparently been going through baby names and he always used to say that he would love to name his daughter Hannah, and she remembered that though they had been broken up for quite a while. I was humbled at that fact, at least. I decided to try and face my demons. The one thing that made Phil and I to grow closer to one another, was his heartfelt letter during a therapy session that week when Dr. Speelman asked him to join us. I remembered that day so well, that it would most probably have stayed in my mind for a long time. He was asked to read that letter to me.

Phil: "My dearest Hannah, firstly, I'd like to apologize for not being a part of your life for an entire 2 decades. Words cannot express how much I am filled with regret. Yes, I should have done better, I should have tried harder, but seeing all those

pictures that your mom would send me of you each year on your birthday just made me melt. I never stopped thinking about you and the more I got to see of you, the more I just felt like I wouldn't have done you any justice by barging into your life. Yes, I was aware of what your mother had been doing to you most of your life, which is why I was paying for your fees and sending your mother money every month. I know, your mother has been a bad mother to you, but I am partially to blame for that. I just left her, of which no man should ever do to a woman. She was left to raise a child all on her own and in turn she became a victim of circumstances to a certain point.

Yes, she has made some really bad choices, but so have I. Despite me having all the connections that I have had, I still never tried to contact you nor take you to come live with me. I know, you have most probably seen some pictures of my family and I online, but I can assure you; you are the only child I have. Yes, I was married to a woman; a woman I had chosen over your mother only to please my parents, but I never loved her. I thought that the children were mine, only to find out nearly twenty years later that they weren't mine. I know, you most probably think that I came back into your life because I wanted to replace them, but no, after hearing that you married Ghadaffi, I had to do something. I was living in so much fear of

what you were going to say to me had you seen me. I didn't want you to think that. I wanted the best for you and when I heard that you were studying to become a psychologist, I couldn't have been so proud.

If you give me the opportunity to prove myself worthy of being a father to you, I promise you, I'll never let you go ever again. If you do, I ask of you to also forgive your mother. We have both done you wrong, and I want nothing but the best for you. I have always loved you, Hannah, from the moment I found out that your mother never aborted you; that was probably the best day of my life. Seeing your picture for the very first time, I knew that you were mine. You got my grandmother's green eyes and hazel brown, curly hair. You have been through so much because of the way you look and I don't ever want you to feel bad about it from this day onwards. Beast has done so much for you, that I owe him the world. No one could ever have done what he did. I chose to help him because I have a passion for justice, but most importantly because I love you. Loving you means loving him and that is what I intend on doing. Forgive me for ripping your heart out like that even before you met me, but most importantly, you managed to find a man that is way better than me. Please, grant me a second chance. Love, Phil.

P.S. I have put a USB on your bed with all the pictures I have of you. When you have the chance, please, take a look at them.”

I hadn't even realized that throughout the entire time he was reading the letter to me, my mother was right there behind me. I was soaking in tears, and when I looked at her, I could see the regret all over her face. So, just like that, Dr. Speelman had killed two birds with one stone. I had no idea my mother sent Phil a letter with a picture of me on my birthday each year. It was something quite special that she had done for me. For that, I knew that she had some good in her. If I had to forgive Phil, then it meant forgiving her. She was my mother after all and she had so much potential to be good. I forgave both my parents that day and I realized the power of forgiveness. Forgiveness birthed healing that day in our lives, and I managed to have a good night's sleep for the first time in a very long time. I slept knowing that I would no longer feel pity for myself. When I saw those pictures, I cried. I knew that they both loved me, and they both had faults. I myself had faults, as much as everyone else, but that didn't mean that I had to dwell on what they had done wrong. Instead, I chose to focus on what they were doing to mend those wrongs and that was the most powerful gift I had given myself. I could take walks with my mother around the garden and the nearby park, without crying

and feeling angry at her. I could go out for lunch with my father, without fear of what people were going to say about the colour of my skin. Yes, initially I was worried that people would have been asking if we were indeed father and daughter, but oddly, they would compliment us saying that he was such a good father and that we looked alike indeed. I managed to forge a long-awaited bond with my father and I also manage to mend a broken one with my mother. It was the most beautiful week I had ever had. In turn, I could tell Beast was having a great one as well, he was telling me all about it in his lovely messages. I still hadn't found the courage to respond to them, but when I heard that his trial date was set for the coming Monday, I just had to respond. It was so beautiful how life was falling into place so effortlessly. I managed to juggle my school life and family life, while my mother was being taken care of by the best specialists in the world. Bella was still living at home in Atteridgeville, and we had to deal with ourselves first before we could deal with her, however, Phil ensured that they were taken care of, though. I really missed Jenny, at times, though I had so much on my plate. Everything was so great, that I had completely forgotten about Ghadaffi's existence. His parents couldn't find me anywhere, though they were trying to call me. Phil told me that he would take care of them all and I really believed him. The first day of trial was about to be the first day of many nightmares. When good things happen, one should

always expect enemies to try and break the door of hope down.

The following day...

The Monday finally came and I got up early to prepare myself for Beast's trial. I couldn't miss it for the world, so I opted for online exams. The University didn't mind at all, so I had enough time to support my Beast. Something within me told me that I was yet to expect something bad to happen that day, but, I didn't dwell on it. Instead, I focused on the positive and I chose to pray. It was about to be the first day of many in that court room, but Beast had to leave victorious; he just had to.

Beast

It was the morning of my appeal trial and I wasn't ready for it all, to be honest. I was afraid of the outcome, but I had to remain positive. Job was so happy for me and the entire night, all my cell mates were praying with me. My heart was heavy, I felt so guilty for what I had done to Raymond. That was

partially one of the reasons that motivated Ghadaffi to do what he had done to me.

Job: “You look worried. Are you nervous?”

Beast: “Kind of. I’m just thinking of Raymond.”

Job: “If you hadn’t done that, he was going to go after her and kill her. Yes, nothing justifies killing, but he has forgiven you. So has the lord. You just have to focus on today.”

Beast: “I hear you. I’ll do my best.”

Job: “That is all I ask of you.”

He gave me a warm hug; he had become like a father to me and I appreciated all our conversations. I hadn’t seen anything of my father, ever since he had been in solitary. Potra had joined us officially and he also became baptized. He wanted nothing to do with crime any more and he was living a good life – away from trouble. The guards came to fetch me and I saw Phil and

my Hazel right outside. They got out of the car especially for me. Just seeing her glow like that, put such a broad smile on my face. All I ever wanted was her to heal. Nothing made me happier.

Phil: (smiling) “Are you ready to go? I have a suit for you in my car. You can change just before court.”

Beast: (smiling) “Yes, I’m as ready as can be.”

I couldn’t stop staring at Hazel, seeing her blush like that brought so many feelings back; feelings I thought had subsided a long time ago.

Phil: “Hey, focus now. You can’t be day dreaming about my daughter while we’re fighting for your freedom.”

