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Chapter 1

“Siza vuka.”

She flicks her eyes open, and fixates them on the man standing by the bedside. His head is dropped, eyes on the two-piece work suit he's throwing on his body.

“What happened? Why am I in your bed, naked?” Her voice spasms with panic, she holds the duvet close to her chest. Her heart accelerating at the speed of light.

“We were drunk, I don't know how it happened.” His head is still dropped and voice filled with worry and regret.

It was his birthday yesterday, he didn't want a party however, the youth from church thought it would be nice to surprise him; here at his own house.

No alcohol was allowed, those were the rules. But someone thought breaking the rules wouldn't be so bad and added dashes of alcohol in the punch.

By the time they realised the punch was spiked, they were too drunk to stop the party and go their separate ways.

"But how? There was no alcohol at the party, you said strictly no alcohol." Does alcohol cause amnesia?

She will have a nervous breakdown if she lets her feelings get the best of her.

"Someone spiked the drinks, I don't know how I didn't pick it up on time." What is this man saying to her exactly?

"I don't care about that, tell me how I ended up here. Did we have sex?"

Silence!

"I am talking to you Siyakhula, did we have sex?" She means to shout but her voice trembles instead.

Siyakhula sits on the far end of the bed, he hasn't looked at her since she opened her eyes.

"Yes, we had sex." He confesses.

This changes everything, she is only twenty-one years old; her life barely begun yet her world has come crumbling down.

Sizalobuhle Precious Gumede, a pastor's daughter is known for her loud personality. Her heart shaped face and bulbous eyes have the boys at church lining up after service just to wish her a happy Sunday, hoping she might catch a liking for them; maybe pick one and introduce him to her father.

The rest of her body opposes with her small voice and face, she's plump with wide hips, and round buns. She is the life of the party and can be heard talking above anyone.

Her personality is a crumb of toast in a plate of pudding, men don't notice the crumb; trivial things like her loudness and sharp backchats. They are interested in the pudding; her being the pastor's daughter and her body.

She's spent most of her life in dresses and if she's ever worn any pants then it's kept away with the secret of her non-existent virginity.

You'll never lose her in a crowd because you'll find her head floating above the rest. You don't have to bend down to kiss her, your posture will be strain free.

"I didn't know you were not a virgin," he wouldn't have the guts to say this if their church didn't forbid sex before marriage.

Plus, it's a bizarre thing for him to say considering they are not a couple, nor are they in a position where they openly talk about sex.

Youth pastor or not, he needs to stay in his lane.

Siza frowns at him, "You were sober enough to test my virginity? Why didn't you stop this whole abomination?"

His eyebrows snap, "Abomination? I am not an animal Gundi, I am..."

"Do not call me that, you lost the right when you took advantage of me."

That is the last thing he would ever do and she knows it, she knows him. If it were not for her father and their close-knit friendship, he'd be another guy at church she wouldn't take a second look at.

She's not sure if he'd even be a devout Christian.

His good looks are undeniably strong though, that's one thing she would put a stamp on.

A youth pastor and choir master, he'd be one hell of a charmer if his sense of fashion coordinated with his position at church.

The only time he's not in blue or green overalls is Sunday mornings. A man that despises suits and ties, has no choice but

to compromise, although God wouldn't judge him for bracing the church walls in overalls and heavy work boots.

Siza has had enough, "Turn around."

That's an order that puts a frown on his face, he won't be seeing anything new. He saw it all last night, from her plump breasts to her unshaved vagina.

His eyes are stabbing into her, almost as if undressing her already naked body.

Overthrown by his stare, Siza throws a sharp gaze at him.

"Don't you think you've done enough perverting for the day? Turn around Siyakhula." It's the first time she is speaking to him with so much rudeness, and second time calling him by his name.

To her, he has always been Malume Khula, he is her father's best friend. The one he trusts the most, if that man hears about their night of mistaken passion, he will raise hell in the house of God.

"I'm sorry." He never stutters when words find him. He quickly turns away with a sigh breaking through his lips.

Siza gets out of bed, an oppressive sense of dread clinging to her shoulders. Nothing will get her out of this situation, no stars in the sky can grant the wish she is silently repeating. *Let this be nothing but a bad dream*

Siza finds her panties first, then her dress. It wasn't this short last night when her friend convinced her to dress up for the party. Today, she feels too exposed.

As she ties her braids, she takes a moment to drink in a long breath, she will need all the strength she can get to face what's coming after this.

With arms crossed and eyes narrowed, she mumbles.

"I am done."

Siyakhula turns to face her, now he looks more confident than when she was naked.

"The pharmacy is open, I have to be at work by 10am. I doubt there is traffic, we'll be there before 9."

He's unlocking his phone to check the time, not mindful of Siza's knitted brows.

"Why are we going to the pharmacy?"

Breathing in and out, his bushy eyebrows come together.

“We didn’t use a condom.” He doesn’t explain much, perhaps it’s the horrified look on Siza’s face.

“Let’s go,” he says and leads the way out of his bedroom.

Siyakhula Mbatha is a daunting young fella with more energy than money, his menacing features, and inadequate vocabulary has earned him quite a small circle of friends in his walk of life.

Speak less and listen more, these are the rules he lives by, and surprisingly have carried him thus far.

He attracts attention when he walks into the room, never mind his dark features. He's as black as the night, carved under the African sun. You can't see him in the dark, but you can definitely feel his aura.

His hands are rough and black from years of being a carpenter, his shoulders broad and strong as if he's the black man that helped Jesus carry the cross.

He met Sizalobuhle’s father in his early twenties, a good man of God who saw potential in him, and saw him worthy to have a position in his church. Life has been going well for him.

Who knew that at 31 years-old he would ruin it by tasting the forbidden fruit?

Traffic in Boksburg is light

they make it to EastRand Mall at exactly 9:12am. The long walk to Clicks is dreadful, they look like a couple that had a fight before they left the car, with Siyakhula leading the way, and Siza dragging her feet behind. Lips pursed and arms crossed.

He stops just outside the entrance, "I'll wait here."

Now he's talking crap.

"I'm not going in there, why do you make it seem like I initiated the sex?"

Siyakhula clears his throat, "I didn't say that."

"You might as well have said it, do you know how embarrassing it is to buy a morning after pill?"

"You've bought one before?" He asks, not hiding the shock in his eyes.

"I don't have to answer to you, until last night, you were my uncle and now..."

"Your father is my best friend, that's all. Stop making it sound disgusting."

"I am not making it sound anything, it is disgusting Siyakhula. I was thirteen when I first met you, I have called you uncle Khula

since. What happened last night shouldn't have happened, you should have stopped everything."

"Now who's making the other feel like they initiated the first touch? We were drunk Gundi..."

Siza lifts her hand to stop him from talking, only her loved ones call her Gundi. A pet name given to her by her father.

"I told you not to call me that anymore, you took away that right when you saw me as more than your best friend's daughter."

Their pent-up anger is showing in public and turning heads.

"Are you insane? I have never looked at you in that way."

Siyakhula defends his honour, he doesn't know how last night happened. How this twenty-one year-old girl became a woman in his eyes.

"Then, how did we end up having sex? No offense, but you are not my type, I wouldn't even give a guy like you a second look."

"A guy like me?"

She nods, "Yes, look at it this way. I am a princess living in a castle and you are the gardener. We are worlds apart Siyakhula, it's forbidden for our worlds to meet. You dared touch me without my permission."

There is no arrogance in her tone, nothing to prove that she thinks she is better than him. Siyakhula's eyes scan their surroundings, and find no one within earshot.

"I didn't rape you Sizalobuhle, you know me. I am not that kind of a man."

"I didn't say you did, I'm only saying I would never sleep with you. Even if you paid me a million."

She is angering him with her words, he doesn't know why.

"Dammit, what happened last night was a huge mistake. We were both drunk, I don't know how we ended up in bed together." Siyakhula continues to explain himself, all he has are words; words Siza is not buying.

"But you remember that your penis pierced through a used vagina?" Attitude has grown in her tone and covered her body.

Exhausted, Siyakhula leans against the glass wall and crosses his arms.

"Why are you talking like this? You are not the Gundi I know, your words right now do not match the person you are." He says.

“I am not the Gundi you know, I am Sizalobuhle, your best friend’s daughter. The one you fucked while she was unconscious.”

They are not going anywhere with this, he grips her hand, she pulls it back. Things can’t be more awkward than they already are.

“How many times must I tell you, I did not force myself on you? We can go to the clinic right now, right now Siza and have you checked for forced entry. I swear on the God I serve that you were conscious, it was consensual.”

Yeah! Siza is not buying it. She creates a good distance between them.

“You go in, I’ll wait in the car.” She throws a R100 note at him, and strolls away before another argument stems.

Siyakhula watches her, there is a temptation to leave everything and head to work. However, a baby is the last thing he wants to deal with right now. So morning after pill it is. He clicks his tongue as he takes the money from the floor.

He finds her sleeping in the car and throws the Clicks package at her, plus her R100, Siza is startled until she sees who it is.

“Is this it?” She asks, looking at the package on her lap. She stashes the crumpled note in her bag.

Siyakhula nods, he’s not in the mood for another argument because it seems everything they say to each other leads to one anyway. He pulls out of the parking lot, jaw ticked and eyes glaring.

“You don’t have the right to be upset, I’m not the one who...”

He cuts her, “I swear if you say I forced myself on you again, I will run this car through a tree.”

Well that shuts her up.

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She gets home around 10am, makes it past the living room, and up her room without bumping into anyone.

It's a Saturday today, the house is always full on the first day of the weekend.

Siza throws her handbag on the bed and lays on her back, eyes closed. Finally she can hide from the world but not from the truth. Her night with Siyakhula slowly starts coming to her. The

slapping, slurping sounds, her loud squeals echoing off the walls. His hands gripped on her waist.

“Harder Khula, harder.” That’s her voice ringing in her ears.

“Harder!!!?” Her eyes jolt open as she screams out the word in shock.

No way was she screaming Siyakhula’s name while he was pounding her, she would remember if she wanted it.

Someone is at the door, “Phakathwayo?”

She quickly sit ups, wide-eyed.

When did he get here? She remembers closing the door.

“Lust is a sin MaQwabe,” he’s too serious. Looking at her as if he knows what she did last night.

She stutters, “Baba?”

“You were breathing hard, are you okay?”

She bites her lower lip, now this is messed up. Her father is going to kill her.

“When last did you read your bible? Are you sexually active Gundi?”

She glances away, it’s not easy lying to him when he’s looking into her eyes.

“No baba, the Lord is my Shepherd.” She says without stuttering this time.

An awkward silence slowly passes between them, her father breaks it by clearing his throat.

“Your aunt needs help in the kitchen, Siyakhula is coming for dinner. Take a cold shower first, it will cool you down.” And with that he walks out.

The Lord will have to Shepherd her to this dinner.

2

SIZA

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When I drag myself out of the shower, I still feel dirty. This is so irresponsible of me, I have been faithful to one man since I was eighteen. It doesn't make sense that I allowed another man to touch me like that. What was I thinking?

I glance up at the clock on the wall. Three o'clock. The nap I took after my father left had me out longer than usual.

My father's last born walks into my room just as I remove the bath towel from my body. Honestly, I don't feel like company.

"What do you want Simengaye?"

She takes one look at me and points at my bag on the bed.

"I have a headache, so I took a pill." She took a pill? What does my bag have to do with it?

"Wait, did you find the pill in my bag?"

She nods, biting her plump lips. I don't remember having headache painkillers in my bag, the only pill I had was the

morning after pill. I grab the bag and empty everything on the bed, no this is not happening to me.

“Simi, what have you done?”

“It’s just a pill sisi, relax.”

“Just a pill? What grade are you in? Can’t you read?”

Really? Tears? I don’t have time for this.

“I’m sorry, my head hurts. Mom said I must ask you for painkillers, you were in the shower so I thought you wouldn’t have a problem with me going through your bag. I only took the pill sisi, I didn’t take your money.”

What am I going to do with this child? She’s only twelve but makes such stupid mistakes.

I pat her shoulder.

“It’s okay, it was just a pill. Don’t worry about it.” I have to get her to stop crying before her father comes for me, he’s too overprotective of his children.

“Stop crying now, you know baba hates it when you cry. I’ll buy you chocolates if you stop.” Sometimes you have to bargain with them.

She wipes her tears, eagerly.

“I’m not crying anymore sisi, can we go get the ice cream?”

What have I gotten myself into?

“Later baby, let me get dressed and clean up my room first.”
I’m lying, this is a ploy to get rid of her and it works. She happily bounces out of the room, now that that’s sorted. I need to call Siyakhula and let him know about the pill.

He is taking long to answer, I almost miss his call when his voice nudges my ear.

“Yes?”

Oho!

“I need you to get me another pill.”

“The first one didn’t work?”

Lord have mercy.

“My sister drank it thinking it’s a pain killer, get me another one.”

“Why don’t you go yourself? You’re a princess, aren’t you? Take one of your father’s cars.”

This is so humiliating, yesterday he was my uncle and today we are sperm terminators; his sperms.

I suddenly feel angry knowing he made a mess and doesn’t care.

“You’ve bitten the hand that feeds you Siyakhula, the least you could do is try and fix the mess you made.”

“The mess I made? Who told you you’re better than me, Sizalobuhle?”

“Don’t turn this into something it’s not, I’m only asking you to get me the damn pill. Stop being a jerk about it.”

“I’m at work, some of us don’t have fathers who give us free money.” He replies with an icy tone.

I shouldn’t be taking nonsense from him.

“Where does my father enter in all this Siyakhula? He wasn’t there when we had sex, don’t involve him in this.”

“You know what, I don’t know why I bother with you. I don’t even know why I’m still talking to you, you are a child. You don’t know the simple basics of communication. Clicks is not in Iraq, stop being a fake Barbie and go buy the pill.”

This idiot, he’s cut the call on me. I would drive myself to the mall but my father does not let me drive since I got into a car accident a year ago.

He’s strict like that, part of me thinks it’s because of the mistakes he made as a child. I’m a result of teenage pregnancy, Kuzimpi Gumede was 16 years old when I was born.

Unfortunately my mother died after giving birth to me. She was

fifteen. She never got to see my face, or hear me cry. I feel robbed whenever I think about it, it's not fair that she was taken away from me.

My father's parents were furious when they found out about the pregnancy, the only thing that saved him was that my grandparents were both pastors. They, forgive but never forget type.

That doesn't change the fact that sex before marriage is forbidden in our church. My old man thinks we're going to repeat his mistakes, have kids out of wedlock. He toughened the rules when he took over as pastor from his father.

I was raised by them up until he finished school and got a job, he's always been a present father. And loves me unconditionally.

When I was five, he met Nomazulu Shabangu and married her. They later had two girls, Ndlelezhle (15) and Simengaye (12). Nomazulu has never made me feel like I don't have a mother, she treats me like her very own although I call her aunty. I like her a lot.

Siyakhula is acting like an arse, I am not going to run after him. I have plan B. Time is working against me, I need to call

Phangizitha. He is the only one who can take me to the mall without asking me a million questions.

The phone is ringing, my heart stops for a while.

“Sthandwa Sami,” he greets.

Breathe Siza, you can do this without sounding guilty.

“Baby, are you busy? I need you to drive me to the mall.”

“What’s at the mall?”

You’d hate me if I told you.

“Sanitary pads, it’s an emergency.” I’m lying to the man I love, I hope he never comes to know what I did.

“Give me a few minutes,”

Now that that’s sorted, I have to find a way to dodge my father.

I find a light dress and throw it on, hopefully Nomazulu will be done cooking when I get back.

A message comes through my phone, he’s here.

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Phangizitha greets me with a kiss when I enter the car. I’m lost in worry and hear nothing he’s saying to me during the ride. All

I offer are chuckles and nods. Luckily he doesn't catch that I'm closed off.

I ask him to stay in the car, I won't be long.

The cashier at clicks says they are out of pills, how many people are having unprotected sex in this town? I hurry to Dischem.

The queues do not work in my favour and they don't have the pills. What's happening?

My enemies have come together to destroy my life. Frustrated and losing my grits, I step out of the shop and call Siyakhula. I'm surprised that he answers immediately for someone who hung up on me.

"My feet hurt and I'm frustrated."

I hear him sigh, "Let me guess. You are wearing heels at a mall?"

"That's not relevant Siyakhula, they have run out emergency contraceptive pills. You have to look somewhere else."

"I don't have to do anything, I told you I'm working. My boss will fire me if he finds me using my phone."

I hate him.

"Your attitude stinks, if I don't find those stupid pills I hope to God I don't fall pregnant because you will make a terrible father."

“Okay bye.” He says.

He’s dropped the call on me again. God! How did I end up in bed with that man?

I need to call Hlelo, we went to the party together. She must know what went down last night, I mean as my friend, it’s her job to know.

I’m getting a call from Phangizitha, I have made him wait for too long.

Empty handed, I enter the car. Just as I expected

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he is mad.

“A whole hour Siza? What were you doing in there?” He must be thinking his own things. I have never given him a reason to doubt me and my love for him.

“EastRand Mall is huge baby, there are also long queues, and I’m wearing hills. Besides, they didn’t have what I wanted. I had to go to Dischem.”

“You should’ve let me come with you, instead of making me wait here like a child.”

And risk him finding out I cheated? I don’t think so.

He's driving in silence, I'll let him cool down before saying anything to him.

"Are we still going to Bergville next week?" There we go, he's back to talking. I wish he had tackled a different topic though.

"I can't, I haven't told my father about it. You know how he hates short notice."

"Sthandwa sami you promised, my mother is waiting for you." He says.

I hate having to disappoint him, but I'm not ready to meet his family. From what I have heard and seen in pictures, they are a pretty huge family. He hasn't specified what his parents do, they have money though. More money than we do.

I was eighteen when we met, five months into the relationship I gave him my virginity. I didn't see the point of waiting when I loved him.

I hate that my father has instilled such rules at our church.

Why must we suffer because he made a girl pregnant out of wedlock? All I see is a man trying to atone for his sins through us.

"I know baby, can't she wait a little longer?"

No one but his family knows about our relationship, he's a secret I'm hoping to keep until I soften my father's heart.

“How long is a little longer? This is the second time you’re standing her up, don’t you take us seriously? I thought you loved me.”

“Its not that Phangi, I love you. You’re the only man for me, please don’t get me wrong.”

We’re home, I can’t stay. My father must be looking for me.

“Can we finish this talk later? I’ll call you.” I say, placing a kiss on his cheek. He’s not looking at me but at my house.

“What’s going on? Is that Siyakhula’s car?” He asks, frowning at the old white, two-door van.

“My father invited him for dinner.”

He knows they are friends.

“Alright, I love you.” He kisses my lips.

“I love you more.”

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Nomazulu welcomes me in the corridor.

“We’re having supper early today, your father has a meeting to get to. Where have you been? Just a heads up, I told him I sent you to buy something at the shops. Next time fill me in so I know what lie to tell him.”

She is my life saver, I thank her with a hug in time to see Siyakhula comfortably strolling around the house.

“Doesn’t he have anything else to wear besides those hideous overalls?”

Nomazulu nudges me, “We don’t judge people baby. Don’t let your father hear you say that.”

There she goes leaving me to greet Siyakhula. I am not a judgemental person, he’s never annoyed me before. But after what happened between us, I can’t stand the sight of him. In fact, I have lost my appetite.

“MaQwabe,” is this his way of greeting? I’m so bored, since when does he call me by my clan name?

My eyes run through his body, “You cleaned up well?” I lie.

What the hell? Couldn’t he go home and change out of his work uniform? He’s greasy and sweaty, it’s not neat.

“Thank you,” he says clearly being sarcastic.

He holds out a Clicks plastic bag, eyes on me.

“And this?”

“Morning after pill.” He whispers.

Oh, I almost forgot about that.

“Please make sure you take it.”

There is something odd in his tone, an insinuation I’m not getting.

“Uncle Khula.” That’s the loud Simengaye running to Siyakhula.

He crouches and catches her in his arms.

They engage in a conversation I care not about, I have to take this pill tonight.

“Gundi, come into the kitchen. I need help.” Nomazulu shouts.

I’m such a lost cause, no amount of prayer is going to help me. My hope lies in this pill, if only this family would freeze for a second and let me take it. I sigh, biting my lip and hide the package behind the TV determined not to forget about it.

I have 5 days to destroy his sperm before it turns into something I don't want. I'll take it after supper.

Nomazulu wants help with dishing up, I have always said we should get a maid. She dismissed the idea, she thinks another woman will take her husband from her. So much for faith as small as a mustard seed.

In less than ten minutes, we are gathered around the table. I want to eat in my room, but this father of mine won’t allow it.

“Gundi, pass your uncle the salt.” My father says, making me cringe at the reality that Siyakhula is my “uncle.”

We haven’t started eating, how does he know the food lacks salt?

“Phakathwayo, it’s sad to see that you have so little faith in my cooking.” Nomazulu complains, a smile spread across her face.

“That’s not it mama, Siyakhula is a salt man.” The smirk on my father’s face, what is he implying?

This is what I get for having a 37-year-old as a father.

I catch Siyakhula’s face to find him staring at me, I challenge him in this staring contest. I’m not expecting darkness to cover his eyes.

What is he mad about? Only I have the right to be mad.

I pass the salt, he mumbles a thank you without looking at me.

“My friend says too much salt is not good for you, she said it makes a person frustrated, and to avoid that you need to get someone to help you with the salt.” Ndlelezinhle randomly drops that on the table.

Through the clanging forks and knives, there’s pin drop silence.

“What did she mean daddy?” She asks.

This dinner should not be happening. Phakathwayo's response is to fill his mouth with food.

"Eat your food Zinhle, talking is not allowed at the table." He says.

Only adults are allowed to talk at this table, but the kids don't understand why. They have mouths too and things to say.

"Baba, what's a morning after pill?" Simengaye disturbs the peace.

The food travels through the wrong pipe, I start choking. If this chicken doesn't kill me today, Phakathwayo will.

My father drops his fork in his plate, "Where did you get that?"

I quickly cover my mouth, my wide eyes running to Siyakhula. How is he calm when my world is falling apart?

"Sis Siza had it in her bag, I drank it because I had a headache. But it didn't go away. Will it go away in the morning?"

This little prick, she read the packaging.

I feel my father's eyes on me, I can't bring myself to looking at him.

Maybe I can hold my breath and make myself pass out, I just want to die right now.

3

SIZA

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Ever since I gave my life to God at thirteen, I don't recall ever disappointing him. I was faithful in my offerings every Sunday and prayed before, and after bed.

As to why he is punishing me like this is beyond me. He always wants more than I can give.

My father just asked Nomazulu to take Simengaye and Ndlelezhle to their rooms. I have a feeling it's about to go down in this place, he is looking at Siyakhula as if he stole a piece of meat from his plate.

Head dropped, Siyakhula shuffles in his seat.

How is he still eating though? He grabs his glass of juice and takes a long sip, probably because he can feel my father's glare.

"I can explain," I say to break the heavy silence and chase the elephant out of the room.

"Khuluma." He grumbles.

“Hlelo asked me to get the pill for her, her father is on leave. He’s always home and accompanying her everywhere she goes.” I have no choice but to lie, I grab my phone and quickly give Hlelo a heads-up.

“And you agreed to do such a disgraceful thing?” My father bites my head.

“She’s my friend baba, she’s done so much for me. I had to return the favour, I’m sure you’ve done crazy things for uncle Khula.”

The uncle scratches his head, no emotion showing on his face or body language. Phakathwayo looks over at his friend with a raised brow.

“Shandu ka Ndaba, you are like a second father to Gundi.”

Siyakhula chokes and spews juice all over the table, some escape through his nostrils.

What a way to spill the beans.

His friend hands him a napkin, while letting out a superficial laugh.

I don’t know if I ever mentioned that my father is unpredictable.

“You okay?” Phakathwayo actually sounds concerned.

The man sitting across me nods, he's the opposite of his friend. Too mysterious and self-deprecating, too quiet all the time which makes me wonder what he's thinking about.

"Thank you for the food Mpi, your wife is still a boss in the kitchen." Siyakhula says, cleaning his plate.

He's a well-mannered man in a time when manners seem to have fled the world. That's an attractive trait, if only he'd care about his looks.

"Don't you think it's about time you get married and stop praising my wife's cooking skills?" That's a joke.

Siyakhula replies with a chuckle. I have never seen him with a woman, or heard him talk about one when conversing with my father. Which is strange, men love talking about women.

Pastors or not.

"I'm going away for two weeks, I'll leave my family in your hands. Especially Gundi, take care of her." That's so random of Phakathwayo.

Is this what this dinner was about?

Siyakhula's eyes rest on me, not unblinking but slowed.

“Gundi is important to me,” he turns his eyes back my father.
“Just as she is important to you.”

“Great, then I trust you will take care of her in my absence.” My father says.

When Siyakhula’s eyes lock over the table, the soft mysterious expression has evaporated.

“I will take good care of her,” he says holding my gaze.

I crack a snort, I wouldn’t trust him with my life. He changed the way I feel about him, and it took one night for me to lose trust in him.

“I will be gone for two weeks, the church is in your hands. Both of you will be preaching on my behalf. Don’t disappoint me.”

I shake my head, shock hanging loosely over my head.

I’m not cut out for this. My father is not a stranger to my dreams and aspirations. He knows I’d never stand on the podium to preach.

For as long as I can remember, he wanted me to study Theology, hoping that one day I will take over from him. I declined, hands down. Preaching is not for me, Nomazulu should be given this opportunity.

“Baba, why do I have to team up with him?” I point at Siyakhula with my eyes.

“Because Siyakhula is older and experienced. You will need someone to show you the ropes, Living Waters is a big church. I can’t leave it to a child who refuses to get a job because everything is handed to her on a silver platter.”

Oh Wow! Why is he attacking me? I didn’t say he must go away.

“You wanted me to wait tables at a restaurant, I have a reputation but you don’t care about that.” I remind him.

“Waiting tables is better than showing yourself off on Instagram.”

How did he know about that? I always thought having a father who is in his thirties is cool, not anymore. He knows too many things that should be hidden from him.

“I get paid for posting those pictures baba, I’m a public figure. Times have evolved, social media is a big platform that gives young people opportunities to earn money.”

He frowns, nothing I say to him ever makes sense.

“Enough Siza, I don’t want to hear it. All you ever think about is impressing those people you call friends. You are irresponsible, you don’t think before you act. How many times have you gotten yourself into heaps of trouble and I had to bail you out? You need guidance or you will perish.” He’s pointing a finger at me as if I’m a petulant child.

“I want you to stay away from Hlelolwenkosi, she is a bad influence.”

The god he serves must be sleeping because what he just said is never going to happen.

“Hlelo is a good person, and you know it.”

“The church disagrees, you two are unequally yoked. She is a lost sheep who does not want to be found, I don’t want her to tarnish my daughter’s good imagine.”

Rha! If only you knew old man.

I’m done with him. I stand because really, I don’t have to listen to this.

He stands with me, “Where are you going?”

“To my room.” I swallow my tears, I don’t want Siyakhula to see how affected I am by such trivial matters.

“I’m not done talking, sit your ass back down.” My father snarls at me, firmly pointing at the chair I was sitting on.

I look away, crossing my arms over my chest. He moves into my line of sight and slams a fist on the table.

“I said sit down Sizalobuhle.” He firmly orders.

This man has anger issues, Nomazulu needs to keep a lookout.

For some reason I look at Siyakhula, his eyes are walking from my hairline to my feet and back up again. He also thinks I'm a brat. The only time his gaze breaks is when I sit my ass down.

My father takes his place, a hefty sigh lifting and dropping his chest. He puts his elbows on the table and intertwines his hands together.

"You two are preaching tomorrow, you'll both be on the podium during the dual service. Siyakhula will preach the first service and you will take the second one. The same thing will happen next week Sunday, I don't want any drama Gundi. You are not a child anymore, it's time you know what you want to do in life."

"Definitely not preaching to a bunch of losers." I mumble to myself.

He hears me but refrains from talking back.

"Siyakhula, do you mind sleeping over? I know this is short notice, but I need you two to go over tomorrow's sermon." My father is taking it too far. His friend can't sleepover, it's unethical

And what is going to happen to my beauty sleep? I can't go to church with bags under my eyes.

I Hear Siyakhula clear his throat and turn my head his way. I hope he is man enough to say no. I want him to look my way so he sees how I am against him sleeping over.

“I don’t mind, pastor.” Pastor?

Oh how fake can he get?

My father is over the moon, “Gundi will learn a lot from you, please if you have time, be her mentor. Teach her the ways of life, I want my daughter to be a proverbs 31 woman.”

Too late for that, and I’m not striving to be a proverbs 31 woman. Unless he is talking about Simengaye and Ndlelezhle.

Siyakhula stares a lot, it’s getting on my nerves. Does he have to be so secretive in his stare? We slept together, did the unthinkable. I don’t understand how he is calm and confident, I’m bloody shaking in my boots.

My phone rings

Hlelo my lifesaver is ringing me. I ignore the unnerving stares from these two men and accept the call.

“Friend, you’re on loud speaker.” I warn her before she speaks like the world as my father would put it.

“Hi Pastor Gumede.” Her high pitched voice has my father flinching in irritation. She speaks to seduce whenever the opportunity to speak to him arises.

“Mndaweni!” Phakathwayo greets with crinkled brows.

The giggle my friend releases makes me cringe, “Oh stop it Pastor, I told you before; call me Hlelo. All my friends do.”

Jee! She sounds like she’s touching herself. I get a glare from my father on behalf of my friend’s promiscuity.

“Babe!” I’m giving her a warning.

“Right, friend where is my package. You know the one I asked you to get?” She’s too loud, and she sounds like she is acting.

I look at my father, I know he is ready to give my friend an ear full.

“Yeah I had to get another one , come through tomorrow.” I lie through my teeth.

“Thanks Gunds, I’ll see you tomorrow. Bye Past...”

I quickly remove the phone off speaker and leave for the lounge.

“We’re alone now, stop trying to charm my father. It's disgusting.” I tell her and she finds it funny.

“You owe me for ruining my perfect girl image, your father loved me. I was going to be his second wife.”

Ew! She is serious about being my stepmother.

“Tell me why you bought a morning after pill? Did you and pastor Siya sin last night?” She knows?

“I messed up friend, why didn’t you stop me?”

“Oh my God Siza!” She squeals. “When I saw you two going to his room, I thought he was going to pray for you. I didn’t know he was going to pray over your vagina.”

Hlelo is crazy.

“Give me details, is he a good kisser? How is he in bed? Lord, how big is he?”

“Come tomorrow, I’ll let you in on what I remember,” and that’s pretty much nothing.

“Can it be tomorrow already? I won’t be able to sleep not knowing how Jesus the carpenter...”

“Okay bye.” I cut the call before she continues with her blasphemy.

I’m startled by a heavy presence behind me, he’s glaring straight into my eyes.

“Your father went to get his bags, he has to be at the airport before 7pm. He said to tell you to behave, he will see you when he gets back.”

Mmh! “Your vocabulary seems to have stretched since you tasted the forbidden fruit. If I knew I’d make such an impact in your life, I would’ve given it to you long ago.”

What did I just say?

Siyakhula takes slow steps towards me, eyes turning dark and predatory. I stumble two steps back, my back crushes against the wall.

“What are you doing?” I shove his hand trying to touch me.

His head tilts to the side, eyes sliding into focus. He touches my cheek with the side of his thumb, his lips forming a pensive grin.

“Who said I would’ve accepted it?” He says, and turns to leave.

My hate for him keeps growing.

“Come to the study, we have a sermon to practice.” That’s him yelling as if this is his father’s house.

My pill is still here, I pop it on my way to the study, forcing it down my throat. Finally, I don’t have to worry about his sperm living rent free inside me and growing into something I’d probably hate.

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The study is where my father spends most of his time, reciting sermons, and talking to his God. It's filled with devotional books and bibles. The most boring library.

"This whole church thing is tedious, does God put up all this work when we ask him for things?" I say walking in and lowering myself on the table. Siyakhula is sitting on a chair flipping through pages from a thick bible.

"I don't understand your question." His eyes are still on the bible, I think I'm more interesting than what's written in there.

"Don't you love spending time in the presence of the Lord?"
What a question.

"Going to church doesn't mean I'm fired up for God, I followed my grandparents to church because they said so."

"So you don't believe in God?" He asks.

"Do you?" That gets his attention, he's looking at me.

He likes clearing his throat, his confidence remains, cool, calm and collected.

"It goes without saying."

I have no idea what he means by that.

“Well I refuse to believe there is a gigantic man, sitting on a big chair and looking down at us, waiting to be told how great he is. The big man Christians have painted sounds like a narcissistic, egoistic maniac, and why does God have to be a man?”

His brows are up in question, finally I see something on that flat face of his.

“Is that how you view God?” He asks.

“It’s how I view men, why does God have to be a man? Why not a woman or a transgender? Whoever wrote the bible was a man who thought all men are God’s gift to the world.”

“Sounds like you have a problem with men in general.” He’s wrong.

“I don’t, my father is a man and I love him to death. I just have a problem with bowing down to a man with long white beard, big blue eyes and a voice that sounds like many waters. See how unrealistic that sounds? It’s a fantasy written by someone who lived in their head a lot, sadly the whole world has fallen for it.”

Siyakhula places the bible on the table, slowly he pushes his chair back and towers over me.

“Does your father know how you feel?” He asks.

“He’ll kill me if he ever finds out.”

He takes my hand, a cold current lifts the hairs on my arm and sends tingles down my spine. I don't like this feeling, and I don't like the way he's looking into my eyes. This long look is probably how he is telling me how stupid I am.

"I'm sorry about last night." He says.

I take my hand back, "Well."

I shrug, his apology doesn't make things alright.

"Do you think others saw us, maybe we started making out in front of people?" That's one of my biggest worries.

"So you agree that we both did it willingly" He stands with crossed arms, creating distance between us.

"That's not what came out of my mouth,"

He sighs, rubbing his ashy lips together. I remember buying a tub of Vaseline last week, I should gift him for being a jerk.

"You asked to speak to me in private, so I followed you to my room."

No, I'd never. Why his room of all places?

"Why would I lure you to your room?" I'm contradicting myself here.

He blinks, then pinches the bridge of his nose.

“Lure me? I don’t know, that’s not how it seemed. You were giggly the whole time, I knew you were drunk. You shut the door and attacked me with a kiss, I was too drunk to stop you and so I went ahead with it.”

I am beyond embarrassed.

It suddenly feels like he’s standing too close, as if I’m not suffocated enough, he gets into my space. His hands are placed on the table, caging me with them.

I lean back, “Get away from me, you smell like sweat.”

He leans in until his lips are almost touching mine.

“That’s not what you were saying last night,” he says.

“Stop it Siyakhula.” I don’t know what air in this room is, it’s giving sexual tension. It’s all wrong, it feels wrong.

“I’m not doing anything.” His lips lightly brush against mine.

I hear the door open, Siyakhula swiftly creates distance between us. I don’t know about him, but I’m afraid to check who’s at the door.

4

SIZA

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“What are you two doing?”

Oh! Thank God, I thought it was my father.

“Aunty...” I jump off the table.

She’s not looking at me but at Siyakhula, glaringly.

“Is this what you do when your friend is not around? You take advantage of his daughter?” Nomazulu spits.

I told Siyakhula to step away from me, why didn’t he listen?

I stand in front of him, oddly hiding him from her death stare.

“I don’t know what you saw aunty, we were not doing anything wrong. I had something in my eye and... malume...”

Jesus! I will never comfortably call him uncle ever again.

I take a deep sigh and brace myself for the feelings of disgust.

“I asked malume Khula to remove it, that’s all you saw.”

I’m praying she doesn’t spread her wings and continue to assume the worst, she can be too observant.

“Thula Sizalobuhle, you’re a child. I am talking to this old man.”
She pushes me to the side.

She’s forgetting that I don’t easily take shit from people.

“Sis Noma, you have it all wrong...” Siyakhula sounds frustrated.

“I told you aunty.” I grit, swallowing the arrogance that wants to take centre stage.

She turns her glare to me, “I am not a child Siza, nor am I stupid. I know what I saw, you two were kissing.”

“No, I’d never kiss him. He’s my unc...”

“How long has this been going on?”

This woman is stubborn.

“Nothing is going on Nomazulu, please stop.” I snap.

She’s getting me all worked up for nothing, it would be rude of me to remind her who she is. Hurt flashes in her eyes, she blinks and stops her stare on the man beside me.

“Go home Siyakhula, you don’t have to worry about coming to church tomorrow. I’ll ask pastor Gwala to preach.” Nomazulu dismisses him.

He looks at me, I'm thinking he will protest because he is faithful to my father not Nomazulu. Instead of standing up for himself and defending his honour, he bids us goodbye.

Yeah, I am being tested today.

Roughly, I shove past her but she grabs my arm, and pulls me back.

"Did you sleep with him?"

"Excuse me?"

Can she tell? What if she is psychic and has been hiding it from us? No, I need to remain calm. She can never find out I slept with Siyakhula.

"No." My heart is racing in my chest, I pull my earlobe and take a silent sigh.

It's cut off by a slap on my face that burns the second it lands, I gasp in shock and cover the pain with my hand.

The same shock kills the vile words I want to say, Nomazulu has never laid a finger on me. She wouldn't dare.

"Wh... why did you hit me?"

"You pull your earlobe when you're lying, you slept with your uncle..."

"I told you I..."

“What have you done Siza? You’re 21, Siyakhula is an old man... your father’s best friend. He's your uncle for Christ’s sake.”

“Don’t call him that.” I fire, disgusted by the word itself and silly me this proves her right.

“If you know what’s good for you Nomazulu, you will never lay your filthy hands on me again.” I roughly shove past her and slam the door behind me.

I can’t shake this sinking feeling in my stomach, something big is coming. Something that will drastically change our lives.

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SIYAKHULA-

He walks into the familiar cluttered room, his eyes fall on the blue sheets on the bed and he suddenly remembers that he needs to take his bedding to the laundry on Tuesday.

The curtains are drawn out, blocking the streetlights from reaching the room. The walls are peach in colour while the door is dark brown.

In the corner of the room is a single bed, and a fridge squashed not far from it. A small wooden desk with a two plate stove,

and a microwave sit gleaming near the door. It's nothing much really, nothing to boast about. However, it is his humble abode and he is proud of it.

Boksburg has been his home for as long as he can remember, his whole life is here. The thought of going back to KwaMashu nastily turns his insides. He's worked hard to be where he is, although he doesn't have much.

He kicks off his heavy boots, removes his work shirt and is left with an Ingwe vest. An insufficient sigh leaps out of his mouth as he sits on the bed, and hears an old rustling of the mattress.

This is the slowest weekend, he wants it to end so he can head home to KwaMashu where his mother and aunt reside.

He glances at his packed bag under the kitchen table, he could only fit a bag full of clothes. That's how much he has. Siza always makes snide remarks regarding his wardrobe, he'd prove her wrong and dress to impress. However, he came to Gauteng to work for his mother, not spend money on unnecessary things.

Speaking of Siza, he is not blind to her age. She is a child, but that child is slowly stirring something in him.

Before their night together, she was just Gundi. Now she is Gundi, his Gundi. He can't get her out of his mind, no matter how hard he tries.

That's why he has made the decision to leave, he is going away from this disaster waiting to happen.

Basically, he is choosing his friendship with Khuzimpi over his feelings.

Feeling resigned, he throws his head on the pillow. It's been one heck of a day, hopefully he will wake up refreshed tomorrow.

His phone rings just as he is drifting off, it's a call from his mother.

He smiles and sits up to answer.

"Ntombizayizela, hau MaMbatha. What did I do for you to remember me?"

His mother knows him as a charmer who hardly ever talks to girls, it worries her sometimes that her son might never take a wife and give her grandchildren.

"Yey wena, who are you calling by name? Don't forget that I am your mother." She says with love in her voice.

If Siyakhula were fifty shades lighter, his cheeks would be red from blushing.

“Ngiyaxolisa mama, unjani?”

She sighs and goes quiet for a while, worry grows on Siyakhula’s face.

“Ma? Tell me you’re okay?”

“I’m okay, it’s nothing serious. The pain that was on my back has moved to my knees. Nomzamo took me to the clinic izolo, the nurse said my body is filled with acid. I can’t do simple house chores anymore.”

There’s always something to complain about regarding her health, he thinks it’s an old people thing. They worry even when there is nothing to worry about, sickness is a trend in the world of the old.

Sometimes he’d find her and her sister Nomzamo competing on a sick competition, one would cry about her knees, the other a week old headache.

The last time he spoke to Nomzamo, she told him she hit her small toe against the edge of a table and it had to be removed because it was giving her sleepless nights.

He laughed it off and told her to use rub-rub.

“Ma, aunt Nomzamo will help around the house. You don’t have to do anything,” he says hiding the worry in his tone.

“I know, when are you visiting?”

He’ll have to lie about this one

he wants to surprise her.

“I have to ask my boss for a weekend off, I will send you money tomorrow. Buy all the medication you need, I’m not massaging your feet when I get there.” He teases.