I chuckled and was put into the van. I didn’t mind being behind the van at all. I was already used to it. My mother and sister were not going to travel with Phil, I advised him against it because of their feelings for Hazel. I totally understood where

they were coming from, but all I wanted was for them to put those feelings aside and just try to be there for me. Once we got to the court, the media was there as always, but I was taken to one of the holding cells. I didn't hear much commotion because I mean

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I was no celebrity, so I didn't think much of the media being there. Once I heard them screaming louder, I got a little weary. I was given a brand new suit to wear; Phil had so much style, I just knew that he and I would get along just fine. I patiently waited to be called and I said a prayer. Before I knew it, it was time to get out of that cell. Once I got up those stairs, which gave me a painful flash back of the day I was sent out of that dock and straight to prison, I told myself that the outcome would not be the same again. Not this time. I looked around and was alarmed at the many people in that court room. It was so packed, but I could spot my Hazel, and her smile alone made me focus away from all the flashing cameras. I couldn't recall so many journalists being present when I first made it to trial. I had hoped that the judge was someone very different from the one I had before. The one who preceded my trial was very rude and cold; he refused to hear me out. I was so anxious. When I saw the face of the new judge, my heart couldn't stop beating fast.

Guard: "All rise."

Everyone including myself stood up. I didn't want to seem having no remorse. I kept looking back at Phil who just smiled at me, effortlessly. He reassured me that everything was going to be fine. The Prosecutor was the very same one who was there during my initial trial. That made me feel really scared. At one point I asked myself if Phil was going to be able to pull it off or not.

Judge: "You may be seated."

We sat down and I could feel my palms starting to sweat. I looked at Phil again and he mouthed a few words to me.

Phil: (mouthing) "Relax, don't panic."

I nodded and tried my best.

Judge: (sigh) "So, Mr. Ferreira, you're back here with your client. I assume you're appealing, am I correct?"

Phil: "Yes, my lord. Upon finding new evidence, I believe that my client was sentenced unfairly as he was given an unfair trial. Nowhere was he even given a bail hearing, nor was he even afforded the opportunity of getting a lawyer. Here are all the necessary documents, my lord."

Judge: "The client did confess to murdering the deceased, am I not correct?"

Phil: "Under duress, my lord. Nowhere did he deny it, but there is actual footage and evidence of his medical records, pictures of sustained bruises and I have sworn statements from witnesses, my lord."

I could see the Prosecutor start panicking.

Prosecutor: "My lord, I have no knowledge of this."

Phil: (chuckling) “My Lord, the evidence was given to the prosecution in due course. Perhaps he should have come more prepared instead of having unsolicited parties a night before such a big trial.”

Phil was so confident, and I could tell by the Prosecutor’s annoyance that he had him right where he wanted him.

Judge: (sigh) “Well, was the prosecution aware of the fact that the defendant was not afforded any opportunity to get legal counsel?”

Prosecutor: (fidgety) “Well, my lord, the defendant did state that he wanted no lawyer.”

Phil: “My Lord, I have further evidence that the previous judge presiding over this case, including the prosecution had taken money – a bribe rather, from a Mr. Brandon “Ghadaffi” Mashile. An amount of R1 million – each.”

The court gasped, and so did I. I had expected that, but I was shocked that he managed to get such information so quickly. He handed the file over to the judge, who seemed to get so frustrated with the prosecutor.

Judge: (sigh) "Is this true?"

Prosecutor: (panicking) "My lord, no, I mean, anyone can give a person money in this country. Why is it assumed to have been a bribe?"

Judge: "All this evidence points to me otherwise, which brings me to the question, how sure are we that the video tape played to the court was not tampered with?"

I was so shocked; Phil had produced evidence after evidence, including Ghadaffi tampering with my voice when calling Hazel and making me look as if I had disappeared. Instead of it being my trial, it ended up being theirs. Countless witnesses were brought forward to recollect what Ghadaffi and the prosecutor had done to them. Some were confessing to having taken bribes from them. None of them shocked me as much as Sporo,

my right hand man. When he was called onto the stand, my heart really missed a few beats. I got to know that people would really betray you in a heartbeat all for money.

Judge: "Do you swear to tell the truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?"

Sporo: (nervously) "I do."

Judge: "The counsel may continue."

Phil: "Thank you, my lord. Sporo, how well do you know the defendant?"

Sporo: (nervously) "He was my boss, sir."

Phil: "What kind of business was your boss into?"

Sporo: "He, uh, he was a club owner. I helped him by making errands for him here and there."

Phil: "I see. Can you tell the court what happened a week before the defendant's supposed disappearance?"

Sporo: "Uhm, I was called by Ghadaffi, to make a deal. He was with my boss's lawyer."

Phil: "By lawyer you mean Mr. Sibiya's financial advisor?"

Sporo: (nodding) "Yes."

He couldn't even look me in the eye.

Sporo: "He called me and said that he wanted to make a deal; he said that I needed to make him look like he had disappeared from the hood, you know. In exchange for money."

Phil: "How much money?"

Sporo: “R200 000.”

The crowd gasped.

Phil: “What exactly did you have to do?”

Sporo: “Nna le Tman (Tman and I) had to forge his signatures and make it look like he had given Tman everything; including a last will and testament.”

I was beyond hurt more than anything; he made me disappear. He knew about everything, yet he just didn't bother to do what was right. He furthermore went on to explain how he and Tman pulled everything off. My heart broke, I was torn. I had helped Sporo and his family in so many ways, and I didn't expect him to betray me like that. I was filled with so many tears; mostly tears of regret.

Sporo: “Bozza harde (I'm sorry).”

Judge: “You may step down, sir.”

I think he was so scared that I'd kill him or do something to him, but I just wanted to forgive him. I nodded when I looked at him and I could tell that he just didn't want to do anything further.

Judge: "Let's take a quick recess before we continue."

Guard: "All rise."

We stood up and took a break. I didn't want to move from that dock. I thought if I had moved, then it would have been my last time seeing them yet again.

Phil: "Beast, go, I'll meet you out there just now."

I was petrified, I wouldn't lie, but I went ahead. Indeed, he and Hazel came to my holding cell.

Hazel: "Hi. I brought you something to eat."

I wasn't even hungry.

Beast: "Thank you."

Phil: "You look so worried. I am telling you, you are going home today."

Beast: "How do you know that? We don't know that for sure."

Phil: "Trust me, I know."

While they were encouraging me, my mother and Brenda decided to ruin the party.

Ma Sibiya: "Hi, Mr. Ferreira."

She just looked at Hazel and said nothing, but my Hazel was just calm and humble as always, though she pissed Phil off.

Hazel: "Sawubona (Hello), Ma."

She just gave her one look without greeting her back. I hated that, and I frowned immediately.

Brenda: "Hi, Hazel."

At least Brenda was being nice to her.

Hazel: "Hello, Brenda."