“Then find a wife, I’m sure she won’t mind massaging my feet. Honestly Khula mfana wam, when are you bringing a woman home?”

Okay! This is his cue.

“Ma there’s load shedding, you’re breaking. I can’t hear you anymore.”

“Hello, hello Siyakhula.” She’s shouting over the phone, he feels bad. But this is the only way to avoid this topic.

Siyakhula raises his voice, “I can’t hear you ma, I’ll call you tomorrow. Please take a selfie and send it to me, I miss your beautiful face.”

He puts the phone aside, he knows she is annoyed because they couldn't talk for long. His phone beeps, the selfie has been sent. It's a bad picture as if taken by a toddler playing with their parent's phone.

She took it from a low angle, her double chin zoomed into the camera. Siyakhula laughs, makes the picture his wall paper and lays back down on the bed.

His phone is busy tonight, another message comes through. This one makes his heart rumble. It's Sizalobuhle telling him to come to church tomorrow.

He will have to think about this one, Nomazulu made it clear that he shouldn't set foot there.

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SIZA

Nomazulu had it all wrong, none of these men will go against Khuzimpi Gumede. They have refused to preach and made it clear that pastor Gumede left Siyakhula in charge.

She tried to call him but couldn't get a hold of him, I hope Siyakhula received my message and will come. The service starts at 7am, we have ten minutes before the choir goes on stage.

Siyakhula is leading choir and preaching today.

"Why did you tell him not to come? Baba chose him for a reason." I confront Nomazulu, she rolls her eyes at me.

"Ubaba doesn't know that the man he trusts with his daughter is sleeping with her." Her voice is a little loud, thankfully it's just the two of us in the pastor's lounge.

"I told you nothing happened. Siyakhula is way older me, he is not my type. I have a bo..."

I'm sharing too much information.

I thought I could trust Nomazulu with my secrets, but after she confronted and slapped me last night, I am not so sure anymore. Her loyalty lies with my father alone.

She sits on a couch, and crosses her legs.

"Where is that boy? Have you spoken to him?" She's talking about Siyakhula.

Has she forgotten that she told him not to come?

Her attitude tells me she will never look at him the same.

“I texted him last night, he didn’t reply.”

That heavy presence, he’s here. Turning on my heel, I meet Siyakhula’s stare.

“You made it?”

He doesn’t say anything but looks at Nomazulu who clicks her tongue in return.

“The service is about to start, the choir is waiting for you.” I say.

Nomazulu can give him attitude later, right now it’s time to play church and make God believe we’re perfect and without sin.

“Nobuntu is leading worship, I’ll go up when it’s time to preach.” He walks in, a bible under his arm.

Does Siyakhula have a mirror at home? I hope he does, then he would know that he looks dashing in a suit.

The navy blends so well with his dark skin, he almost looks like he walked out of a GQ magazine, walked down the runway and landed in church. He smells good too.

I realise I’m staring when Nomazulu clears her throat, she gives me a pretty bad icy glare. We are not allowed to appreciate art in this place.

“Let’s pray and ask God to lead us.” Siyakhula suggests, extending a hand for me to take.

“Ask him to forgive our sins as well, and taking advantage of children.” That’s my step mother rubbing salt on Siyakhula’s wounds. I hate that she is choosing to be this bitter. We all join hands, Siyakhula leads the prayer.

“Father we thank you for this new day, we thank you for your word and the wisdom you have bestowed upon us. Make us your vessel Lord as we preach your word and win souls for your kingdom.”

“And lead us not into temptation.” Nomazulu cuts in.

I take a peek, her eyes are closed, Siyakhula’s as well.

“Give us vision Lord to see things the way you do...”

“And lead us not into temptation.” Nomazulu again.

I feel Siyakhula squeeze my hand, I don’t have control over this matter unfortunately.

I hear him sigh before he continues, “May we apply on Monday what we hear on a Sunday, Lo...”

“Amen and lead us not into temptation.”

What is wrong with this woman? I'm looking at her, in utter disbelief. I know I don't take God seriously but hers is on another level.

Siyakhula is forced to cut the prayer short. 'Lead us not into temptation' won't stop.

We join the congregation, there are two pastoral chairs on the podium where my father and Nomazulu always sit during service.

Today, Siyakhula and I occupy those chairs. It feels weird sitting in front of a huge crowd, I'm usually facing the front not the church.

Siyakhula takes his bible and stands on the pulpit.

"May the church stand for the reading of the word, as usual we'll start with the creed?"

The congregation mumbles as they stand, and in unison go completely silent.

The creed appears on the big screen behind us.

*This is my bible, I am what it says I am. I can do what it says I can do...

What just happened? The screen just went blank. Siyakhula knows the creed by head, he continues and the congregation repeats after him.

Suddenly, moans echo around the auditorium falling one by one. The church goes quiet, people are shockingly looking at the screen behind us.

I know my voice, without a doubt that is me releasing high pitched sounds and screeching screams.

“Mmmm, mmmhmmm, oh yeah! Ahh aah! Ssss!ssss, sssascha. Oh, oh ah ahhh!”

My heart sinks to the soles of my feet, I look over at Siyakhula and for the first ever, I see fear and dread in his eyes. We both turn to the screen, my whole body trembles.

It's us, naked and having sex. Strangely, I look small and vulnerable beneath him. My thighs are spread and legs pushed to my chest. Our lips are roughly entangling, he is pounding me violently.

The frantic slapping sounds of our bodies make me want to puke as they grow louder and more desperate. Siyakhula is grunting loudly, eyes tightly closed and jaw clenched... and I'm... I'm...

Why can't I look away?

“Turn this thing off now!” I hear someone shout, I don't know who.

“Gundi...” I hear a whisper that turns my head, I fix my eyes into focus. It’s Siyakhula, apologising with a stare. I turn to the congregation, they are disgusted by us—by me.

Tears wet my face, I take off running down the aisle. The heels are slowing me down, I kick them off and run as fast as I can.

5

SIYAKHULA

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The church has been dismissed and closed for the day, there are ushers scattered everywhere, kindly asking the ones lurking around to go home.

The gates are to be locked once the premises are cleared. He's been called by the board of directors in the pastoral lounge. He walks in accompanied by nerves, and stops at the door.

Seated on the comfortable couches are three seniors old enough to be his father, pastor Gwala, Deacon Ngcobo and the CEO of Living Waters Mr. Hendricks.

Nomazulu is present, she's here to represent her daughter who is nowhere to be found.

Siyakhula tried her phone, she's not taking his calls. He doesn't want to be here, these people can wait. Siza's safety is what's important at the moment.

"Sit down Mbatha." Ngcobo snaps as if talking to a child.

Siyakhula scans the room, his chest and back are wet with sweat. These people are going to grill him, they don't look like people who were singing God is good during worship.

"We have come to a decision, you are expected to step down as youth pastor and choir master with immediate effect."

When did they talk and come to this dire decision? Unless time had stopped and he wasn't aware of it.

Siyakhula nods, he is not going to explain himself when worry is taping him on his shoulders and urging him to go find Siza.

"Is that all you have?"

Shu! Nomazulu is on fire.

"You raped my daughter and all you have to offer is a head nod?"

He's showing no emotion on his face, but his chest is slowly burning. Rape is a strong word. Everyone saw the video, there was no rape there.

"I am not a rapist Nomazulu." He grunts, eyes fixed on her.

She blinks, a frown coming together on her displeased face.

"That's not what I saw, you were holding her down with your body. It looked like rape to me." She stands with her word.

Siyakhula shuffles in his seat, these old men are looking at him. He is not sure what they expect from him, if they believe Nomazulu. If they do then, they are as dumb.

“I don’t have anything to say, I’m not going to sit here and agree to something I didn’t do. My kids knew alcohol was not allowed, maybe an outsider was invited and they spiked the punch to liven the party.” It makes sense to him, he’s never thought of it actually.

“But why let it go thus far Mbatha? You were the eldest at the party, it was your job to look after the kids.” Pastor Gwala is polite, almost sounding understanding.

“I don’t know how things got out of hand, I’m sorry.” Siyakhula intertwines his hands together, he is holding a bowl of anger in his ticking jaw.

“Sorry doesn’t cut it Mbatha, the damage has been done.” Mr Hendricks says.

Siyakhula knows there is no fixing this, the church will probably be affected.

“I will step down if that is required of me, can I go now?” Yep! He’s in a hurry to find Sizalobuhle.

Nomazulu is not having it, “Look at him, he is arrogant and disrespectful. Where are you rushing to Mbatha?”

“Mrs. Gumede, let’s calm down please.” Pastor Gwala says.

“No mfundisi, he’s rushing to find my baby so he can finish what he started. Last night I caught him on top of her, I could tell that she was uncomfortable and silently asking for help. Stay away from my daughter Siyakhula. You have done enough.” She’s yelling as if this is a stokvel meeting.

Siyakhula sends his glare her way, he never thought he would live to see the day where Nomazulu loses her wits.

“Stop making things up Nomazulu, call Siza now and repeat what you are saying.” He challenges her.

Nomazulu zips her mouth and sits back with arms crossed and an ugly stare.

“Is this what being a Christian means? You crucify us when we make mistakes?” Siyakhula adds a complaint that has Nomazulu rolling her eyes.

“Please, you are not Jesus. Don’t talk about being crucified, you are a rapist Siyakhula.” She snaps.

This accusation will get him in trouble with the police, he can’t accept it.

“Nomazulu...”

“Forgive me pastor Ngcobo, but how do we know that Sizalobuhle is not his first victim? He’s a youth pastor for

heaven's sake, what if he's been touching our girls inappropriately, and threatening them to keep quiet?"

"That's enough Nomazulu, you know me. I would never do such despicable things."

"I thought I knew you Siyakhula, we all thought we knew you. Look at the wonders you have shown us."

"I don't have to listen to this. I'm leaving." Siyakhula stands.

Ngcobo almost meets his height when he stands as well, "That will be for the best, you are suspended with immediate effect. A thorough investigation will be conducted, you will be contacted regarding a way forward."

"And stay away from my daughter, I'm going to get a restraining order against you. You're going to jail for raping her. I won't rest until you do." Nomazulu's bitter words affect him more than he'd like.

His legs feel weak as he walks out, it feels like he's carrying a mountain of problems on his shoulders.

Ushers stare and mutter as he walks down the aisle, he hears a loud mocking laugh. It stops him on his track, he is tempted to turn and reprimand them. They are not supposed to be

throwing the first stone, this is the house of God. If he is ridiculed in here, how will the world treat him?

Before he went to the meeting, orders were given out to clear the premises. Why are there still people here?

“Pedophile!” A male voice shouts.

He knows it’s directed to him, it takes so much in him not to let it affect him. All these people must be thinking he raped Siza, that a pastor’s daughter would never go against her father’s rules.

His phone is ringing, he is not familiar with the number. It can’t be Sizalobuhle, knowing her

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she wants to hide from the world. He puts his phone back into his pocket, and hurries to his van.

To his shock, the window on the driver’s side has been broken. The driver’s door forced open.

Pervert is written on the windshield with a red lipstick.

So this is their true colors?

Anger surges through his veins, he turns to the spectators, nose flaring and fists clenched.

“Who did this?” He shouts and is ignored.

It would be wise for him to jump into his van and drive home, but he wants to know who is behind this injustice.

“I said who did this?” He repeats, louder this time.

Everyone is looking at him, staring with judgement in their eyes.

He is appalled by their hypocrisy, no one is perfect in this place.

“This is my property, I worked hard for this car. Are you not ashamed?” His eyes are frantically going through all of them.

“Are you not ashamed Mbatha?” He’s gone from pastor Mbatha to Mbatha within a twinkle of an eye. This world is not for the faint of heart.

“The Gumedes worked hard to build this church, and you have destroyed their hard work. What is a scrap car compared to this big church?” Another yells.

Whatever these people have said to him has not lessened his wrath, he is still boiling with rage.

Ngcobo and Nomazulu walk out of the church building, the noise probably brought them here.

“Go home Siyakhula.” Ngcobo tells him. There is no kindness in his voice.

Siyakhula could curse and tell them that God will never visit a church filled with a bunch of hypocrites. However, he is not in a position where he can do that.

A strained sigh escapes him, there is a lump in his throat. He holds his breath, he is not about to cry. He didn't cry when his father left him, he won't start now.

Quietly and ashamed, he gets into his van. The car doesn't start, it's not the first time it's doing this. He will need someone to push it, but these people will insult more if he asks.

Frustration grips him by the throat, calling upon the tears bundled behind his orbs.

"How did I get here?" He whispers in defeat.

He tries the car again, it refuses to start.

"Go ahead mfundisi, I'll push." A voice yells.

He looks through the rear view mirror, Bongani the security guard shows him a thumbs up.

Together they get the car moving, Bongani runs to open the gate for him and waves as Siyakhula drives off.

He grasps everything that's happened, and maybe he'll dwell on his mistakes later. But now he needs to find Siza.

Her phone rings, she is still not answering.

There is one person who might know where she could be. He finds her number on the WhatsApp youth group. Hlelo does not attend their church, but goes with them to youth camps.

“Where is my friend? It’s all over the internet, what have you done Siyakhula?” He didn’t think she would yell before announcing who he is, it seems like she has his number saved.

“I thought she was with you,” he says and ignores the part about them spread all over social media.

“I haven’t heard from her, you better find my friend.” That sounds like an order.

He is convinced that from this day forth no one will speak to him with respect.

“Do you know where she might be?” He asks.

“She couldn’t have gone to her house, not after the sex scandal. I don’t know where she could be, just find her before she does something stupid.” Hlelo is humble enough to plead this time around.

There is nothing more he has to say to her.

He spends a fair amount of time driving around, searching for Siza. When he’s gone through her favorite spots, it’s dark out. He decides to drive home, and maybe try again later.

A call comes through as he pulls in, the dreadful news has reached Khuzimpi.

Siyakhula turns the engine off, and answers the call.

“I want you at my house first thing in the morning.” His best friend orders, not hiding the anger swirling in his tone.

The call has been disconnected.

On his way to his room, he sees the landlord. An elderly man who lives alone in the single story house. Siyakhula increases his stride, but the landlord is after him like a house on fire.

“Siya, can I have a word?”

Damnit!

“Bab’Sello?”

“When I allowed a gathering on Friday, you didn’t tell me my yard would be filled with party animals. I thought you were a pastor. What were those drunk people doing here?”

He doesn’t know what to tell him, especially after he told him the youth from church will be the one attending the party.

“There were empty bottles all over the place, beer bottles Siyakhulu. You people partied the whole night, I saw a bunch of young people having sex on my lawn.”

A bunch? Now that's an exaggeration.

Siyakhula is relieved knowing it wasn't him and Siza, they had gone to his room.

"I'm sorry bab'Sello, it won't happen again."

Sello snorts, furrowing his brows.

"I thought you were a good man Siyakhula, a man of God. You should be setting an example to the young people, not this thing I saw Friday night?"

His landlord is always carrying complains in his chest, can't he give him a break today? He's been trampled enough.

"I'm sorry I have to go." Siyakhula carries on to his room.

He needs to find Siza first, then when he knows that she is okay, he'll grab his bag and go to his mother.

In his bed is a mound, hidden under the covers. Quirking a brow, Siyakhula pulls the blanket and to his relief it is Sizalobuhle. Gripped in her hand is a bottle of Black Label.

"Gundi," he tries to touch her. She throws the bottle at him, he ducks.

"Sizalobuhle?"

She sits, eyes glaring. "I'm going to kill you."

6

SIYAKHULA-

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If he decides to stay in Boksburg, he will have to get this door fixed, anyone can pick the lock and break in. Like this woman kneeling on his bed and stabbing daggers at him.

“Where have you been Siyakhula?”

Not only does she act like a brat, sometimes she talks like one.

“I’ve been out looking for you, why were you not taking my calls?”

He was worried while she was here, in his house, under his sheets without permission.

“You’re late.” Siza tells him, he makes a confused frown.

“Is that why you broke into my house, and threatened to kill me?”

She laughs, “Death would be too easy for you, not after what you did.”

“After what I did?”

“Is this some kind of punishment Siyakhula?” Siza queries, stepping down from the bed.

“Woman, I do not know what you are talking about, get to the point.”

“The sex tape dammit, you did it on purpose didn’t you?”

“Why would I purposely ruin my life?” He asks.

That’s a good question, another thing is that he is not one for the spotlight.

“Your life? You ruined my life you selfish bastard.” Siza maliciously returns.

He weaves past her, two steps takes him to the counter where he turns the kettle on.

“You are not dumb Gundi, don’t act like it just because you are addicted to stirring up trouble.” He’s grabbing a mug from the cupboard and rinsing it. He can feel Siza’s eyes on him, she is silent as if she is caught off guard by his clap-back.

“Well, if it wasn’t you then who was it? Do you know the damage that’s been done? My father is not going to let this pass, he will unravel Siyakhula.”

It sounds like she is making it more his problem than theirs.

His hand freezes on top of the sugar can, his eyes stare into space.

He didn't have time to think about Khuzimpi and how he'd feel about this, he was too busy looking for this spoilt brat to care about anyone else.

Siyakhula faces Siza, "Would you like tea? It will help dilute the alcohol in your system."

He's choosing not to talk about Khuzimpi, they are men, they will handle this without Sizalobuhle.

"I am not drunk," Siza spits.

She's a bit tipsy, it's not like she is new at drinking. One bottle is nothing.

Siyakhula shrugs and turns back to his tea.

She's looking at him, he can feel it. He'd be honored if she didn't insult him every time she opened her mouth.

"You should wear church clothes more," that's definitely a compliment.

There is something about the way he stands in a fitted shirt, a pride in himself that is lovely to see.

Siyakhula looks at her, "You're staring."

“Well, Siyakhula, God made you handsome for a reason. I’m just enjoying the view. It’s a pity you don’t know how to appreciate your good looks, you’d actually attract a good woman if you start dressing for your body.”

It must be the alcohol talking.

He has a come-back, but keeps it to himself.

“How much do you make a month?”

“That is confidential.” He replies.

“Confidential you say? Had it been a good salary, you would tell me.”

She is going somewhere with this and Siyakhula is not sure he wants to find out where. Siza can run her mouth not caring how the next person might feel.

“What are you saying exactly Gundi?” He asks and hears her grumble behind him.

She still has a problem with him calling her Gundi.

“That someone paid you to have that footage played in church.” Here we go again.

He was going to run to the corner shop and buy a sachet of Jacobs so he can make her a nice cup of coffee, to hell with the coffee now. This child is disrespectful.

He's lost his appetite, maybe he should drink something stronger.

"Why would I do that?" He is asking for the sake of peace.

Siza crosses her arms, looking around the not so spacious room.

"I mean look at this place, you don't have shit Siyakhula. Desperate men like you sell their souls to the devil."

She turns and catches his eye, Siyakhula flexes and wiggles his eyebrows, a sneer ready to show his rage. One that would match the blazing flame in his eyes.

"Get out!" He grunts.

"Excuse me?"

"You heard me, get out of my house."

She snorts, "You call this a house? Baby, my toilet is bigger than this lunchbox."

He's losing patience with her stinking attitude. Sizalobuhle has changed overnight, God is his witness that this woman was never this bitchy. It must be a punishment for sleeping with her.

"Then why the hell were you in my bed? Under my covers? What the hell are you doing standing inside my house if you

find me less of a human because I have nothing? You think my house is a dump? Get the hell out of my dump then.” He could yell but that’s not him.

The stubborn Siza sits on the bed, and crosses her leg over the other.

“I will leave when I feel like it, my father’s money pays for this place.”

“You’re going an extra mile to act like a bitch Sizalobuhle, it doesn’t look good on you. And I don’t work for your father anymore, your precious church fired me.”

She opens her mouth to say something but that’s all she has to offer, an open mouth.

“Well... maybe it’s for the best. You did take advantage of me, now my life is a nightmare.” Must be the first thing that came to mind, she is going an extra mile to piss him off.

Siyakhula grabs her and drags her to the door, she squirms under his hold as he pulls the door open.

“Siyakhula wait, it’s dark out. Drive me home.” She yells but he is not listening, although he hears her.

With one push from him, Siza stumbles outside gasping in surprise.

“Drive me, I didn’t bring a car.” She says, not pleading.

He cares, but he won't do it.

"Do you have petrol money?" He asks, leaning on the doorpost with hands shoved into his pockets.

"I used my last money on the Uber that brought me here."

"Then I'm sorry, I don't have enough petrol to drive you to your father's palace. Call one of your servants, I'm sure they'd be ready to kiss your ass." His answer hurts.

"You will regret this Siyakhula, my father will hear about it."

My father this, my father that... it's all he's hearing lately.

He shuts the door with a heavy heart.