Ma Sibiya: "How are you, my boy? I have brought you something to eat."

Beast: "Thanks, but Hazel already gave me some food. As you can see."

Ma Sibiya: (annoyed) "Oh, okay. Well, we just came to give you some good luck and blessings before you went back in."

Beast: “Thanks, listen, I need to go over a few things with my lawyer. Can you two excuse us for a few minutes?”

Brenda: “Oh, sure.”

Ma Sibiya: “Why is Hazel staying?”

Phil just couldn't contain himself any more.

Phil: (annoyed) “Because she is my daughter, and she is his fiancée. Is there anything else you'd like to ask since you didn't even bother to greet her?”

He was so annoyed, and my mother could see that. It was pointless being petty towards the daughter of the very same man who chose to save your son from possible death and a life sentence in prison.

Ma Sibiya: “Oh, no. I'll leave you to it then.”

She left with Brenda, while I just wanted to look at Hazel.

Beast: "I'm sorry about that. Are you okay?"

Hazel: (nodding) "Yes, don't worry about that. Let's focus on you, okay?"

She wiped some sweat off my face and I really missed her touch.

Guard: "Sibiya, time to go. The judge has come back."

Phil: "Hazel, let's go."

Hazel: "Can you give me one minute, please? I'll be right there."

He nodded.

Phil: "Fine, just don't take too long."

He left while Hazel looked me right in the eye.

Hazel: "I just wanted to say good luck. I have a feeling you're coming home today."

She gave me one long hug, a hug I had yearned for for nearly a year. She still smelled so good, just like honey. Her skin was still so soft just like butter. She said I was coming home; I had no idea what she meant, but all I knew was that I wanted to do things right and do right by her once I got out. That was confirmation to me that she still loved me no matter what the outcome. I went back to that dock full of smiles, but of course I had to hide that from the judge. It just looked weird smiling while your life was on the line.

Guard: "All rise."

Judge: "You may be seated."

I thought she was going to ask Phil to call on more witnesses, but she dropped a bombshell instead.

Judge: “Well, clearly there is a lot of corruption in this country. I really would like to set an example and make sure that such does not happen to anyone ever again. I am so overwhelmed by all this and I can only imagine had it been my own son, what was I going to do? Mr. Sibiya, I am deeply sorry you had to endure so much abuse, more especially from people who are supposed to abide by the law and protect you. By all means, I will not be moving further with trial. Mr. Sibiya, I do hope that given the chance you sue the hell out of the state, as it is your right. No one has the right to tamper with evidence and play God with people’s lives. You are free to go. All charges against you have been dropped.”

I heard my mother wail in the crowd, while I just cried in disbelief.

Judge: “Guard, take those two away.”

Sporo and the prosecutor were taken away, and I later heard that Ghadaffi was wanted by the police too. Miracles were happening left, right and center that week. All I wanted was to sleep in a cosy, warm bed, but before that, there was something I had to do.

Mark 11:24 – “Therefore, whatever you shall ask in Prayer, believe that you have received it, and it shall be yours.”

“Fight your battles through prayer, And win your battles through faith.” — Luffina Lourduraj

Beast

When I walked out of that court room, nothing else and no one else mattered for a minute. I could smell the fresh air from outside of that court room and it smelled so great. Yes, I had been outside prison for a while and I could smell the air, but I don't think anyone could ever understand the feeling of being able to smell freedom. I thought of Job, of every other inmate I had met who was incarcerated for a crime they didn't even commit. I mean, if Phil could help me, surely he could help others too. I owed Job everything; because he managed to restore my faith in God, in humanity. He ensured that I realized anger was not the way to solve problems. Brenda and my mother wanted me to go with them, but they just didn't understand my journey and my path. Yes, I loved them and I wanted to celebrate with them too, but if they couldn't be around Hazel, then I couldn't hide it.

Beast: “Ma, Bee, do you guys mind following us to Phil’s house? I just need to do something at the prison first before leaving.”

Ma Sibiya: “Oh, Kodwa (but), Bethuel. Surely you can visit your gangster friends another time. You’re free – they’re not. What if they kill you in there?”

Bethuel: “Really, Ma? You don’t have to be so narrow-minded. Can you please just do as I say just this once? Ngiyakucela (I beg of you).”

Ma Sibiya: “Fine.”

They got into Brenda’s car, while Phil, Hazel and I drove in Phil’s car. I was so happy and I felt so blessed, I just had to see Job. Something inside of me was burning to touch his hand. At that moment, all our problems weren’t an issue. I was happy to have Hazel’s head right on my chest.

Hazel: “Do you really have to go there? I mean, you just got acquitted of all your charges. You can see them tomorrow.”

Beast: “Yes, I know, love, but I just have to see him really quickly.”

She understood and so did Phil. In fact, he didn't mind at all. Once we were there, everyone was waiting for me. I was so humbled by them all; they were all waiting for me in their cells and the moment I stepped into the prison, I could see everyone standing outside in the hallway, giving me a guard of honour. It was such a beautiful sight. I really cried, effortlessly. I saw Job right at the end of the hallway, and he rushed towards me and gave me a big hug. I felt something move within me when I hugged him. I managed to see something; a vision of Job while hugging him. I saw myself hugging him, both of us dressed in suits and he was waving goodbye to the prison. That already explained itself. I found myself crying tears of joy when I hugged him again. I think he felt it too.

Job: (teary) “Go out there and live your life, my son. You have done so well. I'll see you soon.”

I was so happy, but they were all happier. I greeted them all goodbye, with a heavy heart. That place had become home for quite some time. I didn't even miss my father at all because he just wasn't interested in becoming a father. I wasn't going to dwell on that at all. Upon exiting the prison, I waved at them one last time before officially letting go.

Hazel: (smiling) "Are you ready to go?"

Beast: (excitedly) "Always."

Hazel was a little farther from me and so was Phil. He had just finished smoking and just as they were approaching me, I saw Phil jump towards Hazel in a heartbeat. I heard two gunshots before I froze for a moment. I turned around after regaining myself, and I saw the gunman about to drive off. I instantly jumped at him and managed to grab him. I removed the balaclava on him and fear consumed me immediately.

Ghadaffi: (Angrily) "If I can't have her – then no one can, Beast."

He gave me an ugly smile, while the guards nearby came rushing at the scene to apprehend him. My mind was buzzing with so many emotions, while I rushed towards Hazel. She had blood on her shirt, and I panicked, only to realize that it was Phil who was shot – twice in the stomach. He was unconscious and Hazel was screaming so badly, I was in shock. I pulled myself together and got Phil into the car, with Hazel at the back.

Beast: “Keep his head up straight. Make sure he is breathing.”

Hazel: (crying) “He’s slipping in and out of consciousness. I’m so scared, Beast.”

Beast: “He will be fine, I just need you to focus and keep calm, okay?”