In his line of work, he's met rude people but this one is a special case. She has harbored her insolence for only two days, it's stuck in his head that he's starting to forget how she was before their night together.

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SIZA-

Phangizitha is not answering his phone, but he is on line. I send him a text asking him to fetch me.

He leaves me on read and goes off line. What is happening to the men of this world?

I'm at Siyakhula's house, I need a ride home.

I send the WhatsApp text, he comes on line before I log out.

Ngyeza.

That's his response.

It's cold out here, I don't have a jersey or my bag, the only thing I have is my phone. I used my last money on an Uber ride, God, I regret coming here. I am such an idiot. When I left church, my mind was a cluttered mess. I didn't know where to go, I was dazed myself when I told the driver to bring me here. In a way, I needed answers and it felt Siyakhula had them.

Turns out he is useless

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I don't want him anywhere near me. How can he throw me out of his room as if I'm trash? He can't seriously be angered by my speculations, if I'm going to find out who did this, then I have to look at all angles, leaving no stone unturned.

A black Range Rover Sport parks at the gate. If anything, Phangi will always come through for me. I feel eyes on me and an urge to turn back defeats me, Siyakhula is standing by the window, stabbing me with his stare.

‘What are you looking at?’ is what I want to say.

His eyes move, he’s suddenly more enflamed. I follow his line of sight to the gate.

Come on! Siyakhula can’t be upset because Phangizitha is parked outside his gate.

Phangi is not giving friendship vibes as well, there’s a way he’s looking at Siyakhula. Almost as if he’d spit on the ground he walks on.

The man waiting for me hoots, without sending his eyes my way. I hurry to the car.

“Hi.” My greeting is ignored. I notice how his hands are clenching on the steering wheel.

He hasn’t taken his eyes off Siyakhula, neither has the man behind the window moved.

I take a peek, Siyakhula looks at me, it’s a disapproval of some sort. Like he’d rather I was not in this vehicle, I don’t know. Maybe I’m seeing things.

“Are you falling in love with my uncle?” I tease Phangi, that’s enough staring for the day.

The glare... I should’ve kept my mouth shut. But since when is he easily offended by my stupid jokes?

“Ungazong’bhedela we-sisi.”

Yoh! Hai ke!

He’s speeding, taking my mind with him as well. I don’t understand why he’s angry.

“Phangi slow down, we’re going to crash.” He ignores me and continues speeding.

We’re not talking to each other? I wish he gave me a heads-up. I don’t like silent treatments, we were given mouths for a reason.

I have so much to say to him, so much to complain about. My heart is heavy, I’m engulfed by fear. If I don’t cry to him, then who?

He’s passing cars like he’s on a race, my life is literally flashing before my eyes.

Yes, it is a nightmare but that don’t mean I want to die.

“Phangi slow down.” I grab the wheel, he pushes my hand and drives like a normal person. Geez!

I see a mall, outside is a McDonald's sign. My taste buds act up.

"I'm hungry." I was too nervous to eat this morning and too stressed to realize that I'm hungry after the church incident.

"Phangi, I said I'm hungry. Why did you drive past the mall?"

He side eyes me and clicks his tongue. I'm missing something here, and so much attitude for a man? Not cute.

Fine! I won't talk to him if he won't talk to me.

It's taken us 30 minutes to arrive in West cliff.

I have more missed calls from Nomazulu, I need to come up with a story. My sisters, what will I tell them?

Phangi dashes out of the car. This man expects me to follow him, if I had money on me, I would go home.

The door is open, I find him in the lounge, gulping down liquor. He doesn't drink, as far as I know.

"Baby?" I'm standing behind him, afraid to see the look in his eyes. "Ba..."

Whoah! He just threw the glass against the wall. He grabs a bottle of whiskey and smashes it on the floor and with ease, flips the coffee table over, growling like a mad man.

What in God's name is going on?

“Phangi, what are you doing?” He’s scaring me, I’ve never seen him like this. He’s never acted like this with me, I don’t understand.

“I loved you Siza, I gave you my heart, and what do you do? You spit on my face.” He howls and punches the wall.

I can hear the anger in his voice, loud and too clear. It doesn’t clear the confusion in my head though.

I need to breathe, it’s the only way I’ll be able to think straight.

Fighting the adrenalin of fear coursing through my system, I take a risk and cup his face. He looks into my eyes, they are bloodshot and dripping with pain and hurt.

“Tell me what’s wrong, baby, please. Wha... what did I do?”

If he was part of our congregation, I’d think he knows about the s*x tape. His warm breath whiffs my face as he sighs in exhaustion. He laces his hands with mine, my eyes widen at how his body is trembling.

“You broke my heart Siza.” He mutters and my biggest fear is slowly unraveling.

The s*x tape... he knows?

I slowly release my hands from his face but he gropes my wrist, the anger visible in his eyes doesn’t suit him. I know

Phangizitha, he's a gentle lover. Everything about him is gentle and kind.

"Siyakhula of all people?" The way he delivers this turns everything in my stomach.

His grip tightens, "You're hurting me Pangi."

"Why him? There are so many men in South Africa, you could've picked anyone if you wanted to be a wh*re. Maybe I would've forgiven you, why him?"

"You bastard, let go of me." How dare he, what right does he have to call me names?

I break away from his hold.

"What are you accusing me of Phangizitha?"

"I know you slept with him."

Oh my god. My eyes almost leave their sockets.

"What, you thought I wouldn't find out?"

Yes, I didn't think he'd find out.

"Your little p0rn movie is all over the internet. When did you upgrade from being an influencer to a p0rn star baby?" He's insulting me.

My knees fail my legs, I stumble back and fall on the couch.

But how? My father... my fans... my life is ruined.

And this man... I look at him. The pain in his eyes leaves me breathless with regret and shaking with guilt. How am I going to rectify this? How do I un-break his heart?

You're a smart girl Siza, you can fix this. I have to pick myself up, I am a princess after all and a big girl.

Standing tall and confident, I look Phangi straight in the eye.

"It's not me in that video." I don't care that he saw it.

I will never agree that I slept with another man, even if he catches me red-handed.

"It's not me in that video, I would never cheat on you baby. I love you."

Do I even sound convincing?

He shakes his head, tears leak down his face. I avoid his eyes, they are evading me, searching for the truth.

"Get out of my house."

"Phangi please ..."

"I don't want to see your face, get out."

I wish he was bluffing but he means it.

“I can’t leave like this, please, let’s talk about it.” I try to touch, he dodges my hand.

“Ungjwayela amasimba Sizalobuhle, voetsek. Get out of my house.” He says, grabbing my arm with force, and starts dragging me down the passage.

“Baby let’s talk about this, don’t throw me out.” I plead.

“I know people, I’m going to kill your little boyfriend.” He says as he pushes me out the door.

“Siyakhula is not my boyfriend, I love you Phangi. You know I do...” I tell him.

His eyes are intensely burning into me, he snorts before shutting the door on my face.

How am I going to get home?

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SIZA-

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Nomazulu fetched me last night, I had to wait outside the premises and lie that I was stranded. I'm back home, and walking on egg shells.

My father will be home today, I haven't spoken to him, nor has he tried to call me. I know Phakathwayo, he is breathing fire wherever he is. I'm going to be on the receiving end of his anger when he gets home.

"Friend, maybe I should come spend a few days at your house. You know, for moral support." That's Hlelo, and this is her third call. She called last night when I got home, early this morning before I woke up, and right now.

"What moral support? You just want to parade yourself in front of my father, he is a married man." I remind her and hear her snort.

"You know Siza, sometimes you hurt my feelings. It hurts to know that you think so little of me." She's fake crying.

“Cry me a river, it’s not happening.”

“But why friend? I can be the voice of reason when pastor Mpi wants to slaughter you alive. I’ll even wear my mother’s two-piece suit, and walk around quoting proverbs 31.”

This girl has no shame, I love her regardless. She has the ability to chase away dark clouds and make it sunny again. I have to cut the call and get ready before my father arrives.

There’s someone at my door, I shout for them to enter while silently praying that it’s not my father.

A familiar face peeps in, my heart jumps for joy at the sight of my father’s brother, Qedakonke.

He looks older every time I see him, you’d think he would be like his brother; ageless. He’s lost so much weight, yet his pot belly stands out.

“Bab’omdala!” I squeal in excitement, and run into his arms. He tries to lift me up like he used to do when I was a kid but fails.

“Look who decided to grow up after promising she will stay a child forever.” He’s complaining and laughing at the same time.

“I’m not the only one who broke my promise, you promised to never grow old and that you’ll always spin me around. Now you can’t even lift my pinkie finger.”

He shrugs his shoulders and smiles widely, “How are you my child?”

Change of topic so soon?

I sigh and find a chair to sit on, he settles down on my bed.

“You heard what happened?”

“I saw what happened, church people can be mean. You should have called me, I was going to burn down the building before everyone left. Give them a taste of hell since they are all going there one day.”

He’s a fifty-seven year-old wildcat, has a heart of a cub. My father calls him childish, I say my father is jealous of his energy.

“What am I going to do bab’omdala? How am I going to fix this mess?”

He wraps his arms around me, pulling me in.

“You don’t have to worry about anything, I’m here now. I will protect you.” He says and I believe every word, it’s all he ever does. Protect me.

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Bab'Qeda will be staying with us, he didn't specify till when. I don't mind really, I'm happy that he is here and supports me. His presence makes things seem okay, I can't say the same about Siyakhula. I found him in the kitchen when I came down, he only spoke to me when I enquired about his presence so early in the morning.

He was summoned by my father, other than that, he has nothing more to say to me.

It must have everything to do with what I said last night, I was an idiot, confused and scared. I needed someone to blame and he was available.

"Would you like something to drink or eat?"

"I'm fine." He says.

At least he's talking.

"I'm a coffee person, my day only starts after I have had a cup or two." I don't know why I am telling him this, it looks like he gives no flying fucks.

I sit across from him with my cup of coffee, there is always tension whenever we are in the same room. It's exhausting, seriously.

Siyakhula taps his fingers on the table, he must be anxious. I clear my throat to get his attention, he stares at me with a burning intensity.

“I’m sorry about what I said last night.” I did say I was stupid. He shrugs like it’s not a big deal.

“You love disrespecting me, Gundi. Is it some kind of fetish?” How can disrespect be a fetish? Does he even know what a fetish is?

I want to express how angry I am that he let things get that far, I want him to know that I am beside myself with anger that he didn’t protect me. He was my uncle before anything, it was his duty to keep me safe. No matter how strong I came on to him.

“You didn’t protect me, I have never had a one nightstand before. If I wanted one, I would have chosen to do it sober.”

He scratches his head, something tells me he is not ready for this conversation.

The uncomfortable silence is back, it’s forever present when we’re alone.

“Please don’t tell my dad about him, no one should ever find out.” I jump to the next thing that worries me, Phangizitha. I’m no longer looking at a calm Siyakhula, something has happened to make him angry.

“How long has he been a secret?” There is a frown on his face as he asks, voice patient though and soft.

“He’s not a secret, the time just hasn’t arrived for me to tell my father.”

“Do you know anything about that boy?”

I try not to be offended by him calling the man I love a boy.

“Phangizitha is a man, I can assure you that.” I say with assurance in my voice.

His frown seems to deepen, what is it that is tickling the devil in him?

“He’s 27,” Siyakhula says.

How does he know his age? They have never met.

“Sisi, baba is asking for you.” Nomazulu says behind me, I quickly turn and find her eyes on Siyakhula. She clicks her tongue and marches off.

“Should I go in first?”

That’s nice of him but I know the man that fathered me, he will chase him out.

“It’s okay, he asked for me. I will go in first.”

He acts like a gentleman and stands when I stand.

I move back as he attempts to take my hand, his scent is all over this place. It must be because it is morning, he doesn't smell like a long day's work today.

He smells nice actually.

"Don't worry

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I won't ever touch you without your consent again. Not until you request me to."

That will only happen in his dreams, this man and I will never have any close encounters again.

His fingers brush against mine, I haven't had time to grasp what he's trying to do when he intertwines our fingers.

"You said you won't touch me without my permission." I sound like an idiot right now.

"I did, I'm only holding your hand because I'm hoping that one day you will hold mine."

He's asking too much from me, it's also written in his warmth-filled eyes. Lately, I cause pain to the hands I hold.

"Siza!"

I thought Nomazulu left, I quickly jolt away from Siyakhula's hand and rush to the study without turning back. I don't want to be making promises I can't keep, besides, I don't owe him anything.

"These are holy hands, the future success of the works of God, lies in the hands of those who find the answer to the questions; what must we do that we might work the works of God. I dedicate my hands to you Lord." My father is doing a creed, we recite it when we are about to pray over someone. I knock, and let myself in.

I've been hiding my nerves, and now that I'm standing in the presence of my father, they decide to come out.

"Sit down." He says, eyes on the note pad he's scribbling on.

For how long is he going to write on that diary while I'm sitting here? I can't breathe not knowing what he is thinking.

"Baba..." I should explain before he says anything.

"I just came from a meeting at church, Siyakhula has been removed from his positions." He says, lifting his eyes.

I am aware of the latter, Siyakhula brought it to my attention last night. I would tell Phakathwayo but he'd think we were doing the ungodly.

“There was a vote, majority wants me to step down as their pastor.”

That’s absurd, it’s his church. My grandparents started that church with their sweat and blood, they can’t ask him to leave.

“You won’t step down, right?”

He shakes his head, I’m not okay with that heavy sigh he just let out.

“Sizalobuhle, you have ruined me my child. I trusted you so much, and left the church in your hands. Why would you humiliate your father like this?”

For a second there I thought I was safe, I really didn’t want it to come to this, where I have to explain myself. I’m tired of telling people that I didn’t intend to sleep with Siyakhula... that I was drunk and didn’t know what I was doing.

Shame has me dropping my head, “I’m sorry Phakathwayo.”

I catch a glimpse of his eyes, his eyes bear the rage I have been seeing on the people around me.

“Your apology changes nothing, what’s done is done.” He leans back on the chair and pulls a bible from a drawer.

“The word says if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

Really, a scripture? Confessing my sins will not erase the video of me and Siyakhula going around the internet.

“I know baba,” I say, predicting his next step as I close my eyes and ready myself for 30-minute prayer session.

The silence and tension in here is too much for me to bear, he’s too quiet it almost scares me. I hope he doesn’t slap me with those hands he declared holy when I walked in.

“Maqwabe, the church members still want me as their pastor.”

I open my eyes at the sound of the good news. Why did he scare me by saying majority ruled him out?

I don’t get why he looks dejected, his expression confuses me.

“There’s a condition, you have to report Siyakhula for r@pe.”

No, I didn’t hear right. I think the devil just spoke through my father, a pastor of all people.

“Can you please repeat that, I thought you said I have to cry r@pe.”

He leans on the table, eyes stuck on mine, and joins his hands together.

“That’s exactly what I said.”

“No baba, he’s your best friend.” He's a family friend.

“I am a friend of God, not men.”

Argh! He's too old to be saying that. Siyakhula is not a bad person, I've been harsh on him and it's justified. But that does not mean I want him to rot in jail.

"But the video... everyone saw it. It didn't look like I was being harassed. The whole nation has seen that video baba."

He looks away from me, he is disgusted by my mere presence.

"What everyone saw was a man on top of a young woman, those screams were screams of help."

What screams? I wasn't screaming.

"The church is willing to stand by you, they will say whatever needs to be said to..."

"You mean the church is ready to lie to save the church?" I'm on my feet, leering down at him. His stare is intimidating, ready to rebuke me.

I can't believe him, he's a pastor. Why would he agree to such nonsense?

"That church is your legacy Sizalobuhle..."

"I don't want it," am I snapping at my father?

This audacity will get me into trouble, his eyes are hardening by the second.

“That’s what you think now, wait till you are old enough and have to beg for food and a place to stay. And that is exactly what will happen if we lose that church, we will be out on the streets.”

I am not convinced, we have enough money to survive after a storm.

“What about the money we have baba? We don’t need the church, we’ll be fine without...”

“What money? I’d like to see it,” what is he talking about?

“Are you telling me we are poor?”

He sighs and takes his eyes away, “I am saying we will lose it all if we lose the church. Your sisters will be transferred into a public school, we’ll lose this house and the cars and everything we have.”

I sit back down, so this means we are at the mercy of the church.

“The law is fair baba, they won’t believe my word.” I tell him.

“Don’t worry about that, you just have to do everything I say.”

He says.

“What happens if I cry r@pe?”

My father rubs his forehead, one of the traits he's norm to when he is under stress.

“Siyakhula will be arrested, and I will remain pastor.”

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PHANGI

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Nestled along with other houses in the foothills of the Drankensberg mountain is the Donda estate, the lavish five bedroom ranch is all concrete with tall windows that give a view of the mountains.

Mlamuli Donda got his first big break when he met his wife Nonhlanhla Khuzwayo, luck seemed to follow him everywhere he went and everything he touched turned to gold.

Her arrival was unexpected, a bad timing that broke another woman's heart. He was tied down and stupidly in love with his long-time lover, and had already fathered three boys. The seeds of her womb.

That didn't stop Nonhlanhla from sinking her claws into him, and of course Mlamuli couldn't let the opportunity pass.

It was clear to everyone around him that MaKhuzwayo was his lucky charm. Umlingani wam' is what he called her whenever he had a chance to tell people about her. Unlike his first wife, she helped him build a legacy for his children.

For a man who lived in poverty all his life, and was wise enough to know that love doesn't put food on the table, Mlamuli asked MaKhuzwayo to be his second wife.

The woman whose wedding band was tied around his finger went crazy and threatened to leave him if he ever takes a second wife.

Mlamuli was caught between a rock and a hard place; love over a legacy for his children and his children's children.

His uncles supported him, "A man with no money is useless in this world."

As if they had money.

Mlamuli married MaKhuzwayo and brought her to his matrimonial home. The only woman that had ownership over his heart packed her belongings, she wanted to leave with her sons. They were hers, she carried and nurtured them in her womb.

"You can go if you want, but my sons are staying." He told her with a heavy heart.

Her family had warned her that Mlamuli would never let her take his children, she knew she was fighting a losing battle. Going on her knees and pleading for the sake of their children was the only option she had.

“Ngonyama, Masinga, Thusini, Mzimela. Don’t separate me from my children, MaKhuzwayo is young. She will give you sons.”

His heart bled when he watched her in tears, he didn’t want her to leave but he couldn’t force her to stay either.

“Go with the one that made you a mother,” Mlamuli said.

One son was better than nothing, with a throbbing heart, she separated her youngest from her breast, removed the second born from under her wing and left with the first one who was responsible for people calling her a mother. Their first born.

Mlamuli was a present father to all his children but the eldest grew bitter with age, he purposely detached himself from his father and everything that had to do with him.

MaKhuzwayo gave him a daughter years later, she loves his sons and goes to all extents to make sure they don’t feel their biological mother’s absence.

He drove to Bergville last night after Siza left. His life has changed within a snap of a finger, she was it for him. The woman he wanted to introduce to his mother.

His heart is in the midst of mayhem, there is no other way to describe it. To say he is disappointed would be a slap in the face, he's torn to shreds and left bleeding.

He's in his room, sitting on the floor with his head resting on the bed. His thoughts are all over the place, but Siza dominates them.

What hurts him the most is that she denied everything, knowing that he's seen the footage.

Couldn't she just stay loyal, love him like he's loved her for three years? She hasn't tried to reach out, not even a call back from her.

It's the type of woman she is, not once did she shed a tear during the confrontation. He's been with women before, women that loved him for his status and bank balance. Women that threatened suicide after he broke up with them, he hated how clingy and weak they were. Then again, it made him feel wanted although he knew it was more about the money than the heart.

Siza is special, confusing special.

"Ngonyama, are you okay?" MaKhuzwayo is standing in his room, he didn't hear her come in.

“I’m fine ma.” He lies, he is drowning in pain and trying to pick up pieces of his broken heart.

“Maye! Mmhh! Yoh amadolo...” MaKhuzwayo grumbles as she sits down on the floor beside him. Old age is catching up with her, raising three children and trying to keep a man who is not entirely into you is not a walk in the park. She’s ageing too fast.

She cradles Phangi’s face, making him look at her.

“Your mouth can be deceitful, but your eyes never lie to me.” She says.

Phangi has always been a crier, his tears speak for him when words fail him.

“Why is love so hard ma?”

“Love will never be easy my child.” She has first-hand experience, she fell in love alone. An unrequited love is the worst kind of love in the world, one that has destroyed many of its victims.

“Not everyone is lucky enough not to fall prey to love, the word sounds beautiful but the feeling is a disease.” She says.

The theory simply makes no sense to him, love is a beautiful thing. He’s felt it with Siza, no woman has ever loved him like that.