She nodded but I could tell she was very afraid. How I made it to the hospital in such high speed? I had no idea, but I made it. I just rushed out of the car and started shouting for help. They took him away as fast as they could, while Hazel was

in deep shock. All I could do was hold her and comfort her at that point.

Hazel: (crying) “What if he doesn’t make it, Beast?”

Beast: “Look at me, we won’t know what God has in store for him, but I need you to tap into that warrior inside of you. Can you do that for me?”

She nodded.

Beast: “Come, let’s go and pray.”

We just knelt down in that lobby, with no care in the world and I started praying. I didn’t care who was watching, I mean, I had no shame in the Lord. Jesus did say in Matthew 10:33 – “But whoever denies me before man, I will also deny him in front of my Father in heaven”. I had so much faith in me, that nothing and no one could shake me any more. For 2 Corinthians 5:7 says; “For we live by faith, not by sight.”

Beast: (praying) "Father God, we come before you as your children. Yes, we are not perfect, Lord nor do we want to be. We ask that you please help save Phil's life. He is yet to be a great father to Hazel and I and an even greater grandfather to our children. Psalm 119:30; "I have chosen the way of faithfulness; I have set my heart on your laws." God, you have moved mountains and you have healed the sick and awakened the dead. I am not asking for much, but I am asking that you give Phil a second chance at life. 1 John 4:4 says; "Great is He who lives in me." You live in each and every one of us, Lord, so let your will be done. Amen."

Hazel was a mess, but I could tell she had a lot more faith than she had had over a year ago. She was still a little traumatized, but I knew that she was going to be okay. I knew that somehow, that situation, was going to make her stronger than ever. We waited for a while and filled in all his details. She had all that blood on her clothes, and so did I, but it didn't matter. She called Paul and her mom to inform my mom and Bee that we weren't going to make it to the celebratory lunch, because Phil was in hospital. Of course, it didn't take the media very long to figure it out. They were right outside the hospital before we knew it. We just wanted to know if Phil was going to be alright. Neither of us wanted anything to eat or drink, and

news spread like wildfire. Job called me to pray for Phil and right after the phone call, the doctor finally came out of theatre – two hours later.

Beast: “Doctor, any news?”

Doctor: “He’s on a ventilator. He’s wounded really badly. We have managed to get the bullets out, but we have one problem. His left kidney was ruptured by one of the bullets. He may be able to breathe and live on the ventilator, but not for long. If I don’t get a kidney for him soon, he might have to live on dialysis.”

I could tell Hazel was stressed about that idea.

Hazel”: “I’m his daughter, his only daughter. I’m sure I could be a match.”

Doctor: “Are you sure?”

I was just about to ask her the same thing. I mean, yes, she would have been saving her father, but living with one kidney was a huge sacrifice.

Hazel: "He's my father."

Doctor: "Okay, follow me."

While she went to get tested, there I was praying that everything would have gone well. My future wife's father was in theatre, while she was getting tested to see if her kidney was a match. She came out looking like death itself.

Beast: (shocked) "What's wrong? What is it?"

Doctor: "She's a match."

Beast: "So, what's the problem?"

Doctor: "She has a very damaged fallopian tube, of which made me wonder why it was never removed. So

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due to that, it will be harder for her to conceive and if we were to remove one kidney from her, it would increase her risks of having a non-fatal pregnancy."

I was beyond shocked.

Beast: "I'm sorry, damaged fallopian tube from what?"

I could see her embarrassment when she looked down.

Doctor: "Uhm, it could be many factors, for example, a hard blow to the abdomen or stomach trauma or injury."

Then it hit me. Ghadaffi beat her up so badly that it crushed her fallopian tube. She looked so afraid to even look at me, but it just wasn't her fault.

Hazel: "I still want to do it."

Beast: "Test me. Test me and if I'm a match, then you can take mine."

Hazel: (shocked) "Beast, you can't do that."

Beast: "I want to."

I didn't even want her to rethink it. I simply followed the doctor, and by God's grace, I was a match. I preferred to have my kidney taken than hers. I didn't want her to live a life filled with guilt and regrets should we not have been able to conceive or have any children. I didn't want to wait. I wanted them to do the transplant right then and there. I was healthy and hadn't eaten all day, and I hadn't been drinking much in a long while, so I was perfect. I had just recently gotten my neck and arm braces removed, but my scars on my back were still healing. I prayed before my surgery and I reassured a frantic Hazel that I'd be alright. I owed Phil that much. He saved my woman from getting killed by Ghadaffi, while I had to save him by giving him a kidney. Yes, whenever you have a window of

opportunity in life, do not forget the enemies that come with every good thing that comes with it.

Hazel

Everything was just moving so fast. One minute we were reeling from Beast's verdict, while my father got shot the next all while trying to save me. I wished it had been me. Now, I only found out that my fallopian tube was never repaired after Ghadaffi beat me up that night. I regretted every decision I had taken regarding that man, but I chose to focus on the good. Beast had taught me to remain faithful and steadfast in prayer. God was the only aid I needed. I was a mess, I still could smell Phil's blood on my shirt and my Beast was also undergoing an operation. I was alone and frantic, until I saw Paul push her into the foyer. I hugged her and cried in her lap. It felt so good to just vent and be the one comforted.

Binah: "It's going to be alright, Hazel. You'll see."

Hazel: "How do you know that?"

Binah: "Because, God would never allow Beast to go through so much effort and trouble to get you back, to get his freedom back and just have him taken away from you. Phil will also be fine, you just wait and see."

I had hope in her words, but fear just over takes at times. We spent hours waiting for them and I couldn't stomach anything. I was so angry at Ghadaffi for ruining my life and now he had ruined two other lives in the process. What if Beast were to get involved in an accident of some sort and he would need a kidney? Such things were running through my mind. After hours of waiting, the doctor finally came and blessed us with good news.

Doctor: "I have good news, you have two warriors in there. They made it out of surgery and they are awake as we speak."

Binah: "Thank you, doctor."

Hazel: "Can we see them?"

Doctor: "After what I have witnessed in that operating room, I'll break my rules just for today."

Paul, my mother and I went into the hospital room and found my father and Beast were placed in the same ward. I was wondering what the doctor was talking about, until I heard the nurses talking about it.

Nurse 1: "Don't tell me you didn't hear that sound. It sounded like a lion, a big, roaring lion."

Nurse 2: "I saw it too. All I can say is that these two have strong ancestors. They won't die any time soon."

They were going on about it, while Beast and my father just found it funny. Men are truly something else. There I was, worried, and they were making jokes.

Phil: "Hey, baby girl."

I just burst into tears when I saw him.

Phil: "Hey, don't cry. I'm alright. All thanks to your man over here."

Hazel: "I'm sorry I couldn't save you. Had it not been for Ghaddafi –"

Phil: "Don't do that. Don't you dwell on the past. You have a life to live far away from that man. You can finally let go of him."

Hazel: (crying) "But he tried to kill you."

Phil: "Yes, tried, but he didn't succeed. No weapon formed against me shall prosper, remember?"

Hazel: "I'm worried about you guys while you're here making jokes."

Phil: "The beauty of life, baby. Find humor in the most awful situations at times. It will calm you down. Besides, I specifically asked for a room with double beds so that I can keep an eye on you two. I don't want any grand children just yet."

Phil and Binah just laughed, leaving me embarrassed.

Beast: (shaking head) "We're doing things right this time, Daddy P. I'm marrying that daughter of yours the second I get out of here."

Phil: "I don't recall you asking her for her hand in marriage."

Beast: "Patience, I'm a romantic man."

That indeed he was. They were chuckling and laughing so much, that they didn't even seem like they had just had surgery.

Phil: "Paul, please take them both home. Keep them safe."

Beast: “Don’t you worry, no one and nothing will touch you. Not while we’re both alive.”

They just kept laughing, my goodness. I was already seeing how much they were going to annoy me in future. While we drove on home, I thought we were going to be alone; just the three of us. I had completely forgotten about Brenda and Ma Sibiya. Once we walked in, Ma Sibiya jumped at me leaving me so annoyed.

Ma Sibiya: (shouting) “How is my son?! Since well you didn’t want us to come into the hospital! I demand to know how he is.”

Binah: “Yoh, wa rasa (Oh, you’re making noise), man.”

Ma Sibiya: “You, stop talking. It’s bad enough you’re paying for your sins by being stranded in a wheel chair, now you want my son to follow the same fate.”

I was so angered. That woman was really getting on my nerves. I was just about to celebrate yet another victory, but she just kept going.

Brenda: "Mama, please."

Ma Sibiya: "Why didn't you give your own father your kidney?! Or is he not your father?"

Hazel: "Mama, with all due respect, you came to MY house, ate MY food and relaxed on MY couches and drank MY wine only for me to come home to this bullshit? I never say anything, but tonight, you are going to listen to me. This right here, this is my mother. Her being in a wheel chair changes nothing. She can still beat the shit out of you by the way. Secondly, I can't disclose whatever happens in my life to you all the time, so me being unable to give my father a kidney has nothing to do with you, but if you must know, I can't give him one because it would make having children in the future a lot harder than it already will be. Thirdly, Beast offered to give him one despite my reservations. I know, you don't like what happened, but why the fuck do you have to dwell on the past so much? It's like you just hate change so much that you block it from every

angle. You are more than welcome to stay the night – do so at your own accord, but this right here, this is MY house. This house was given to me by my grandmother. So, if you are going to feel the need to be disrespectful, then I suggest you leave because I am not going to get out of Beast’s life any time soon. I respect you for being his mother, but you have got to stop being such a pain. I am going to take a long shower and then eat something before bed time. Please, leave me in peace.”

I left her standing right there, in shock. Yes, I might have gone a little overboard, but wow, that woman got to me. I was still shaking from telling her all that. It was so scary. I just don’t even know where I had found the courage, but it felt good. I got into the shower and my mom brought me food afterwards. I updated Mathilda about everything since the media was so full of lies. Overall, it was a good day. So much had happened, but it was a good day. There was so much to do, in such little time, but I had faith. I knew that Beast would get his life up and running in no time, and I was there all for it.

Psalm 40:16. "16 But may all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you; may those who love your salvation say continually, Great is the Lord!"

"To love is to recognize yourself in another." – Eckhart Tolle

One week later...

Hazel

It had been a rather eventful and stressful week. I finally managed to finish my exams and it was the last day of the first Semester. I could finally start preparing for my holidays, while Beast and my father were also getting discharged from the hospital. My mother was doing so well, and though she could never be able to walk again, I had never seen her that happy before. She was a completely new and different person. She did say that she wanted to be a better mother, which included being a better grandmother. So, Phil had her house completely revamped – just the way she had always wanted it to look decades ago. She was just happy to be around all three of her granddaughters. She did however give Bella an ultimatum; if she didn't fix her life within three months, she was going to kick her out and take the kids away from her. Of course, Bella hated the fact that I had found my father, but I really had no time to be petty. The more the days went by, the less fucks I gave,

actually. I myself was so surprised, but I just didn't care about people's opinion's any more.

Beast had said that it was because I had near-death experiences and they had given me a whole new perspective on life. Well, Ma Sibiya was still a bitch, although she had toned it down a little bit. Brenda had still not forgiven me yet, but that was okay. I wasn't going to make it my life mission to make her forgive me, though. They went back home the following morning and had been visiting Beast the entire week as well. Ghadaffi was arrested and I hadn't seen him that whole week. My father sped up the process and managed to get me legally divorced from him even though he had refused to sign the papers. Things were a little bad the first few days after his arrest, when he just kept blowing up my phone with endless calls and messages and even threats. I wasn't sleeping well, although I didn't tell Beast about it. I had weird dreams and thoughts of him, more especially after midnight, but I was still afraid to tell Beast. I just wanted a clean slate without Ghadaffi on my mind. I didn't want him to keep invading our lives, even without his presence. His parents of course, were less than pleased about the entire idea of divorce. They couldn't believe I had done that to their son, but life had to go on. They did nothing when he beat me to a pulp and damaged my fallopian

tubes as a result of that. I hadn't even taken note of anything, but my periods became irregular ever since that incident. Paul was still my driver, although he had to drive Phil around after the surgery. I remembered that morning very well, when I had to go pack their bags since they were being discharged. I was so happy that they were finally getting out of that place. I hated hospitals, they just reminded me of a dark time in my life. Just when I had entered the ward, I found Brenda right outside the hospital room. I knew she was waiting for her mother. The conversation was always awkward between us ever since Ghadaffi happened.

Brenda: "Hey."

Hazel: "Hi."

Brenda: "Have you come to pick him up?"

That was obvious, but awkward conversations were just weird.

Hazel: "Yes."

Brenda: "I see."

We had one of those awkward pauses before she continued.

Brenda: "I'd like to apologize."

Brenda wasn't a very bad person, although I didn't expect that from her.

Hazel: "No need, really. If anything, it is water under the bridge."

Brenda: "No, I'm serious. I really should apologize. Things were always great between you and I and I just lost it when I heard that you had moved on. It was never my intention to be so mean to you, but you know, he's my brother."

Of course he was, but she taught me that in-laws were simply in-laws and they would choose their blood over you in a heartbeat. Well, most of them.

Hazel: "It's alright. I understand. I most probably would have done the same thing. Just so you know, I love him and I never stopped."

Brenda: "I know."

I nodded and just continued forward. I went into the ward and Phil wasn't there. Beast was just getting his shirt on and he looked as if he was dragging his feet. His mother was just going on and on, much to his annoyance.