“I am not a victim to love ma, I have loved and been loved. She just didn’t know how to love me right.” He says.

“Are we talking about the girl you wanted to bring home?”

He nods, “She messed up. I don’t know if I will ever forgive her.”

It’s hard to look past what she did, especially since he saw her in the arms of another man.

“Give it time, let your heart heal, only then will you make a sane decision.”

Phangi is not sure if his heart will ever heal.

It’s harder for MaKhuzwayo to stand, her grumbles are the same as when she was going down. With her hand pressed on Phangi’s shoulder, she manages to stand straight.

“Come down, food is ready.” She tells him, adjusting her long skirt and head wrap. She is a housewife who spends her days behind the stove or pushing couches and taking down curtains.

Pangi nods and watches as she walks out, leaving the door open.

His appetite hasn't returned since he saw the video of Siza and Siyakhula, however it will not stop him from eating his mother's food lest she is offended.

The room next to his belongs to his brother. He thinks he's hearing sexual sounds, and that has him pressing an ear against the shut door. This boy can't be so stupid to bring a woman into his father's house and have sex with her while their mother is in the house.

He bangs the door, before inviting himself in. There's no woman here, just his brother in front of a laptop and engrossed on the screen.

Mhlauli is four years younger than him, 23 with no direction in life. He's still enjoying daddy's money and is unashamed about it while Phangi is head in into the family business.

Their sister Sikhulile; named by her father, is the only fruit of MaKhuzwayo's womb. She came when Mlamuli was at his worst, suffering from a broken heart. The name Sikhulile was meant to take his burdens away. Seventeen years later, her presence in his life has done nothing to fix that which he broke. Mlamuli still yearns for the one he failed to love and his first born son.

"Ndoda close the door, they are almost done."

Not only is Mhlauli chasing his breath, he's half naked, lying on the bed with the laptop on his lap and a hand covering his sack. His eyes have grown small from lust.

Forgetting that, Phangi recognises the video playing, this one is not as clear as the one he saw.

He grabs the laptop and slams it shut, life has not only kicked him down once but twice.

“Are you sick or something? Why were you watching that?”

Mhlauli almost can't believe what is happening, it's not the first time Phangi has caught him watching p0rn. He's never had a problem with it.

They are siblings who don't subscribe to age.

“What's wrong with you? Since when does me watching p0rn affect you?”

Mhlauli is putting his clothes back on as he says this.

“That is not p0rn, that's my girlfriend.” He snaps, he's on the verge of breaking down. Can't his heart just stop breaking?

Mhlauli's face breaks a shocked expression

“Noooo, that's Siza? Umakoti?” The entire family knows about Siza and how much of an effect she has on Phangi.

The big brother sighs and settles down on the bed, he buries his face in his hands.

“I downloaded the video from X videos, it was uploaded last night. I mean the quality is bad but the sounds...” Mhlauli stops when he gets an ugly look from Phangi.

Moments of silence pass before he looks at his Mhlauli and asks, “Can she sue?”

Mhlauli puts his hand on his shoulder, “Don’t bother ndoda. I guess we will have to accept that we have a p0rn star in the family.”

He must be joking.

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SIYAKHULA-

Siza has been in there for too long, his shift starts at 12pm today. Khuzimpi will have to wrap it up.

His phone is ringing

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it's his brother calling him. They are estranged from each other because of their parents' choices.

The kids always catch fire when parents decide they can no longer tolerate each other. He wouldn't say he hates his brothers, he just doesn't want them near him and his beloved mother.

He rejects the call and accepts the one from his mother.

"Siyakhula, Thabo says there is a video of you and a pastor's daughter going around."

The news has reached KwaMashu. What is it with people and spreading things that have nothing to do with them?

"Don't listen to Thabo ma, you know how he is a gossip monger. Nothing of the sort has happened."

He has to lie to her, there is no other way to keep her heart beating right.

"Your cousin showed me the video Siyakhula, he even offered to get my glasses. Is that what you're doing in Joburg? What is your father going to say?"

Great way to piss him off.

"Don't talk to me about that man." His tone is accusing, he's forgetting who he is talking to.

“You can pretend that he doesn’t exist, it’s your choice. It still doesn’t change the fact that he is alive and he’s your father.”

“Ma, I beg of you please. I’m going to drop this call if you don’t stop.”

“You see, this is what happens when you start thinking you have grown. Is this how you speak to me now? I am your mother, Siyakhula. I know why I am pushing you to have a relationship with your father.”

A relationship with that man is one thing he is not interested in, he severed all ties with him when he left them.

“It’s not going to happen, don’t ever mention that man again.”

He’s done talking to her, he pushes his phone into his pocket and stands when he sees Siza.

She’s rushing to him, cautious eyes everywhere. A frown finds his face and questions fly around his head.

“Did he hit you?” Is the first thing he asks, Khuzimpi has a short fuse. He is quick to anger.

“You have to get out of here,” she’s whispering.

Siyakhula thinks she is losing her mind, he hasn’t seen the man who called him here.

“I have to talk to your father first.” That’s the whole reason why he’s here.

“You don’t understand Khula, no one wants you here. Go back to KZN, and don’t ever come back.”

He is not a child, such feeble words do not work on him.

“Gundi, take a deep breath and tell me what’s going on?”
Finally he brings a question forward.

“The police are on their way.” She mumbles for the two of them to hear.

“Why? What happened?” Siyakhula will continue dropping questions until she starts talking like a normal person.

“It’s about us... me and you, and the sex tape. It’s about the church, my father and his position.” Her answer is all over the place like a carrot cake.

Siyakhula grabs her upper arms, a gentle touch that stops her from talking gibberish. She looks up at him, wide eyes dangling in a pool of fear.

“Breathe and tell me what exactly is happening.” This is one patient man.

“I’m sorry Khula, I didn’t want to do this. But I have no choice, they said my father will be fired from church if I don’t agree to it “

“If you don’t agree to what?”

“If I don’t report you for r@pe,” she reveals.

Siyakhula is beyond flabbergasted, his hands loosen around her, but he remains standing dangerously close. Too close that if anyone had doubts that something is happening between them, this position would clear them.

“You agreed?” That was shaky.

“I’m sorry.”

Yeah! This word hurts as much as the pain she is causing him.

“I wouldn’t dream of hurting you Siza, why would you do this to me?”

She says nothing, in her eyes are tears. She shudders, rapidly blinks to force the tears away. They win and cover her face.

“That’s why I said leave, run away before the police get here.” She tells him.

Live his life as a fugitive is what she is asking of him, Siyakula has suddenly turned sour.

“Go, what are you waiting for?” She snaps and pushes him but Siyakhula doesn’t move an inch. He is looking at her, she is looking at him. So much is being said without any words leaving their mouths.

“I have a mother,” Siyakhula is first to break the silence. “I’m the only thing she has. Do I take her with me?”

A cloud of confusion hovers around Siza, “Khula?”

“Do I take my mother with me? Of course I will have to move from one town to another every month because fugitives don’t have an address. I want to know if I should take my mother with me.” He’s being sarcastic, it’s dry sarcasm.

This woman has no idea what a poor man like him has to do to get by in life, all her life, she has had everything handed to her. She didn’t have to fight for anything.

“Siyakhula, this is not a game. The police are on the way.”

“My life is not a game, Siza, but you and your family are playing with it. It’s my life, and you’re slowly destroying it.” He delivers through grinding teeth to control his voice.

“Okay fine, I’m a horrible person. Call me whatever names you want but go Khula, I am begging you to run. They’ll be here any minute.”

“I didn’t do anything wrong. I will fight for my rights.” He says, trying to sound unbothered.

“With what?” Khuzimpi is here, slowly walking towards them.

“You don’t have money to pay for a lawyer.”

They size each other up, Siyakhula is about 2 to 3 inches taller than Khuzimpi.

“I’m innocent Mpi, ask your daughter.”

“Don’t talk about my baby, don’t even dare look her way or I swear to God I will destroy you.” A man of God, swearing upon God?

Siyakhula briefly looks at Siza, she is trying so hard to control her tears, they won’t let her be.

“We didn’t mean what happened, I’m sorry brother... I would...”

Khuzimpi interjects, “I am not your brother. You destroyed our friendship when you took advantage of my baby.”

Maybe the problem here is that Khuzimpi sees Siza as a baby, if he could look over that, he would see that she is past her baby years.

“Remember what I told you the other day? Gundi is special to me, that night was a mistake Mpi. Yes I should’ve stopped it...”

“Then why didn’t you?” Another interjection from the pastor.

“It was in the punch, I could see everything only from a tunnelling view. I wanted to scream and make it stop, but it felt impossible. I swear on my mother’s life that all rationality was drained from my mind.”

He could go on and on, but it's no use. Khuzimpi has decided, there is no turning.

Trust the police to make their presence known with that loud siren.

"You're going to jail," Khuzimpi gloats.

He's still staring at his friend when Siza grabs his arm and drags him towards the kitchen.

"Use the back door, I told you to run before they get here. Why didn't you listen?" She's telling him as she opens the door.

Siyakhula stops, she looks at him dazed.

"Go please. I'm sorry. I didn't want this to happen." She says.

He stands in front of her and cups her face, causing her to look up at him.

"Only you can stop this Siza, tell the truth. Tell them I'm innocent, that we were both drunk. Tell them Gundi, I have a mother please. She won't survive the news of my arrest, please."

Siza is staring, their conversation has stopped here. Khuzimpi has let the police in through the front door.

Nomazulu and Qedakonke have come to be spectators, they are watching the police question a fearful Siyakhula and handcuff him when he doesn't confirm who he is.

His eyes are on Siza, pleading with her. She stands with arms folded, and tears her eyes from him.

“We're not perfect Siza, you are allowed to make mistakes. Don't do this to me, I will take any punishment but this one. We were wrong, it's a shared responsibility, but I am catching all the stones thrown at us.” His words are falling on deaf ears, Siza hides in her stepmother's arms as the police take him away.

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SIZA

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Sleep evaded me last night, I spent it tossing and turning, entertaining thoughts of Siyakhula behind bars.

I told him to run, all he had to do was listen to me. His stubbornness makes up for his very small vocabulary. In all my years on this god-forsaken world, I have never known anyone so stubborn.

Who am I kidding? No matter how much I insult him, it won't take away the strong feelings of guilt. I'm at my wit's end with worry.

Did I mention that I feel like the scum of the earth?

Drinking a sigh of exhaustion, I drag my body to a sitting position. My plan is to stay in bed the entire day, I really don't feel like seeing people. My face is plastered all over the internet, I lost followers on my Instagram and Twitter account. The people I thought love me have turned against me.

It's 10am, my stomach is growling yet my appetite is on strike. Nomazulu came in here a while ago and I pretended to be sleeping. I hate how she looks at me with pity in her eyes, I'm

also aware that her loyalty lies with her husband. It won't matter if I ask her to convince him to let Siyakhula go, she will blatantly refuse.

Oh God, who is knocking at my door?

"Come in." I grumble with disinterest.

He pushes the door open, carrying a tray of food. I can't smell anything, I hope it's not what I think it is.

"You didn't eat last night, I had to wake up early and make you porridge."

Uncle Qeda thinks I am a child, he loved feeding me porridge back in the day. I would keep the food in my mouth till it turned watery. I hated porridge then, I hate it now.

"Thank you, baba."

A smile stretches his lips, he loves it when I call him baba. I have always thought it was because he doesn't have children of his own, I was proven wrong when he told me that he is not interested in being a father. Uncle suits him better.

Uncle Qeda sits on the bed and hands me the plate, thank God he won't insist on feeding me.

"Did you sleep well?"

I shake my head no and put the plate aside.

“Did I do the right thing bab’omdala?”

Injustice can never be right. He is the only one who can tell me the truth. Everyone else is out to get Siyakhula that the truth has ceased to matter.

“What does your heart tell you?”

This question confuses me even more, my heart is a liar like my father. I don’t trust it to give me sound advice.

“I don’t want him in jail, he is not a bad person. But baba will lose everything, I can’t let that happen.”

“Siza, you were made to choose between two men who love you dearly, and you chose your father.”

Siyakhula can’t possibly love me, especially after what I’ve done to him.

“Loyalty is important in our family, but that doesn’t mean we should make wrong decisions because we are loyal to the ones we love. Siyakhula is a good man, if you feel that what you did was wrong, fix it.” He continues.

Not all broken things can be fixed, what’s done is done. Siyakhula will never forgive me.

“How do I fix this bab’omdala without causing my father’s down fall? I have tarnished his name and church, he was given a second chance to lead his people. I can’t take that away from him, I can’t be the reason behind his heart break.”

“Only you know what you need to do, listen to your heart. It will never lead you astray. I can tell you this, that Phakathwayo is not the same, he's hurting. Siyakhula was like a brother to him, not once did he think he would betray him by sleeping with his daughter.”

Does he really have to put it like that? I didn’t do it on purpose, my father of all people should know that mistakes are common. He preaches forgiveness but fails to apply his own teachings.

“Listen, I have errands to run. Think about what I said, and don’t forget that I’m here for you. As much as I am here for you, I’m also on the side of the truth. Do the right thing baby.” He kisses my cheek and leaves me to my misery.

I sink down on the bed, covering myself with a blanket. All I need is to be left alone, but no, here’s another one coming to disrupt my peace.

“When are you getting out of bed? It’s almost midday.” Nomazulu has never had a problem with me sleeping in.

“I’m not ready to face the world aunty.” I say.

She gives me that look of pity I hate so much, shockingly, it turns me into a marshmallow and I break into tears.

Nomazulu rushes to sit beside me, “My baby it’s okay.”

I sniff, wiping the stupid tears away.

“It’s not okay aunty, it will never be okay.”

She drags me up to hug me.

“Tell me what you’re thinking.” Her voice is motherly and comforting.

“Everyone expected me to choose between my father and his best friend, and I chose my father. Was I wrong to do that?”

“What I know is that the church was wrong, they shouldn’t have put you and your father in that position. An innocent man is behind bars, his life will be destroyed if he gets trialled. It’s up to you to right your wrongs baby.” She says.

I didn’t know this is how she feels, the look she gave Siyakhula yesterday had me thinking she hates him too.

“You always have a solution, please tell me what to do.” I plead.

She is a wise woman, if anyone can get through to my father, it is her.

“Phakathwayo and I are married, I have to stand by him no matter what. If I say drop the charges and he finds out I advised you to, I might lose my husband. I can’t tell you what to do Gundi, you are not a baby anymore. You know the difference between wrong and right.” She wipes my tears and stands.

“Now get up, and brush your teeth, your friend is here to see you.”

Hlelo came without calling first? She’s not the type that pitches up uninvited.

“I didn’t know you and Bonisile are friends.”

Who is Bonisile?

“I don’t know anyone by that name, aunty,” I hold in an eye roll.

It must be someone from the papers wanting information about the case. How can she be so naïve not to tell?

“Of course you know Bonisile, she’s in our cell group and volunteers at church.”

Nomazulu is trying hard to make me remember this person, and my mind won’t give her the satisfaction.

Her face crinkles in disappointment, “She cleans the church Saturdays, her mother is MaShezi, the woman that sells fat-cakes and chips outside the church building.”

“Let her in aunty,” I still don’t know who she’s talking about.
If I don’t send her away, she won’t stop.

Oh! This Bonisile... I’ve seen her at church, had one or two conversations with her. She’s mostly acquainted with Siyakhula.

“Hi Siza.”

She’s standing at my door, fiddling with her fingers. I don’t know why my eyes take in her black washed out jeans, and the wrinkly sky-blue t-shirt she’s wearing. I know Mr. Price when I see it.

“Hey Boni, this is a surprise.”

Why is she here again?

She lifts her eyes and returns my greeting with a small smile.

“You don’t look okay, is there anything I can do to help?”

This is my house, she came to find me. Do I look like I need help?

“Why are you here Bonisile?”

“I just came to see how you slept in your comfortable bed

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I couldn't help it. I mean not everyone is fortunate to live in luxury."

This girl! Did she just...

She's looking around my room, the smile on her face leaves me confused. Her voice carries undertones of disrespect, yet her face is kind.

"Do you think Siyakhula was able to sleep on the cold floor?" She says, I wish to say with zero conviction. But nope, this girl is testing every patience I have left.

"Why are you here?" I repeat my previous question, I don't want to be rude and tell her shit.

"How do you live with yourself after getting an innocent man arrested? I thought I should remind you sisi that Karma is a bitch and when it finds you..."

How did I not see this coming and from Bonisile of all people? Her innocent face would fool you, I am shocked.

"Get out of my house before I call the police." I snap, my body buzzing with irritation.

A flurry of emotions cover her face, it's not hard to tell that she loathes me.

"I didn't know that behind that pretty face lies a black heart. Siyakhula is a good man, good always wins. May thunder strike

you and your bank balance, maybe you will start treating people with kindness.” She rushes out, before I clap back.

That little brat.

I have to see Siyakhula, I won't be at peace if I don't.

SIYAKHULA-

Some officer said today is his bail hearing, with a public prosecutor as his presentative, chances of him sleeping in his bed tonight are next to nothing.

The jail guard told him that he has a visitor and brought him to the visiting room.

He’s praying for lawyer, or a release from this place. Not this woman walking in here, wearing big sunglasses, six inch heels and a body hugging black leather dress. Her soft braids are loosely dangling above the small of her back.

There’s an empty chair on the other side of the table, she pulls it and sits. Before saying anything to him, she digs into her bag and takes out a yellow lunch box.

“Here, eat. They don’t serve real food in this place, plus it’s not hygienic.” The lunch tin is pushed to him.

Siyakhula welcomes it with a blank stare, he is not going to touch it.

“What are you doing here?” He asks.

They are not friends, he has every right to ask.

“How are you?” Siza answers his question with a question and that pulls Siyakhula’s last patience. He pushes his chair and stands, not forgetting to pierce his eyes at her.

“Are you here to gloat?” He asks.

Siza stands, “No...”

“Then what are you doing here?” –him.

“I want to make peace Siyakhula, I don’t want you to go away like this.”

Oh! That’s the reason she is here. It would’ve been nice if she had come to drop the charges.

“Whatever it is you are doing, stop it. You’ve done enough, I want nothing from you.” Siyakhula tells her.

She has to remove her sunglasses for this.

“Please don’t push me away, I want...”

“What? You want me to accept your apology? You want us to be friends?”

“Yes,” she gives him a sympathetic look, guiding her hand to his cheek.

Siyakhula never thought he would be disgusted by her touch, there are too many emotions written on his face. He wants nothing to do with her, the further she is away from him the better but for the life of him, he's struggling to separate himself from her warm hand.

He closes his eyes, their foreheads meet.

"Please..." her voice almost breaks.

He can't really say what is happening, nor can he control himself. The pull between them is too strong for him to ignore, it weakens every fibre in his body.

He's looking down at her, and she is staring back. Her trembling lips are trying to form words, she's breathing fast. He runs his thumb over her lower lip, and that causes her to gasp breathlessly.

"You are bad news Siza... stay away from me," his words are barely above a whisper.

"Please... don't ask me to leave." The second plea brings him back to reality, he blinks and jolts away from her.

"Go Siza..." His eyes are glossy with pain, he is overwhelmed by a feeling of defeat. Siza is not here to drop the charges. She is here to... he is not sure why she is here.

He is almost walking away when she grabs his hand,

“What do you want from me, Khula? I’m trying here.” She didn’t intend to yell at him.

He gives her a soft glare, “You are not trying hard enough Siza, clearly.”

He gestures around the room with his hand.

“You don’t understand what I’m going through, I have it worse than you do. What about me and how I feel? I am going through shit Siyakhula, but you don’t care about that. You are only looking at things from your angle.”

“Which angle is that?” He’s asking out of wonder, otherwise he is bewildered by her selfishness.

“It was either you or my father, and I chose him. I had to choose him, he is my father.” She says.

If Siyakhula ever had any doubts where he stands with her, they have been cleared.

“Sizalobuhle!” A voice behind the door shouts, Khuzimpi has found her.

Her eyes are wide and questioning as she looks up at Siyakhula, she doesn’t get time to ask a question. Khuzimpi has just walked in with his wife.

“Phakathwayo?”

Khuzimpi is pissed, he grips her hand and pulls her to him.

“What are you doing here Siza?”

“You followed me, baba?” Siza asks with a frown on her face.

“You are a naïve little girl, I knew you were having regrets when I heard you continuously mumbling Siyakhula’s name in your sleep last night.”

She’s embarrassed, she doesn’t remember dreaming about Siyakhula.

She looks at the man in question, her eyes drop when she finds him looking back at her.

In his eyes are many questions, he’s utterly shaken by Khuzimpi’s revelation. When Siza musters the courage to look up at him again, Siyakhula frowns at the look on her face.