Ma Sibiya: "You should eat more often, I mean this hospital food just didn't do you justice. Look at how skinny you have become. Oh, and Brenda is outside waiting for you. I asked Phumzile to make you some pap and beef stew – your favourite."

That wasn't his favourite meal, it was hers. The moment he saw me, his face just lit up. I always loved seeing that side of him.

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Beast: (smiling) "Hey, you finally made it."

Hazel: "Yes. Sawubona (Hello), Ma."

Well, as expected, she just completely ignored me and decided to click her tongue as a form of a greeting.

Beast: (frowning) "Really, Ma? You expect me to smile when you're so rude to my wife?"

Ma Sibiya: "She's not your wife yet and besides, you weren't there when she spoke to me like – "

Beast: (interrupting) "I don't want to hear it. Please, give us some space."

Ma Sibiya: (annoyed) "I'll be right outside waiting for you."

Beast: "No need, I'm going to be a bit busy with Hazel today."

She was so irritated, she cursed and cussed as she stormed out of there, but I wasn't bothered and neither was he. He pulled me closer to him and kissed me.

Beast: "I missed you."

Hazel: (blushing) "You really should have a talk with your mother. All that stress isn't good for her."

Beast: (laughing) "Well, someone has finally decided to put on her big girl panties. I should donate a kidney more often."

Hazel: (chuckling) "What can I say? It comes with love."

He was all over me, of which he hadn't done in a while. He seemed so in tune with his feelings, which made me start thinking that he might have had something up his sleeve.

Hazel: "Why are you so touchy-feely today?"

Beast: "I'm always touchy-feely. I spent nearly a year in prison. I have to touch you as much as I can."

Hazel: "Beast, not here, man."

Beast: "I'm just touching you, babe. I am not doing anything sexual. Besides, I want everything done right this time; our first time together should be special; even more special than our very first time."

I was so touched, in fact, I had a feeling that he was up to something. Beast had always been romantic, it was as if he wanted to do better than movies. Whatever it was, I sure knew it was going to be a good surprise.

Hazel: "You just enjoy going all romantic on me, don't you?"

Beast: "It is my job, baby. If I don't do it, who will?"

We smiled at one another and just as he was about to kiss me again, my father was being wheeled into the ward on his wheelchair. He was still a bit weak from the gunshot and the transplant operation, so he needed to stay off his feet for a few days. Of course, he hated that part so much, but he had no choice.

Phil: "Hey, hey. I don't want to see you two smooching so much. You might just decide to make me a grandfather. I'm still too young for that."

Beast and I just couldn't help but laugh.

Beast: "Sir, I promise you, I will not plant my seed in your daughter any time soon. She has a career to follow and dreams to fulfil."

Phil: "I like the sound of that. Now, shall we leave?"

Beast: "You don't have to tell me twice."

Beast gave me their bags while he pushed my father out with so much excitement. Those two got on like a house on fire. The entire hospital staff even came to greet them goodbye personally. Beast had an immense capability to heal people; especially emotionally. He would just hold their hand and pray for them and they'd come back with results. I had no idea how he did that, but all I knew was that he had that ability. I didn't mind at all. Because of him, I managed to get back into praying and having faith again. I managed to stop dwelling on the past and what could have been. I no longer cared about what people thought of me and I didn't see the need to entertain every single person who was rude to me. It was a wonderful feeling to explore that new side of myself. We said our goodbyes to everyone at the hospital and Beast helped Phil into the car. He refused to let Paul do it. We just let him be; I guess it was his way of feeling closer to my father. Beast and I got into the back, and Paul drove off. Beast was smiling the entire time and he kept kissing my hand, while telling me how much he loved me. In fact, he repeated those words every two

minutes. My father kept glaring at us from the rearview mirror so much that I ended up feeling so embarrassed.

Hazel: (blushing) "Beast, stop it. My father is staring."

Beast: "Ah, let him see just how loved you are."

Hazel: "Hai (no), man."

Beast: "I've been meaning to ask; since well it is officially June holidays, what are you planning to do?"

Hazel: "I haven't thought so far yet, but I just want to rest and relax. It's been a bumpy Semester."

Beast: (chuckling) "Okay, but you won't mind if I take you on a little adventure today, would you?"

I knew it.

Hazel: (frowning) "What kind of adventure?"

Beast: "You'll see."

He looked at my father and he winked at Beast. Those two were up to something. I could feel it.

Hazel: "What are you two planning?"

Phil: "Leave me out of it. I am a single man on his way to recovery."

Beast and I just laughed and Paul carried on driving. He drove into the yard and I could tell Beast was getting so excited. Paul parked the car and he went out to help my father out of the car. As I was about to open the door, Beast stopped me by holding both my hands gently.

Hazel: "What is it?"

Beast: "Before we go in, may I please do something to you?"

Hazel: "What kind of something?"

He reached for his pocket and took out a blind fold, a red one in fact.

Hazel: "I knew you had something up your sleeve."

Beast: "I promise, I won't kill you."

I nodded with a smile while he gently placed the blindfold over my eyes and he gave me a little kiss. He aided me as I walked hand in hand with him. It was a little weird, but I went with the flow. I could hear a little change in the ambience; after we took one more step, I heard the start of our favourite song; Ubuhle Bakho by Ami Faku. What amazed me was that it didn't sound like it was being played from a speaker or anything like that, the sound was more authentic and a little unique; I could hear a violin and something that sounded like a Saxophone. It

sounded so beautiful. My heart was beating a little faster, out of excitement. Beast was something else; he had just come out of the hospital yet he had planned all that – for me. I bet my father helped him plan it all. Finally, we stopped. I was getting too anxious. He slowly removed my blindfold and I was astonished at what I saw.

The entire garden was filled with red, yellow and white rose petals. There was an orchestra, playing our favourite song. It was so beautiful more especially because no one was singing. My mother, father, Mathilda and Paul were all sitting on one side watching the entire thing with a table already set and full of delicious-looking food behind them. What actually surprised me was seeing all my other relatives from my mother's side sitting on the other side, across my mother and them. Beast's family was also present; also with their own side all set. I saw his sisters and his sour-looking mother in the crowd, and a few other elders I hadn't met before. I looked around and saw pictures of us together; some that were taken before we were even an item and some when we were engaged. They were so big and all changed into portraits, hanging all around. I had no idea when they even managed to put up that marquee because I was there that morning. I was a little mad at him; we were both not properly dressed for the

occasion. He gave me a broad smile, reached for his pocket yet again and took out a ring box. How on earth did I not see it in there? He got down on one knee – despite having had surgery a week ago.

Beast: (clearing throat) “Mkami (My wife), you are the most beautiful woman I have ever met. Your smile calms me down; your presence brings music to my soul and just having you next to me makes my heart jump for joy – always. I knew God existed the day you became mine. I never knew the meaning of love, until you came along. Hazel, you complete me. I don’t want to spend another day without you. I love you so much, that I feel like should I die one day, we should die together.”