She is consumed by guilt, that’s the only reason he’s haunting her dreams.

“You didn’t have to follow me, baba, I am not a child.” Her voice reeks with frustration.

Khuzimpi huffs, “I had to make sure that you don’t change your mind.”

His easy gaze chases Siyakhula, he clicks his tongue when their eyes clash.

“We’re going home Siza.” Khuzimpi says, keeping his stern gaze on Siyakhula.

“I know my way home baba, you go ahead”

He looks at her, “I’m not leaving you with this criminal. You are not even supposed to be here. What will the police say when they hear that you visited your r@pist?” –Khuzimpi.

Siyakhula tries not to look offended, he is in no mood to argue and prove his innocence. There is no point anyway.

“Baba please, don’t fight me on this. I need to talk to Siyakhula, I need to...”

Khuzimpi reaches out to grip her wrist, she winces and squirms as he starts dragging her towards the exit.

“Ouch, baba.” Siza squeals. “I’m not done talking with him, just give us a minute please.”

A minute is what Khuzimpi doesn’t have, this is his daughter and he is taking her home with him.

10

SIZA

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I am squirmish and that's saying it lightly, Nomazulu bought the dress I'm wearing yesterday. It's right above the knee and fits loosely on my body. She said I need to look presentable for church this morning, I feel suffocated in it.

It's a week after I visited Siyakhula, I haven't seen him since then, nor heard anything about him.

This morning I was on Google searching how men are affected by false accusations of rape, the findings left me shaking and bothered. I wouldn't want him to harm himself, I plan on visiting him again after church of course without my father's knowledge.

"MaQwabe, are you ready?"

That's Phakathwayo knocking on my door.

"Do I have a choice?" I mumble to myself.

I hear his footsteps strolling away. I look at the piece of paper on the dressing table, my heart wrenches in irritation. Last

night before I went to bed, my father said I have to address the church this morning.

Everything I need to say is written in this piece of paper, every word written on it makes me want to gag.

They expect me to stand in the house of the God they claim to serve and lie about Siyakhula being a pervert and pedophile. They want me to tell the church that he's been molesting young girls in the youth.

I don't want to go to church, but I don't know how to escape my father.

I grab my belongings and head to the living room when he calls my name.

The family looks ready for church, Simengaye and Ndlelezhle are in matching outfits. Nomazulu of course won't forget her two piece suits and my father... well he's dressed to impress. He's preaching this morning.

"Baba, I don't understand why I have to go to church."

He looks like he is done with me and my complaints.

"We are saving the church Siza, you messed up and now it's time to clean up the mess you made. Take responsibility for your actions."

I hear him but he's asking me to do the opposite, turn a blind eye to my responsibility.

Sure, I put the blame on Siyakhula but I was angry. I resented him for letting us go that far, but things are different now. I know we made a mistake.

I see that night in my dreams. It comes to me vividly, he didn't force himself on me.

"I'm still young baba, can't we just let this go and move on. I don't want to be caught in this mess anymore."

"You were always free to do whatever you wanted." He is lying.

"It's time we do things my way, do what I say and you will be fine." He says.

"You want me to add to my lies Phakathwayo." I whisper so the girls don't hear."

"Stop thinking a lot, you'll be fine." He squeezes my shoulder, it's not comforting.

"Let's go to church, we shouldn't keep God waiting." He takes the girl's hands and walks out.

Talking to him is like pouring water on a duck's back.

"You'll be fine," Nomazulu says, slightly patting my face.

If I'm going to be fine like she says, why do I feel like my life is about to go from bad to worse?

Church should have been closed today, we are still recovering from last week. It's days like these that I hate that the Gumedede blood runs in my veins.

Uncle Qeda is not going, when asked this morning, he said God kicked him out years ago. The story as I have heard it is that he has never been to church. That's why his parents chose my father to lead and not their eldest son.

We arrive in less than ten minutes, it's still early. The parking lot is empty. I rush inside, leaving my family behind.

I'm greeted by mocking laughter from a bunch of young women cleaning the chairs. That brat Bonisile is among them, by the looks of it, I am the joke of the morning. Her eyes are on me as I hurry to one of the empty rooms.

Phakathwayo makes me so mad sometimes, I told him I didn't want to come to church. People won't sympathize with me, they saw the video. They are not stupid, they will know I'm lying when I stand on that podium and read the speech he prepared.

Phangi is calling, it's the first time since he chased me out of his house. I still have time to talk to him, problem is that I don't know what I'm going to say to him.

Do I accept that I slept with Siyakhula? I close the door and take his call.

"Wow, not even a call back Sizalobuhle?"

Hau! I thought he wanted nothing to do with me.

I can't explain why I didn't bother calling to beg for a second chance. Maybe I've been too busy with this Siyakhula issue, that my mind placed him far at the back. I feel bad, he is the man I love.

"You asked me to leave your house Phangi, I thought you needed space."

Thinking is not always good, see where it has led me.

"I know what I said, but you could've tried to contact me. Let me know and feel that you still care. Your silence hurts Siza."

That was not my intention, I'd never intentionally hurt him.

"I'm sorry baby, I'm also sorry about everything."

He doesn't give me a reply, I hear him sigh which means he's listening and possibly considering forgiving me.

“Can I come over to your house, I’ll bring pizza and wine...” And juice because he doesn’t drink, unless he’s fallen in love with Whiskey.

“I’m in Bergville, I don’t know when I’ll be back in town. Siza, calling you doesn’t mean I have forgiven you. You cheated on me...”

Yoh! He’ll remind me forever this one.

What’s the point of continuing with this lie? The truth is out there.

“I’m sorry, sthandwa sam.” I tell him and wait for a snappy clap-back.

“You’re sorry? You cheated and all you have to say to me is that you are sorry? Where has that ever gotten anyone in life? You are self-centered Sizalobuhle, and I’m starting to think you led me on. You don’t love me, you never did.”

Haibo! I gave him three years of my life, I wouldn’t have stayed if I didn’t love him.

“Don’t say that to me Phangizitha, I’m not going to let you doubt my love for you neither am I going to justify your claims with a response.”

If he wants me to run after him it’s not going to happen. That’s not who I am.

Strangely I find myself chasing after Siyakhula, there's something drawing me to him. It could be out of guilt that I find myself worrying about him.

I hear him snort, "I don't know what I ever saw in you. You don't have a heart Sizalobuhle."

"Pha..."

The call has died. I can't do this anymore, it's too much for me. How do I scream without being heard?

"Your father is having tea in the lounge, come join us before the service starts." Nomazulu informs me as she lets herself in. There is never privacy in this place.

She admires the dress I have on and fixes my braids, not that there is anything wrong with them.

"Are you ready for today?"

What is there to be ready for? I am about to further destroy Siyakhula's life. She reads my sigh and cups my face.

"Bab'omdala said to follow my heart." I say that unconsciously, and I swear her face just turned pale.

"What is your heart telling you?"

"The truth," I say.

I need her honest advice regarding this, not her silence. Nomazulu is different from my father, and more understanding.

“You don’t want to address the church anymore?” She asks, I answer with a nod. “Is it the speech?”

“Siyakhula is not a pedophile, he didn’t molest anyone aunty. You and I know that he didn’t rape me either.”

I’m startled when she cups my mouth, “Shhh! Keep your voice down.”

What is happening?

She looks over her shoulder, eyes scanning the shut door.

“Your father is the church leader, he will get in trouble if any of the congregants hear you say that.”

This woman!

“But aunty, you told me to do what’s right, I don’t want to lie. This is the house of God, what if he strikes me with lightning?”

She breaks into laughter, I cannot find humor in what I said. I’m terrified, shaking in my boots. If the truth ever surfaces, we will get into trouble.

“That only happens in movies baby,” she tells me as she steps back to admire my outfit. She is happy about this dress, I’m going to donate it.

“On a serious note Siza, don’t break your father’s heart.” She articulates and I am not following.

This is the same woman who told me to do the right thing knowing well that the right thing might break her husband’s heart. I feel like she is deliberately juggling my emotions.

I wish my mother was here

she would tell me what to do.

With a huge smile on her face, she takes my hand and ushers me to the lounge. People have started filling the auditorium and the thought of it filled to the brim churns my insides.

The smell of fat cakes worsens it, I won’t be able to stomach even a sip of tea.

The lounge is crowded, Bonisile and her mother are squashed next to each other.

Our eyes clash upon my arrival, I have never paid attention to this girl till last week when she came to my house to disrespect me. I don’t think I like her very much.

“Sizalobuhle, you look beautiful mntanam.” That’s her mother, she never misses a chance to tell me how good I look.

I return her kind smile, “Thank you mah.”

Her daughter’s eyes roll to the back of her head, I don’t care about her.

“Come sit next to me,” my father says.

Not to be rude or anything, I would rather be far from him. I can’t stand him right now, not after those lies he wrote about Siyakhula.

I choose a seat that’s far from him, the pain in his eyes feels like a kick in my stomach.

“MaShezi made these fat cakes for us, I thought it would be nice to have her and her daughter join us for tea.”

Is this father talking to me? I am not interested in these fat cakes or the tea.

Bonisile’s eyes are burning holes on my temple. I want to know what her problem is, does she have a thing for Siyakhula? The thought makes me uneasy, I shuffle and challenge her with a stare. This girl is not going to look away, she is stubborn and I hate her.

“Don’t you like amagwinya sis’ Siza?” The brat shoves a plate of fat cakes under my nose, I push it away.

“I’m fine thanks,” I’m sure she hears the attitude in my voice. The shrug makes me more annoyed, she puts the plate back on the table and continues to stare at me.

Someone clears their throat, I lose the staring contest to find my father spitting a mouth full of fat cakes into a serviette. His face is scrunched up in disgust.

“What’s wrong Mfundisi?” The worry in MaShezi’s voice.

“Did you put tripe inside the fat cakes?” My father.

If Mashezi’s eyes don’t fall out of their sockets today, then God is definitely good.

“Tripe? That’s not possible.” She grabs one from my father’s plate and breaks it open, and lo and behold, a piece of hairy tripe was baked inside the fat cakes.

The old woman is quickly captured by panic as she breaks all the fat cakes, they are all the same. Some have cow intestines, why would she put tripe in her fat cakes?

Defeated but mostly embarrassed, MaShezi stands with hands on her hips. When an African mother takes this posture, and looks at you the way she is looking at Bonisile, RUN!

“What did you do?” She asks her daughter who shrugs in return.

Bonisile folds her arms, her decision to remain quiet will get her killed in church by her own mother.

“Bonisile,” she grabs her ears, pulling her up from her seat. “I will drag you out of this church like a goat and embarrass you in front of everyone. Don’t try me.”

Yep! I believe MaShezi.

Bonisile looks like the wincing goat she was promised to be turned into.

“It’s just mogodu, mah. It’s not like I put cockroaches.”

Oh, so she did it deliberately?

“Why would you do something so stupid? What is wrong with you?”

Bonisile finally breaks away, she’s rubbing her ears while killing me with her angry eyes.

“I was trying out a new recipe, that’s all.” She explains, I don’t believe a word she has said. This is a punishment of sort, she made it clear that day that she is on Siyakhula’s side.

“New recipe yothuvi...” MaShezi is quick to realize her mistake, she covers her mouth and gives my father many apologies.

Phakathwayo is all smiles and a kind face, if only MaShezi knew how conniving he is.

“It’s okay mah, and don’t punish Boni. Kids love to explore, I understand.” -Phakathwayo.

I am not looking at a kid, Bonisile is older than me. Who cares that she is ageing gracefully like most black women?

Can drop dead...

I am entertaining borderline diabolical thoughts when I hear someone choking, and that catches my attention. Phakathwayo is hunched over, Nomazulu has a serviette pressed to his mouth while patting his back.

Predicting that Bonisile has done something again, I look over at her. She looks ready to run out of here.

“What’s wrong Mfundisi?” MaShezi is going to have a heart attack, she is giving Bonisile a death stare.

“The tea is salty and chilli,” my father mumbles as he pushes a glass of water to his face and gulps down the liquid.

“Bonisile?” MaShezi barks, I think I should call an ambulance. She is going to pass out.

“The tea was meant for Siza...”

What? Why is this child lying?

She sees I’m about to call her out on her lies and cuts me.

“She played a prank on me last Sunday, so I was returning the favor. We play like that, all the time. Tell them Siza.”

I don't even know you.

She should be pleading with those eyes staring at me, but she looks cocky and conniving. She has something up her sleeve, I just know it.

“Right Siza?”

She's pushing it and that smile is the fakest thing I have ever seen. I should get her in trouble because she means nothing to me, but I find myself shrugging and looking away from her intense stare.

“That's it, your uncle will hear about this. Are you trying to kill me, Bonisile? God will punish you, stupid child. Don't you know you don't touch his anointed?” MaShezi is blowing up.

“But God's anointed has been touched, he's currently behind bars.” Bonisile confirms my suspicions.

I knew this was about Siyakhula, she can't be his girlfriend. I mean, she is not his type.

“Voetsek!” MaShezi smacks her on the head.

Old people are forgetful, and this one has forgotten that she is in the house of God and in the presence of a pastor. She is dishing cuss words like it's Christmas.

“I’m sorry, Mfundisi. This child is bringing the devil in me, kids are a gift from the devil.” Ehh!

I wouldn’t want to be Phakathwayo right now.

“Not you Siza, you are a gift from heaven.” MaShezi’s repentance tickles me.

“You mean the leader of the women’s conference in hell.” Bonisile is directing that at me, I am not going to take her bullshit anymore.

“Say that to my face wena nja!” I size her up, she’s as tall as I am. I want to slap her out of this church.

“Madam Satan...” she spits without blinking.

My hands are itching, why haven’t I punched this bitch?

I will not be undermined by the likes of her.

What ticks me off the most is the audacity to come to my house just to warn me to stay clear of Siyakhula as if she sleeps on his chest every damn night.

If she thinks she has a chance with him, she better stop dreaming before I crush them.

“I am not your friend Bonisile, I will not take your nonsense.”

There is someone pulling my hand, “Siza stop it and act your age.”

What does Nomazulu mean I must act my age? This girl is in my face and I am itching to set her straight.

“No aunty, let me deal with Miss Thunder strike you.” I pull away from my aunt’s grip.

“Excuse me?” Bonisile asks, clearly confused by my choice of words.

“You said thunder will strike me—thunder doesn’t strike sweetie, lightning does.” I remind her, she is lucky I am kind enough to correct her.

Bonisile arrogantly claps her hands, “Khuphuka Dictionary, thank our tithes and offerings for taking you to private schools. Which was a waste of money ngoba umqondo ugwcele ubulongwe, no wonder you are so dumb and sending innocent men to jail. Your head can’t be big and useless, choose a struggle sthandwa.” She mocks me.

(Your head is filled with cow dung.)

I feel every vein in me vibrate, I’m close to grabbing her by her cheap braids and moping the floor with her when her mother forces herself in between us, and slaps her daughter across the face.

11

SIZA-

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A certain pastor once said, the Son of God's name is not Jesus, but Yeshua. I never took that into consideration, I mean for centuries he's been called Jesus. Yeshua was left for the Jews to use. But what if that is true?

What if we are using the wrong name, that's why you find pastors like Phakathwayo? Maybe Yeshua doesn't respond because we are using the wrong name to call upon him. I am not deep into Christianity, but I know what I am about to do is a sin. I know that God is against it. Maybe that stupid girl Bonisile has every right to judge me.

I'm standing on the podium, my father and Nomazulu are sitting behind me.

We just finished praise and worship, I was then asked to come on stage. My hands are shaky and sweaty.

My eyes browse the crowded auditorium, these people will not believe me. I see it in their eyes, how they are throwing silent slurs at me.

A hand on my shoulder turns my head around, it's my father probably giving me "moral support."

"You've got this," he whispers into my ear.

If only he knew how weak I am, I should drop dead right here and never wake up.

I upturn my eyes to the ceiling and have a moment of silence for my departed mother. I have never craved for a mother till today, she would know what to do.

I direct my eyes at the congregation, "I greet you in the house of God."

"Amen." They say in agreement.

My throat feels dry, I need a glass of water. But I'm afraid I will fall if I take a step, that's how weak my knees are.

"I don't know where to begin, this is harder than asking my father for his bank card."

It's meant to be a joke and I'm a little relieved that they catch it and laugh with me, although the only thing I manage is a dry chuckle.

I clear my throat trying to get rid of the lump in it.

"What I need to say is written in this paper, but I think I should speak from the heart."

I fold the paper and put it in my pocket.

That loud gasp of panic belongs to Nomazulu, I might panic as well if I turn and see their faces.

I look at the people in front of me, it helps that Bonisile is not here. That girl gives me unnecessary anxiety. Still, in her absence I feel an uncomfortable atmosphere.

“I’m sure you all know that I am not perfect, no one here is.” They turn to each other, dazed by what I just said.

“My father is a pastor, my grandfather was a pastor. I know from the outside some of you think we are a perfect family and that we don’t fall into temptation.” I take a deep sigh, preparing myself for the inevitable.

To say I am exasperated would be an understatement. I never thought a day would come where I would be responsible for an innocent man’s downfall. I can only cross my fingers that one day, Siyakhula will forgive me.

“Pastor Mbatha is behind bars, he was arrested at my house last week after our sex tape was leaked.”

There is a hand on my shoulder, I can recognise my father’s strong grip. He’s not here to comfort, but to control what I say. He wants to make sure that I follow his rule. I don’t turn to him, but look at the pastors sitting at the front. Ngcobo, Gwala and

the CEO Mr. Hendricks. Their families are with them, children and grandchildren.

“Mr. Ngcobo, your wife and kids look beautiful.” Ngcobo smiles at my compliment.

“Stick to the plan.” My father mumbles behind me, digging his fingers into my shoulder.

Of course I am sticking to the plan, I am still talking to Ngcobo.

“I’m sure you would do anything to protect your family, am I right Mr. Ngcobo?” He gives me another smile, nodding in response.

“We have something in common, I would also do anything for the people I love. My father, my sisters and my mother.”

I have to call her that in front of people, just to paint that perfect family picture. I glance at my father beside me.

“Baba, I love you. You mean the world to me and I will always choose you over anyone and anything, but not when that thing goes against everything I believe in.” I pause, seeing his serious expression.

I have gone so far, there is no backing out now.

“Don’t do this,” he mutters under his breath.

I turn back to the congregation and speak into the mic.

“Siyakhula Mbatha is innocent, he didn’t r@pe me.”

Many voices rise, causing chaos in the auditorium. It’s too loud and disordered for me to make out what they are saying.

When I feel my father’s grip on my arm, I yank it back and continue speaking.

“Pastor Mbatha is a good man, he would never hurt anyone. What happened that night was a mistake, our drinks were spiked. We don’t know who did it, but whoever you are, I will find you.”

I’m speaking above their voices, my father grabs the mic. I am not done talking, and Nomazulu is dragging me away.

“I can’t believe you would do this to your father.” She whisper yells when we get to the lounge.

“You told me to do the right thing, and that’s what I did.” I answer in total confusion.

“I said don’t break his heart, but you went and did the opposite. Congratulations Siza, you just killed your father. He will never recover from this.”

My father will have to recover, I couldn’t help it. It was either him or me, I too wouldn’t have survived Siyakhula serving time all because of me.

“I did the right thing aunty, I told the truth.” Her narrowed eyes speak of hate before she turns around and bangs the table with her fist. The sound is deafening, I can’t imagine what has gotten into her.

Nomazulu confuses me

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one minute she is on 6 then she’s on 1. Keeping up with her personalities is exhausting.

“Do you know what you have done? You chose an outsider over your father.” She says.

How is Siyakhula suddenly an outsider? He was treated like family since day one.

“I didn’t choose Siyakhula aunty, I chose myself. I was going to hate myself had I lied about him.” I tell her.

The silence that attacks us makes me edgy, she’s staring too deep. It feels like her eyes are vacuuming my soul.

“Go home Siza, we will talk when we get home.” She dismisses me with a wave. I want to go, I have served my purpose.

The door bangs loudly as Nomazulu slams it behind her. I request an Uber and hurry outside.

It's empty, it's good that I won't have to see people.

I want to tell Siyakhula the good news, tell him that he gets to go home. He doesn't have his phone with him though, I'll go see him during visiting hours.

The Uber arrives in less than 5 minutes, the poor guy is making small talk. He is asking about the church and answering his own questions. I am not in the mood to talk, nor am I listening to him.

I get home and hurry to my room and bury my face in the pillow, this is the only way I can hide from the world.

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The sound of my name echoing in my ears wakes me up, I flick my eyes open. For a minute, I almost can't recognise my surroundings. It slowly comes to me, I'm in my room and I had fallen asleep.