The crowd laughed, while I was soaked in tears.

Beast: “You make this life thing seem so effortless and each day feels like an adventure with you. I hope to grow old with you and make amazing memories. I cannot wait to show you off to the world, and to pitch up at family events with my Psychologist wife. I can’t wait to tell people off for disrespecting my WIFE.”

They all laughed once again.

Beast: “I can’t wait for us to have our own children; with a girl who looks just like you and with a boy, who also looks just like you. I mean, can you imagine fathering a boy who looks as big as me?”

At that point, he was sounding hilarious.

Beast: “You are my world, Hazel, and I am literally nothing without you. I am fortunate that you chose me and I know that if given another scenario, you’d still choose me even tomorrow. I love you so much. Will you please be my wife?”

Hazel: (teary) “Yes, of course I will be your wife!”

At that point, he opened the box and I saw the most beautiful rose gold diamond ring I had ever seen in my life. I had no idea why he felt the need to buy another ring, when I still had the old one.

Beast: “I know, you’re thinking we’re wasting money. This ring is a symbol of our renewed love. Thank you so much, I love you.”

He gave me a passionate kiss while everyone was cheering for us. I knew that his mother wasn’t even clapping hands and his other two sisters, but I wasn’t bothered. That was our moment. No one needed to ruin it – because we just wouldn’t have allowed it. The orchestra continued playing more of our favourite songs, while everyone came to hug and congratulate us. Of course by everyone, his mom and two other sisters were excluded. Brenda was very happy for us. I finally got to meet Malume (Uncle) Sfiso and Beast’s favourite aunt, personally. It was a wonderful affair; with everyone enjoying themselves. The booze was flowing galore and of course Aunt Hunadi was praising Beast all the way. I couldn’t imagine doing life without him, really. It was the best gift he had given me and I wanting nothing more, as long as he was by my side.

Ten years later...

Life had its own ups and downs, to be honest, but nonetheless, Beast always ensured that I enjoyed my day no matter

what. We did get married soon after the engagement – on his birthday. He wanted to do it sooner, but I wanted his birthday to also have a bigger meaning for us. Soon after we got married, we got news that his father hung himself in prison. The secrets that came out were really dark, and his mother never got the chance to divorce him. She thought that she would get over him, but as per custom

she was ordered to mourn him. If it were me, I would have told them where to get off, but she did mourn him. She never really changed towards me, she just learnt to tolerate me and that was honestly okay with me. I on the other hand, took every bad thing with a pinch of salt. Gone was the old, fearful Hazel who was always crying whenever something bad would happen to her. Yes, I did graduate, with Cum Laude. Beast and I travelled the world for a year after I graduated, while Mathilda got married to our former lecturer. She had already had two children by then, while Beast and I stopped trying. We knew that God would bless us eventually.

Ghadaffi was imprisoned very quickly, with the aid of my father. He started going mad soon after he was arrested, and apparently he mauled one of his cell mates with his own teeth. He was isolated from the rest of the inmates, and after he wrote a lengthy letter as to why he couldn't live without me,

he also killed himself. His parents were not happy about that and blamed me, but I refused to let them do that to me. I accepted the news with God's grace and life went on. It was bad enough that we found out all three of Bella's children were fathered by Dragon. So, when Ghadaffi died, he came out with the news and wanted to suddenly be a part of their lives. We refused, we didn't want any evil to be associated with those children. My father ensured they went to good schools and my mother had the best wheel chair money could ever buy. She ended up moving to the Suburbs, as she was tired of the township life. She even got a new hobby; she started baking and opened her own store. She stopped drinking and became sober and found God. Bella picked herself up even though she wasn't 100% there, but we were all happy with her progress. My father chose to do what he did for Beast, for others as well. He started helping inmates who were wrongfully convicted – pro bono, including his very first client right after Beast's release – Job. He got acquitted and his ex wife wanted him back, but God gave him a second chance with his new wife. At the age of 54, he got remarried and had three sets of twins. Just like Job in the Bible; God took from him and chose to bless him tenfold. It was honestly the most inspiring story I had ever witnessed.

My father was still very much a father to me and he and Beast became so close, it was as if they were indeed father and son. He chose to do God's work by helping the wrongfully accused, while he also met the love of his life, yes, a black woman. He married her after 6 months of dating and she had been helping him with his work. His ex wife and ex children, if I could call them that, had tried on numerous occasions to ruin our relationship, until they ended up begging for mercy because they were too broke to function. He reassured them that the day they had come to him with clear hearts, he would welcome them back into his life. His father, my grandfather, fell ill and needed a kidney. So, I happened to be the only match for him, but sadly, I couldn't give him one and not even all the money in the world could buy him a kidney. After I explained the whole story as to why I couldn't give him a kidney, he swore at me and called me a "kaffir". It was his way of thanking me for even talking to him. Soon afterwards, he didn't make it that long and he passed away. He lived a rather sad life.

Beast sued the state, and walked away with R5 million, which he chose to donate to my father's practice, so that he could help other inmates, and to some of the inmates' families. He was a good man, my Beast. My father had given me all my

inheritance right after graduation, which included the house I was already living in back then, a trust fund worth over R20 million and a personalized yacht. I had no idea he was that rich, but then I had no idea what to do with that kind of money. So, while we were traveling the world, we found ourselves in Vegas – yet again. We went to visit little Malachi and we were gambling for fun. While at it, Beast played the lotto and ended up being a millionaire over night. He won himself R25 million. We were a millionaire couple, and even that couldn't fill the hole in our hearts. So, Beast had his own non-profit organization, where he organized counselling and employment for ex convicts, a better way of life. Job was the lead preacher there whenever they had church service.

I always had such a good feeling whenever I saw him doing God's work. We chose to trust God since we just couldn't conceive, for He knew what was best. Since well Beast had opened a private practice for me, I could regulate my own hours. It was December holidays, a day before Christmas, and he suggested that we take a break and go to Cape Town as a family. Everyone was excited about it, really. Mathilda and her husband already lived there, so it was the perfect opportunity to go visit her. The day we arrived, we all decided to go to the beach. There's just something about black people and the

beach; we just love water even though most of us can't swim, right?

Beast and I took a walk, and when we passed a couple strolling with their little baby, I couldn't help but feel a little sad.

Beast: "Hey, we will have our own, okay? You have to keep holding onto that faith."

Hazel: "I can't help but feel as if it is all my fault, Beast. You still chose me despite knowing that we might have a childless marriage."

Beast: "Having you is more than enough. Don't beat yourself up about anything. It wasn't your fault."

It was a bumpy conversation and as much as he always reassured me, I knew that he was hurt by not having our own children. We would always get Jenny and the twins to come visit us during school holidays and I would see his face light up whenever he played with them. He was a father to those girls,

and it broke my heart knowing that I couldn't give him any. That entire day, my mood was just off. I didn't enjoy anything, and for some odd reason, I couldn't even stomach any food. I was not hungry and I assumed that I must have eaten something or the sea water was making me sick. We went to a nearby beach restaurant and had our own feast. I even ordered a salad and a sex on the beach cocktail, but oddly, nothing worked.