"Phakathwayo?" Didn't I leave this man at church?

My eyes flicker to the watch on the wall, it's past 4pm. How long have I been sleeping?

"Get up," my father waves his hand, gesturing me to get off the bed.

“Baba?”

He arches an eyebrow, showing me he is dead serious.

“Get off my bed, I paid for it with my money.” He is looking at me with attentive eyes, assessing me from head to toe.

“I want you out of my house this instance.” He says.

There is something in his tone that makes me feel like he is not joking. My father wouldn't do this to me.

I look to Nomazulu for answers, she folds her arms and looks away.

I am going to hold my ground, “Phakathwayo, you are joking right?”

His piercing eyes flash, “You are cut off Sizalobuhle and you're dead to me.”

No. No. He can't do this to me, I'm his daughter.

“I'm not leaving.” I back up against the wardrobe, ignoring my speeding heart.

Seemingly annoyed by my tenacity, my father snatches my hand and starts lugging me out the door and down the stairway.

“Baba, don’t do this.” I plead, trying to break free from his hold. He’s stronger than me, I have nothing against him. Nothing to fight for me, not even the fact that his blood runs in my veins.

“Bab’omdala, Bab’omdala.” I scream for my uncle.

Where the hell is he? Why is he not coming?

As we get to the corridor, I press my feet on the ground and apply force. Frustration builds up on Phakathwayo’s face, I try to bundle myself into a ball on the floor. But he won’t release my hand, he’s pulling me and it hurts.

“Aunty tell him to stop, please.” I beg.

Nomazulu is looking at me with sympathetic eyes.

I understand that she is loyal to him, but I should mean something to her as well. Phakathwayo grabs my legs and begins dragging me like a sack.

“Please... baba please don’t throw me out.” I’m screaming, tears trickling down my face.

The girls come running, Simengaye screams while Ndlelezhle covers her face with her top.

“Baba, what are you doing to my sister?” Simengaye questions at the top of her voice, I can hear fear in it.

Her innocence does not touch my father's heart, he opens the door and with the final push, tosses me out the house.

I get on my knees, hating myself for not being able to control the disgusting tears of weakness.

"Please baba, I'm your daughter. Your baby."

He shakes his head slightly, "You came into this world with nothing and you are leaving my house with nothing. Everything you have belongs to me, your phone, your clothes, including that dress you have on. You are dead to me Sizalobuhle..." His declaration rips through my heart.

I'm such a pathetic loser, I'm whimpering on the ground, and clearly making a fool of myself.

"No Phakathwayo, you can't disown me. You are the only parent I have, don't kick me out please."

When pleading with him fails, I turn my eyes to Nomazulu and the girls.

"I don't want to go aunty, Simi, Zinhle. Talk to him, please." I plead, watching my sisters sobbing. I have never seen them so afraid before.

"How am I going to survive out there baba?"

He sneers at me, and roughly grabs my braids. I wince in pain as I grip his wrist. I can see contempt in his eyes, he is voicing out his opinions of me without actually uttering a single words.

“You are not my problem anymore, you can kill yourself or sell yourself for all I care.” He spits, and shoves me to the ground.

My entire world comes crushing down when he shuts the door, locking me outside.

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PHANGI-

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He is in the kitchen fixing a quick snack before dinner when MaKhuzwayo toddles in, she's carrying a washing basket containing a winter blanket.

"Ngonyama, you're here."

He's the only child she calls by his clan name because in her head, he is the oldest.

"Let me help you with that." He leaves his plate and takes the basket from MaKhuzwayo.

"Where is Sikhulile? This is her job Mah, she can't expect you to be running around carrying heavy things." He complains.

The old lady pulls a chair and sits down, taking down a blanket from the washing line has left her tired and panting. She doesn't mind though, Sikhulile is her only biological child. Spoiling her is not a big deal.

"It's going to rain tomorrow, I had to wash your sister's blankets. All her blankets smell like sweat because she sleeps

with her head covered, no matter how hot it is.” MaKhuzwayo reveals.

“Sikhulile hasn’t outgrown that silly habit? She will suffocate in her sleep if she continues like that.” He says as he walks out of the kitchen with the washing basket.

When he comes back, MaKhuzwayo is gulping down a glass of water.

“Have you spoken to your father?” She asks.

He didn’t, there was a message from him telling him to call him. Phangi sighs and scratches his head.

“No,” his answer is short.

“He sounded worried, call him please.” She is her husband’s spokesperson after all.

“Mah, can’t I just enjoy my vacation without ubaba bugging me? Who told him that I’m home anyway? I didn’t want him finding out.”

Their relationship isn’t the best one out there, Mlamuli’s yearning for his first son has created a barrier between him and his children. The two youngest don’t seem to be bothered that much by it, but this one is slowly growing to resent his old man.

MaKhuzwayo has been here before, she tried more than once to get Phangi to like his father but failed.

Who said trying once again guarantees success?

“Where is Mhlauli? I haven’t seen him since yesterday.” She diverts the conversation.

Come to think of it, Phangi hasn’t seen him either. His eyebrows furrow as he tries to recall the last time he saw his little brother.

“Let me call him, I hope he hasn’t gotten himself in some trouble. I am not helping him this time.”

This time because Mhlauli is forever falling into the hands of trouble, Phangi has tried talking to him. A foolish move to want to tame a ravenous 23 year-old.

MaKhuzwayo is growing worried, that boy is the reason her heart is always racing.

“He’s not answering the phone, but it’s ringing.” –Phangi reports.

A ringing phone could mean that he is alive wherever he is.

Phangi’s phone vibrates in his hand, he swipes the screen on. There’s a message from Mhlauli.

My brother has been arrested, I'm going to get him out.

The message reads.

“Yoh! Yoh! Yoh! Mhlauli mahn, I swear that boy's mother banged his head somewhere when he was a baby.”

He's letting anger and pain speak on his behalf, his outburst doubles MaKhuzwayo's worries.

“What happened?” She pushes herself to the edge of the chair.

“Mhlauli is in Joburg, he's going to see our brother.”

Mhlauli is one of the people in his life that has a soft spot for that fool he calls a brother.

“Ay! Aksenani.” (What can we say?)

MaKhuzwayo says with a deep sigh and relaxes back on the chair.

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SIZA-

The Khumalos are not home, I've been buzzing the gate for hours. I thought they had a maid who answers the intercom.

They are our neighbours, I can't say they are family friends. Our relationship with them starts and ends with greetings, they are nice people. Mr and Mrs Khumalo are a young couple with a four year-old boy. My father respects Mr. Khumalo, so I'm hoping with fingers crossed that he will be able to speak to him on my behalf.

There's a car coming, I recognise that black Fortuner. Where is Phakathwayo going?

I press my back against the wall, watching him drive past. He doesn't bother to look my way. What have I gotten myself into?

I sink down on the paving, I will wait here till the Khumalos come home.

The sun is slowly withering, it's going to be dark soon. This might be a gated community, but the crime rate is insanely high.

The gate opens, I thought no one was home. I stand to my feet and hurry inside. Martha their maid opens the door and waves before I get to her.

"I saw you through the cameras, how long have you been sitting there?" She asks, greeting me with a smile.

“Hi sisi, unjani?” I have to greet first, elders are easily offended.

“I’m fine my child, come in.” She steps aside as I slide into the house, entering through the kitchen.

“You can sit down, sisi.”

I pull a chair and accept the glass of water from her, she stands with folded arms. That look in her eyes is her trying to read me, I don’t blame her. Nomazulu is the only one in our family who ever comes here, otherwise it’s the Khumalos who come over to our house.

“Are the Khumalos here?” I ask.

“No, they are in Cape Town on holiday.”

Yikes! I need to have back up, sleeping over here is not an option. I have to talk to my father and get him to take me back.

“I need to make a phone call sisi, do you perhaps have airtime?” I ask while feeling bad for having to bother the poor lady.

She once complained to Nomazulu that the Khumalos don’t pay her enough.

“I think I might have, I juiced up this morning. MTN is expensive you know.” She’s digging for the phone inside her bra.

“MTN is expensive, that’s why I moved to Telkom.” I reply to her mini complaint.

I would promise to replace her airtime but I am broke as a joke. Phakathwayo will never even see the windows of heaven, let alone the gates.

I’m calling my aunt, uncle Phakathi’s wife. Phakathi is my mother’s first cousin, years older than my father. I’m not really close with them, my father limited our communication and that created a wall between us.

They care though, I think. Malumekazi checks up on me from time to time, the others don’t bother. I’m waiting for the day of my wedding, if I ever decide to get married. They will crawl out of their holes like ants.

“Cathy speaking hello?”

I almost laugh at the English accent, trust my aunt to be so dramatic and formal. She probably thinks it’s a company calling her for a job interview, at this time of the day.

“Malumekazi, it’s me Gundi.” They also call me Gundi.

Apparently I had a squeaky voice when I was a child, my father said I sounded like a mouse. He started calling me Gundi and it grew on everyone too.

“Sthandwa sami, did you change your number?” There is confusion in her voice.

“No malumekazi, I’m not using my phone. Phakathwayo took it, he took everything that belongs to me and threw out of the house.”

Martha gasps.

I have given her something to talk about with her friends during lunch, me and my big mouth. She clears her throat when she sees me staring and pretends to be cleaning the kitchen counter.

“Is it about the sex tape?” Oh Lord. They also know.

I need to calm down and not cry, damn these tears.

“Yes, can you please come and talk to him? I don’t have a place to stay Malumekazi, I don’t have money on me. That man didn’t even let me take my shoes.” I confess, pressing down tears threatening to come down my face.

Her sigh is loud, “Your uncle is home. We are coming my child, Khuzimpi will tell us why he is treating Khaya’s daughter like an outsider.” She’s fuming.

Khayelihle was my mother’s name.

I hand Martha her phone back with hope in my heart, I'm relieved when she doesn't ask me any questions regarding the sex tape.

The whole country has probably seen it by now, I wouldn't want to be rude by telling her to mind her business after I have used up her airtime.

She tells me she has to clean the house and leaves me with a glass of juice and her phone, just in case aunt Cathy calls back.

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In fifteen minutes, there is a call coming through. It's the same number I had dialled.

"Sis Martha," I yell for her, she comes running. Eyes wide with panic. Eh!

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing sisi, my aunt is here. Thank you for everything." I put her at ease, she heaves a sigh of relief I guess and takes her phone.

"You are going to be okay sisi, take care of yourself." Her smile is warm.

“Thanks, bye.”

I walk out with my head hanging, I have just been reminded that I have a stubborn father. It’s going to be a long night.

Their Toyota Yaris is parked outside my father’s gate, aunt Cathy sees me coming and steps out.

“My baby, come to mama.” She says, stretching out her arms.

I run into them

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and break into a soft cry.

“I’m here now, everything will be okay.” She comforts me.

I wish this was true, things seem to be worsening.

“MaQwabe, unjani?” Uncle Phakathi gives me a brief hug. He is traditional like that, hugs are not his thing. I’ve never seen him hug his wife, I have never seen them engaging in PDA.

“Nomazulu is taking her time to open the gate.” Aunt Cathy says.

They have rung the intercom already?

“Nomazulu won’t open the gate Malumekazi, she supports Phakathwayo. I haven’t had anything to eat today, I have stomach cramps and a headache. Nomazulu knows I get sick when I don’t eat malume, but she doesn’t care. Whatever

Phakathwayo says goes.” I have the right to complain, he is my mother’s brother.

“There she is,” Aunt Cathy says, pointing toward the house.

Indeed Nomazulu is outside, the gate opens. My aunt takes my hand and hurries us inside.

“Bring the car in Phakathi,” she orders my uncle around this one, and uncle Phakathi has no problem with it.

Aunt Cathy is not the typical black wife, she wears wigs instead of a doek. Her makeup is over exaggerated. She is in love with jeans, tight tops and sandals. Her body is smaller than mine, I think she starves herself. Her cheeks are red and lips black from years of using whitening creams.

I think he found her this feisty and when he saw he can’t change her, he made peace with it.

“Khathelina?” Nomazulu says with an attitude.

Aunt Cathy places her hands on her hips, returning the same attitude she is getting.

“It’s Cathrine, Nomazulu.” The fake English accent.

These two love to hate each other, if Nomazulu and a dog were begging for food, aunt Cathy would give it to the dog. It’s that hectic.

“Baby, are you okay?” –Nomazulu.

I thought she didn’t care, she said nothing when my father chased me out of the house.

I shrug, “I’m hungry.” I say the honest truth.

“Come in, I’ll prepare a plate of food for you. Your father is not home.”

Who knew this day would come, where I would be offered food in my father’s house like a visitor?

Aunt Cathy won’t let go of my hand as we walk in, she knows where the lounge is. Uncle Phakathi joins us, he doesn’t look comfortable with how he is sitting on the edge of the couch.

I don’t know where Nomazulu disappeared to.

The TV is on, something to kill the silence in here.

A while later, Nomazulu comes back with three plates in a tray. Rice and stew, plus salads. This was going to be our Sunday dish, I believe.

I take my plate and dig in, uncle and aunt don’t touch theirs.

They are upset, I know they won’t eat till that father gets home.

“When will Phakathwayo arrive?”

“I think he is on his way, he had a meeting to attend to at church.” Nomazulu says.

“Church huh, it’s still up and running? I thought it would be out of business by now.” Aunt Cathy is starting trouble.

“It’s a church, not a business.” Nomazulu retorts, I think that’s enough. They will scratch each other if no one stops this.

The sounds of the door opening and closing brings my heart to a standstill, he is here. My father has arrived.

“Look what the devil brought in,” I hear aunt Cathy mumble beside me. I’m grateful that she didn’t project her voice.

Phakathwayo stops when he sees me, he looks at the plate then at me.

“Nomazulu, didn’t I throw this girl out?” He glares at his wife.

“Phakathwayo, is this how you welcome your in laws?” Uncle Phakathi says, standing to his feet.

“You people are not my in laws, I don’t remember paying even a chicken for your sister. The only person I paid for was this unruly child and I want her out of my house.”

He is yelling, it doesn’t suit him, and this new behaviour he is showing my mother’s family.

“Siza is your daughter, you can’t throw her out.” –Uncle Phakathi.

“You are right Phakathi, she is my daughter. I paid lobola for her and gave her my surname, now I’m saying take her back. You don’t have to pay me back, I regret taking her in.” My father is so cold and cruel.

Why would he say that about me?

“Have you no shame Khuzimpi? That is no way to talk, you will bring nothing but bad luck to yourself.” That’s aunt Cathy stepping in.

“Please, Siza is bad luck. Take her and get out of my house.”

I adjust myself on the chair, the pain in my heart is unbearable. This man yelling and pointing fingers is not my father, he can’t be.

“Baba?” He doesn’t look at me.

“We are not leaving until we sort this mess out, sit down Phakathwayo and let’s talk like adults.” –Phakathi.

It’s no use, Phakathwayo has made his decision. I thought bringing them here would work in my favour. I am so mad at him.

Where is he going?

“Phakathwayo?” Nomazulu is scurrying behind him.

Aunt Cathy and uncle Phakathi march after them. I am not staying, I want to see what my father is going to do outside.

“I’m not going back in there, it’s either me or her. I refuse to stay in the same house with that child.”

Did he just say what I think he said?

Curious as to what is happening, I pick up my pace. He is standing outside, arms folded and eyes glossy with tears.

“I trusted you Nomazulu, why did you let these people into my house?”

He can’t be serious.

“They want to talk to you baba.” Nomazulu sounds afraid.

Her biggest fear is losing her husband.

“So? Who are they to you? Are they so important to you that you contested my decision and let them in my house? This is my house Nomazulu, kwaGumede. What I say goes.”

Uncle Phakathi steps outside, “Phakathwayo clam down, don’t act irrational. We are not here to fight.”

“I don’t care, take your sister’s child and leave my house.” He is adamant in not wanting me around.

I don't want to cry, but I can't help it. My father is breaking my heart.

"Siza is a child, how do you expect her to survive out there?" Aunt Cathy is right.

"I don't care, if she dies I will buy her a coffin." Phakathwayo continues to twist my heart.

"No baba, don't buy me a coffin." I step outside and stand in front of him.

"If I die, you must eat me." I add.

Aunt Cathy pulls me to her side, "Thula wena."

"No Malumekazi, it's his fault that my mother died. He got her pregnant before her breasts occupied her chest, she died because of him. He put me in her stomach, so if I die out there, don't burry me. This man must eat me. I didn't come from dust, I came from a womb and since he killed my mother, he must eat my corpse."

This is my clap back and I stand by it.

Phakathwayo's eyes are suddenly bloodshot, I see pain in them as well.

"Uyahlanya wena? We're trying to fix things and you're making it worse." Uncle Phakathi slaps my back, it hurts.

“But Malume...”

“Thula!” My aunt interjects.

She looks at my father, and joins her hands together and pleads with him.

“Phakathwayo, for the sake of Khayelihle and her resting soul, have mercy on her daughter.”

My father looks away, “We are done here.” He takes his wife into the house, and slams the door.

13

SIZA-

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“Malumekazi, can we pass by House of Ribs? I’m starving.”

We are on the road, uncle Phakathi is behind the wheel. They are taking me to their house, I think they are.

“Malumekazi, did you hear what I said?” I have to ask because they keep exchanging glances.

“I heard you sthandwa sami, do you have money on you?” She looks at me and sees my speechless face, I am not used to not having money.

“My bank cards are in the house, baba cut me off remember.”

She was with me, how could she have forgotten?

“I’m sorry baby, we are broke.” She replies, turning back to face the front.

What’s the use of protesting? We have passed the damn restaurant.

“Where should we drop you baby?” Aunt Cathy questions, I don’t say a word because... why is she asking me this question?

I catch uncle Phakathi’s eyes in the rear view mirror, it’s as if he is asking me the same question.

“I don’t have a place to go to malume, I thought maybe I can stay with you guys till my father changes his mind.”

“Oh sweetie, that evil man will never change his mind. Don’t even bet on it.”

I am fucked up.

“Our flat is small Gundi, we’d take you in but we are already feeding more than five mouths.”

I don’t want details, and this was expected from my mother’s family. I bite back the urge to tell them how they only care about me when I have money.

“Where do you want us to drop you, sthandwa sam?”

Aunt Cathy is sounding very fake, now that I know they won’t take me in.

“Eldos, my friend lives there.” I say.

Eldorado Park is a scary neighbourhood, Hlelo and her parents are brave to be living there. I would choose Boksburg anytime. Plus, almost everyone I know stays there.

“Oh no, I forgot about Siyakhula. Please turn the car around, I have to get Siyakhula out.”

I feel so bad, how did he slip my mind?

“We’ve driven a long distance Siza, I don’t have enough petrol and you know how expensive it is.” -Uncle Phakathi.

“Okay.” It’s not okay, but I don’t have a say. It’s not my father’s car.

In forty five minutes they drop me off outside an RDP house, aunt Cathy steps out of the car with me.

“Be safe, I love you Gundi. I will call you okay.” Her lips touch mine in a soft kiss.

I feel like hell as I walk through Hlelo’s gate, the lights are on. I don’t know what time it is, but it’s not late for visitors.

“Who is it?” That’s her father’s voice.

I draw in a breath and answer, “It’s Siza.”

I wait for the door to open, it’s taking them too long to open. Do they need a map to get to the door?

Hlelo peeps through the small opening just as I’m ready to knock again, she looks nervous.

“Friend?”

She tears herself out through the door, along with the smell of tinned fish and shuts it, her back against the door.

“What are you doing here?”

I didn’t expect this question from her.

“I need place to crash friend, my father kicked me out.”

She looks over her shoulder, then back at me.

“Friend, my parents are here.” She is whispering, like she doesn’t want anyone to hear her. I gather my thoughts and try not to think the worst. Hlelo is my friend, she will never kick me when I’m down.

“Your parents know me, and your mother loves me. Why would they have a problem with me sleeping over?”

“That was before the sex tape, they think you are a bad influence. I’m sorry, but I am not allowed to be your friend anymore. My father is very strict, he will kill me if I defy him.”

She must be joking, she has to be. I don’t recognise my dry giggle, even when my heart is thudding too fast in my chest.

“Hlelo, we have been friends since we were ten. We can’t be apart because of some silly mistake.”

“My parents don’t think it was a silly mistake, they are Jehova Witnesses born and bred. Thanks to your scandal, my father will drag me to church with him. I don’t like that place Siza.”

This is so selfish of her, I have bigger problems to worry about than her not liking her church.

The door opens behind her, I see her mother’s unfriendly face. This is the same woman that used to adore me.

“Greetings Mah!” I flash a smile that is not returned.