Beast: "Are you okay? You barely touched your food."

Hazel: "I'm fine, I just feel a little sick. Maybe I ate something weird. I don't feel too good."

Beast: "Do you want us to go lie down?"

Hazel: "Thanks, but I'll go. You should rather enjoy the night with the boys."

Beast: "Are you sure?"

Hazel: "Yes."

Mathilda was there and she offered to take me back to the hotel, along with my mother.

Mathilda: "I'll take her back, Beast. You can check up on her later."

Beast: "Okay. I love you."

Hazel: "I love you too."

The entire car ride back to the hotel, Mathilda kept looking at me with a weird smile on her face, while I just felt sicker with every robot stop.

Hazel: "How far are we now from the hotel? I really don't feel too good."

Mathilda: "Should I stop so you can throw up?"

Hazel: “How do you even know that I want to throw up?”

Mathilda: “Because, I know that look. I’ve had it before whenever I vomited.”

I wasn’t even paying attention to her. We finally made it to the hotel and I was irritated by the fact that our room was all the way on the top floor. It felt like it took forever to get there. Once I was in, it was as if my entire body was waiting for me to get into the room. I rushed to the bathroom and let it all out. I vomited and I was surprised by what came out because I hardly ate anything that day. Once I was done, my mother and Mathilda looked at me and smiled broadly.

Hazel: “Ag, would you two please stop looking at me like that? Why are you even smiling?”

Mathilda: “Ma, do you want to tell her or should I?”

Hazel: “Tell me what?”

Binah: (smiling) "You're pregnant."

Hazel: (irritated) "Ag, you two of all people should know not to make such jokes."

Mathilda: "Yoh (Oh), the mood swings have already started."

Binah: "I bet you're carrying more than one."

Hazel: "Ma, it's not funny."

Binah: "Who said I'm joking? Malachi told me. In a dream. A week ago."

Hazel: "What did he say?"

Binah: "He said; "when you finally see the moment, tell Hazel that her dream is about to come true. When God blesses, He blesses tenfold."

Hazel: "That's it?"

Binah: "Yes."

Hazel: "Mama, that could mean anything. I don't want to get excited for nothing."

Binah: "Okay, but don't say I never told you."

Hazel: "Can you guys please just leave me alone for a bit? I want to lie down."

Mathilda: "Of course, Mommy. We'll check up on you a little later."

I was so irritated. It felt as if those two were really making a joke about my situation. I was feeling worse than I was before I vomited, and before I knew it – I dozed off. I had the most beautiful dream. I was surrounded by a big lion, with all my deceased loved ones circled around me. Beast was standing right next to me, and I saw myself rubbing my protruded stomach. None of them said anything, but instead, they were smiling at me. The lion was roaring non-stop while rain was pouring yet we all weren't getting wet. Oh, it was just so beautiful and I was woken up by the smiling Beast.

Hazel: "What is it with everyone smiling at me? Fuck."

Beast: (chuckling) "Wow, you really are moody."

Hazel: "What do you want?"

Beast: "I came to check on you, Mama Bear."

Hazel: "Beast, fokof (fuck off)! Why would you even joke like that?"

I felt warm tears flow down my face.

Beast: “Hey, I’m sorry, but I wasn’t joking. I know you’re pregnant. Malachi told me.”

Hazel: “Not you too. I’ll tell you what I told my mother. I don’t want false hope.”

Beast: “Then let’s find out.”

He took out a plastic bag with two pregnancy tests.

Hazel: “I’m not doing this again only to be disappointed.”

Beast: “You have nothing to lose, do you? I don’t recall marrying a coward.”

I was just irritated, but I grabbed the tests from him and I went to take them in the bathroom. I hated taking pregnancy tests, which is why I had stopped a year after we got married. They just reminded me of that painful night I found out I was pregnant and lost my very first child. I didn't even look at the tests. After I was done, I threw them at him and I looked out the window. I didn't even want to see them. I was starting to shiver, knowing very well that I'd receive bad news. I hated false hope. After about two minutes, I felt Beast embrace me so warmly from behind.

Beast: (teary) "Mkami (my wife), it has happened. It has finally happened."

I was too scared to even look at him. I was actually in disbelief. I was shaking like crazy, with my tears overflowing and my stomach feeling so stiff.

Hazel: (crying) "What do you mean?"

He gave me the tests from behind. I looked down and I saw "9 weeks pregnant" on both of them. I cried in silence with my husband wrapping his warm hands around me.

Beast: (whispering) "I told you it would happen, my wife. Our faith has finally paid off, our love has endured it all and our patience has proved to be fruitful. Ecclesiastes 3:1 says; "There

is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every event under heaven.”

Hazel: (crying) “Isaiah 60:22 says; “When the time is right, I, the Lord, will make it happen.”

And just like that, an eventful journey began for us. We were blessed with triplets; two girls named Faith and Love and a feisty boy named Patience.

There comes a time in life when one gets exposed to all the evil in this world, but that shouldn't overshadow and make you overlook all the good that happens. God and our ancestors work over time for us. For as long as you're breathing, it means that you haven't reached your destiny yet. For as long as you're breathing, it means it is not the end for you. Life is too short to be filled with regrets; as we all live and learn, we realize that friends come and go and those who stay must compliment us and be just as good to us as we are to them.

Life happens and situations differ, we judge but we never know what might happen in our own lives. People wear masks on their faces every day, most of them hiding the pain they have to endure. Some are so tired of living because nothing feels like it is falling into place, but they keep going for the sake of their children. I have learnt that no matter what happens, giving up can't be a solution. Although some do give up, but that is where mental health comes in. We all need to change our past

and reverse all the toxic garbage that we were left with by our parents. You should always remember that you are not your parents and you don't have to take the same route. Generational curses are real but that doesn't have to be the end of you.

We are fighting with demons we can't see and some come in the form of our loved ones. Love yourself enough to keep your spirituality afloat. The devil enjoys seeing us give up, but God and our ancestors will never give up on us. Trust God. Put your faith in him.

Proverbs 3:5 – “Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding.”

So many of us have lost loved ones, jobs and friendships this year, but that does not mean that it is the end. We don't know why certain things happen, but Trust God with all your heart and He will give you all the desires of your heart.

Jeremiah 29:11 – “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

God loves us all and He has plans for all of us. Your plans might feel like they're not falling into place because they are not His plans for you.

1 John 1:5 – “This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.”

Learn to forgive as much as you can so that He can also forgive you. Learn to ask for forgiveness no matter how much it hurts. Most importantly, learn to forgive yourself. You are not your sins, for He knows your heart. I wish you a life full of abundance, grace and mercy of God.

.....**The End**.....

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