She snaps her eyes at Hlelo and grabs her arm, “Get in the house, Hlelo.”

“Mah, I need a place to stay for the night. I’ll be gone in the morning before you wake up.” I get on my knees and grovel.

“Mah, let her stay for the night. It’s dark and Eldos is not safe.” Hlelo pleads on my behalf.

Her father appears behind them, he snatches Hlelo from her mother’s grip only to slap her on the face.

I gasp, cupping my mouth in shock. Mr. Mndaweni slams the door on my face.

I have no plan, I have nothing on me. Eldos is a crime infested community, if I’m spotted by the wrong people, then my life is over.

“Siza!” A voice calls my name, I whip my head back and see Hlelo peeping through her bedroom window. She gestures that I come over and throws me a R100 note.

“This is all I have, I requested bolt. He’ll take you wherever you want to go.” She says, her eyes telling me how sorry she is.

She closes the window before I can thank her.

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BONISILE

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I’m too old to be thrashed with a belt, somehow Sphokazi has not been informed. If I didn’t have proof that she gave birth to me, I would question it.

“Make sure you pack all your clothes, don’t leave a single underwear behind.” She orders, pointing at the clothes on the bed.

I look at the weapon in her hand, I can still feel that belt buzzing on my ass.

“Don’t send my child away. Who is going to miss me when I’m at work?”

Khabazela is trying to be cute, he did nothing when his wife was belting me. A whole 29 year old, then when I press charges she will call a family meeting.

“Your daughter is disrespectful baba, thanks to her, I will never show my face at church.” Sphokazi exaggerates.

“But mah, God takes time to punish the wicked. I just took over his job, I’m sure he doesn’t mind.”

Why did I say that? She whips me on the back with a belt, I screech and hide behind my father.

“Did you hear her baba? Your daughter is possessed, no child of mine behaves like this.”

“Why is she my daughter only when she causes trouble? I deserve to be praised for her good deeds too.” -Khabazela.

These are my parents! We have a love hate relationship, I’m the daughter that gives them grey hair. Their only daughter, there is no getting rid of me.

“Finish packing Bonisile, your uncle is on the way.”

Or not...

I have nothing against uncle Ronny, but he lives alone and that's just... creepy. He's not the friendliest person I know, he's been miserable since his wife left him. How am I supposed to stay with a man who is indifferent? Turns out he got me a job at some mansion, I'll be working as house executive. Better than standing in the sun every morning and selling fat cakes.

"I'm going to watch soccer

don't forget to kiss me goodbye Bobo." –My father.

That pet name tastes bitter in my mouth. I zip my bag and carry it to the living room. Sphokazi has suddenly become a security guard following me around, she really wants me out of her house.

She is going to miss me, I just know it. By the end of the day tomorrow, she will be blowing up my phone begging me to come back home.

"I packed a bag of 2kg rice, tinned fish and baked beans. Don't starve yourself, dish up for your uncle too. Don't trouble him, he is old. You are too energetic Boni, it's not right, and don't get into trouble."

She's crying, she misses me already. I'm flattered really.

"Yes mah."

“And behave at work, don’t forget that it’s not your father’s house. If you lose that job, I will kill you Bonisile. Your boss is not your friend, don’t backchat. Know when to speak, and don’t eat his food. Your father is not the owner of Pick ‘n Pay.” My mother throws jabs at my father, and he says nothing about it.

“I will mah, don’t worry about me.” I love food, I don’t care what time it is, when I’m hungry I cook.

Chances of me eating my boss’ food are higher than my chances of marrying a rich man.

“Call me if you need anything, airtime, or money for pads. Your father will buy them, do you wear large or medium?”

Nooo! When were pads invented? Actually, how old is this granny? If I didn’t know her to be clueless, I’d say she is deliberately embarrassing me.

“Mah, pads don’t come in sizes.”

I won’t tell her that I have a heavy flow, and I wear those super long night ones.

“Okay,” she hugs me. “Sleep early okay, you get cranky when you sleep late.”

I feel like a baby, I look to dad for help.

“Mfazi, she will be okay.” My father to the rescue.

Dreading to leave my parents, I lean into my mother. She wraps her arms around me.

“You are going to be okay Boni.” She comforts me.

The sound of a car horn breaks our embrace, my uncle has arrived.

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SIYAKHULA-

Indifference and strictness, these were the rules I lived by before I met Khuzimpi. I was a hard man to love, a tough cookie to crack. The only woman I have ever loved is my mother, otherwise I gambled with women. I ate love for breakfast, gave women a run for their hearts without even blinking twice.

That’s the old Siyakhula, the one who ran without being chased because I didn’t want to let people in. My biggest asset was and will always be my poker face.

I swore that I will never go back to the person I was, I swore to be a better person.

It was when I had found a family in Khuzimpi and his family, funny how life will show you that people are never who you think they are.

I'm a living example, but no more. I am done with humans, the Gumedes and every other shitty person that has ever crossed me.

"Mbatha, you are free to go." Says the jailer as he unlocks the bars.

It takes me a while to register what he just said, I have questions but I preserve them. I am a free man, who cares how it happened?

"You are a lucky man." He pats my shoulder.

There is no such thing as luck, or fate. People choose their own destiny, had I stayed away from the Gumedes and their God, I wouldn't have been accused of ra.pe.

I amble past him, keeping my head held high. I'm not about to feel sorry for myself, not when vengeance is calling my name. I miss the sweet taste of it in my mouth.

In the reception, I see Pastor Gwala. He's with Mr. Hendricks. They are wearing shiny expensive suits, I don't understand why these people care so much about their appearances, but none for their personalities.

“Pastor Mbatha!” Gwala’s voice carries, loud and clear.

What is he smiling about?

“Pastor.” I accept his hand and shake it, the smile on his face slowly fades when my grip tightens.

“How are you, Pastor Mbatha?” Mr. Hendricks is next to shake my hand, unlike Gwala, he is not intimidated by my firm grip.

“Alive,” I tell him.

“And free,” adds Gwala with a laugh that annoys every everything in me.

I don’t give him a reply, my unwavering stare is making him nervous. He rubs the back of his head and diverts his gaze elsewhere.

“Madoda, iyobonana.” (Goodbye.)

I take my leave, I need to get home and call my mother. She must be worried about me.

“Pastor Mbatha wait.” Gwala calls after me.

I crane my neck, eyes intentionally cold and calculating. Mr. Gwala blinks, he smiles wide but fails to include his eyes.

“You... umh! The charges against you have been dropped.”

There is something undecidedly empty in both their eyes that tells me to stay away from them.

I never liked these people.

“You want a thank you?” I keep my voice flat and shoot him a hard glare.

“No... I thought maybe...”

“You thought what, Mr. Gwala? That I would jump for joy or go down on my knees and sing your praises?”

“No, Pastor Mbatha. I just didn’t expect this type of reaction after you’ve been released. You are angry and I get it, you were wronged. We can talk about this, come to a conclusion without the church getting involved.”

They are here to save the church not me.

I ignore Gwala and head to the man in uniform behind the desk, he lazily looks up at me. I anticipate a rude question from him and speak first.

“I want to press charges against Sizalobuhle Gumede for defamation of character.” I say, not giving him a chance to address me rudely.

He dips his hand inside an open drawer beside him, takes out a form and drops it on the table.

“Fill this, don’t forget your signature.”

I slide the paper to me while trying to shake off the heavy eyes drilling my back. When I'm done, the officer tells me that's all.

I take the plastic bag with my cell phone and car keys, my battery is dead and my car is at the Gumedes. That's if Khuzimpi didn't have my car towed.

"Pastor Mbatha..." Gwala is starting to get on my nerves.

I interrupt him, "I am not a pastor."

I see him flinch at my statement, resembling a scared puppy.

"Mr. Mbatha, you don't have to do this. Please, can we forgive and forget?"

My arrest was not another hurdle falling down without difficulty, like every obstacle their church members face. They can't shut me up. I crashed and burned when they had me arrested for ra.pe.

"I am not one of your congregants Gwala, you can't make me zip my mouth by quoting scriptures."

"But you are a good man, don't let anger control you." Mr. Hendricks looks worried.

"I slept on my goodness on a cold floor, and unfortunately I crashed it." I say.

I am not the always-gets-the-last-punch-line-kind-of-guy, but I have had enough with these people. I exit the building a free man, with a promise to myself that I will never grace the prison walls again.

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SIZA

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“Are you going to sleep your life away?” This annoying voice again.

I turn my head to a different direction, refusing to respond to the man’s voice.

This is a tavern, I have heard that some people sleep here and since I have no place to sleep, why not crash here?

“Sisi wake up!” This man continues to annoy me.

I lift my head and roll my eyes when I meet his face.

“When are you going to pay for my alcohol? Siyakhula has not come yet, you said he will pay for the alcohol and it’s almost time to close.” What’s-his-face complains.

I lied about Siyakhula coming to pay for my drinks, it was the only way to get this man to give me alcohol.

I needed to drown my sorrows.

Heaven knows how I got here, I must have told the Uber driver to drop me at this place. Siyakhula’s rented room is not far from this tavern I found myself in, I figured that he might be

known around this neighborhood and used his name to get myself a drink.

To my luck, the owner knows him.

“Can I sleep for two seconds please? We will talk about Siyakhula when I wake up.”

He threatens me with his eyes, “I’m starting to think that he is not coming. You lied to me.”

How did he figure that out? He doesn’t look like a smart person.

“I swear he is,” I stand and fall back on my seat.

My head is spinning, and my knees feel dizzy. I didn’t feel this drunk when I was sleeping.

“Give me his number, I’ll call him.” He holds his hand out and I suddenly remember that I don’t have my phone. Luckily, I know Siyakhula’s number by head.

“062...” I call out the number between burps.

He captures it on his phone and leaves me alone. I hope I will be able to sleep till morning.

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SIYAKHULA-

Like I predicted, my van was towed. I have to pay to have it released. It's money I do not have at the moment, that's why I left it at the garage and took a taxi home.

There's a young man in black ripped jeans sitting on my doorstep, I recognize that yellow bone, skinny kid. We're all dark but him, he's got my mother's complexion and facial features.

He sees me and shoots up, rubbing his tired-looking eyes. I have a good mind to turn back and pretend that I never saw him, but this is my territory. He should be the one leaving.

"Bhuti ..." He greets nervously.

I hate that he knows I exist, he should have killed me in his head like I killed all of them.

Without a word, I slide past him and open my door.

"Bhuti, I came to get you out of jail but when I got there you were talking to some men, I overheard your conversation and didn't want to intrude. That's why I came to wait for you here."

He is hovering behind me, annoyingly like a fly.

As I push the door after entering, he jams the crack of it with his foot.

“Piss off Mhlauli.” I sputter beneath a whisper.

He tilts his head, “I came to see you. Why won’t you let me in?”

“Because I don’t want you here, now leave. Go back to your father.”

He should read my tone and take it as a warning.

“Our father is also on his way here, let me in, I’ll leave with him if that’s what you want.”

Mhlauli pushes his way in, his stubbornness reminds me of our mother. I’m standing in front of the open door, watching him throw his flat ass on my bed. He is too comfortable for someone I haven’t spoken to in years.

And what’s with all those tattoos covering his body? I have no problem with tattoos, I have a few on my back and shoulders. It was easy to hide them from the church, thanks to the darkness of my skin.

This boy is covered in them, they go all the way up to his neck.

“What do you want?” I query.

Pushing him away is not helping, so why not get to the point and find out what brought him here.

“I heard you were arrested.” He starts, as he lies down on my bed.

I ogle at his dirty off-white shoes and lose the strength to tell him off.

“The plan was to get you out, is it true that you had sex with Phangi’s girl?”

Mhlauli talks too much.

“It was a mistake and I didn’t know they were together. I only found out recently.” Strangely, I am explaining myself to a kid I want nothing to do with.

“I believe you bhuti.” He makes me cringe when he calls me bhuti.

“But Phangi won’t believe you, he loved Siza.”

“So? What does that have to do with me?”

He shrugs, daring me with an unbothered stare.

“You are brothers...”

“He is not my brother, neither are you.” I interject.

There is nothing they can say or do to make me accept them.

Mhlauli leans against the headboard, in his eyes is pain. I intended to hurt him with my words.

“We are your siblings bhuti, denying us means nothing. You are one of the Donda brothers and...”

“I am a Mbatha.” I snap, irritation crawling through my skin.

Mhlauli jerks from the bed, it’s an attempt to size me up. He’s a head shorter and way too skinny for someone who eats cheese for breakfast.

“Changing your surname at Home Affairs means nothing, you are a Donda through and through.”

He is challenging me to a fight, I will not be told by a child.

A knock interrupts us, I spin on my heel to see Mlamuli at my doorstep.

“Son!” His voice holds a whiff of surprise, he lets himself in and wraps his arms around me. I push him off.

“Son...” He mutters with worry, his normally furrowed brows slowly easing.

“I am not your son.”

My answer makes Mhlauli laugh, “You are too young to be bitter, my brother.”

“I am not bitter,” I bite back, towering over him.

Mlamuli stands in between us, “I came here to tell you that your mother found out about your arrest and had a stroke.”

“What? When?”

My mother is a strong woman, trialed and tested and survived everything thrown at her by life.

“Last night

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your arrest and the sex tape was all over the news.” Mlamuli delivers, bringing my world into a complete standstill.

My heart is a chaotic mess—not my mother, she is the only person who means the world to me.

“Where is she? I want to see her.” I try not to panic as I demand answers from this man who was never there for us.

“I flew her to Cape Town to get treated, it’s not looking good son.” He touches my shoulder, I reject his hand by stepping back.

Tears are knocking in my eyes, I blink them away. But I can’t seem to get rid of the black hole I am trapped in, a place where there is no escape.

The vast darkness paints my heart black, hatred and revenge seep through my bones. They swallow me whole, consuming the entirety of my soul.

I grit my teeth and clench my fists, someone is going to pay for this.

“Siyakhula,” Mlamuli’s voice snaps me back.

“Who gave you the right to make decisions regarding my mother? What do you want with her?” I gush in anger.

His first response is a puckered brow, “She is my wife!”

“Bullshit,” I slam my hands on his chest, he stumbles back almost falling but Mhlauli holds him down.

“She ceased to be your wife when you left her for another woman.”

Mlamuli looks at me with wide spread eyes, “I didn’t leave MaMbatha for another woman. She chose to go, she was adamant about it. I tried Siyakhula, I tried to make her stay but she wanted out. Letting her go was the hardest thing I ever had to do, that is why I didn’t divorce her. I love her...”

“Stop lying to me,” I fire with a vile tone.

He is stirring so much anger in me, it has me losing control and punching him on the face. I shake my head at how pathetically weak he is when he falls on the bed, I’m also anticipating a

violent reaction from Mhlauli. But he's just staring, the veins on his forehead throbbing.

"Take me to my mother now." I tell Mlamuli, he brings himself up from the bed.

"I can't do that, not when you are like this. You need to calm down first, who knows what you will say to her. She doesn't need bad energy around her."

The bastard is further pissing me off, I grab him by his collar and slam him against the wall.

"You are so pretentious Mlamuli Donda, we both know you don't care about my mother. Now cut the crap and tell me where she is."

"You are fighting the wrong people bhuti," Mhlauli jumps in.

"Shut up!" I was going for an icy tone, but all my voice can produce are sounds of anger.

"Your brother is right, you are fighting the wrong people." Mlamuli says, jolting away from my grip. He creates distance between us as he fixes his top.

"Look at how you're living, Siyakhula." He's waving a hand around my room. "You don't have to live like this son, you have shares in the Donda Empire. You were never excluded from anything."

Anything but his presence in my life. He betrayed us, he betrayed me.

“You can live like a king, and own the world. Those people that hurt you and put you in prison, you’ll have them eating on the palm of your hand. Put your pride aside son and come home, let your father take care of you. You can’t avenge yourself with holes in your pockets. A poor man is as good as a stray dog in this world, the rich will play you like a game of dice, and bury you like a dog.” –Mlamuli.

“I don’t need you, Mlamuli Donda.” I say.

“Don’t lie to yourself Siyakhula, a man is not an Island. We all need a helping hand. Let me help you avenge yourself. We’ll start with that godforsaken church, I’ll shut it down so fast they will think the devil escaped from hell just to punish them for their sins.”

How does Mlamuli know so much about me? Was he having me followed?

Nevertheless, I am tempted, maybe if my mother was not involved in this I would let it go. I begged Siza to consider my mother, but she didn’t care. This is her fault, and Khuzimpi. I swear on the love I have for my mother, they will pay.

“I will accept your help, but not you. You mean nothing to me Mlamuli and don’t expect me to call you father.”

Prides resides on Mlamuli's face, "One step at a time son, one step at a time."

He is holding on to the hope that one day we will reconcile, not a chance in hell.

"One more thing, I'm a carpenter, Mlamuli. I don't do suits and ties. I hope you won't expect me to sit in an office and take over from you."

"Which is your rightful place bhuti, it's where you belong."
Mhauri says, sounding like an idiot.

"I know that you love carpentry, buy that company you work for and add it to your empire. You have always been one of the richest men in the country, all you had to do was find your way home." Mlamuli says.

Building a legacy is the last thing on my mind, I am thirsty for revenge. Everyone responsible for my mother's condition will feel my wrath.

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SIYAKHULA

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Mlamuli is serious about helping me, as strange as this may sound, it feels good to have someone on my side.

“Tell me about the night you slept with Gumede’s daughter.” He’s pulling a chair and making himself comfortable.

I don’t know why my eyes clash with Mhlauli’s, he shrugs and sits on my bed.

I will have to tolerate these men if I will be working with them.

I shift to lean against the fridge, arms folded.

“The youth organised the party, it was strictly no alcohol. I don’t know how it happened that someone snuck alcohol in.” The yard was parked that day, anything could’ve missed me.

“Do you remember who offered you the first drink?” Mlamuli asks, scratching his beard and appearing deep in thought.

“Gundi... I mean Siza did.”

“Siza is the girl he’s with in the sex tape,” Mhlauli tells his father who throws an inquisitive gaze my way.

“How well do you know this girl?”

“She was thirteen when I met her, she’s bratty like most spoilt kids but she’s a good person.”

Mlamuli snorts at my words, “A good person who framed you for sexual harassment?”

I know it looks bad, but I would still vouch for the good hearted Siza that I know.

“It couldn’t have been her, we were both caught in the fire. Why would Siza deliberately tarnish her life? Sex before marriage is not allowed in that church, she wouldn’t go against her father and show it to the world.” I explain.

“I agree with bhuti, it must have been someone else.” – Mhlauli.

“Can you point out who was at the party? I think we should question them, ask all necessary questions. If we find out who brought the drinks, then we will find out who is behind all this mess.”

Mmh! I like Mlamuli’s wisdom.

“There is a girl who might get me a list of the people who were present.” I reply.

Bonisile has suddenly crossed my mind, she was at the party that night. We didn’t talk much but I remember the hug she

gave me, she wouldn't let go till one of her friends pulled her back.

"Call her," Mlamuli orders.

"It's late, she's probably sleeping." I check the time on the microwave, it's twenty minutes to nine.

I have her number saved on my phone, it's off and in the charger.

"It's not that late Siyakhula, but do whatever makes you happy. As long as we get to the bottom of this." Mlamuli declares.

I guess I will have to contact Bonisile today.

"And drop the charges you made against Gumede's kid, Jail is too lenient a punishment. Her father is moneyed, he will bail her out before morning. I know something that will drive her pastor Gumede up the roof." –Mlamuli smirks.

I'm still dazed by how much he knows about me.

"What do you have in mind?"

He shuffles on the chair and tells me the most absurd thing I have ever heard, I look to Mhlauli to see if he is hearing what I'm hearing. By the looks of it, he is on board with it.

"No, that's crazy. I can't do that, I'm not going to do it. It's a serious offence." I argue and get a glare from Mlamuli.

“It’s the only way to stir Gumede and get him to do what we want. You said you want revenge, right?” Mlamuli says.

“I did... I do... but it’s wrong.” I protest his suggestion.

His face instantly turns sour, “That’s the thing about revenge—you go against the law and sometimes against God. You disregard people’s feelings and choose the path of selfishness.”

“What about Phangizitha? They are a thing.” I don’t know if he knew about this, his face says he didn’t. He turns his confused gaze to Mhlauli.

“Bhuti Phangi and Siza have been seeing each other for years now, he loves her.” He says like it’s no big deal.

“That girl will never be my daughter in-law, I don’t want a Gumede in my premises.”

Yet he is married to one.

“I agree with you dad, she has hurt both my brothers. I don’t want her anywhere near them.” -Mhlauli.

“And no word to Phangizitha about this, he doesn’t have to know what we are up to, what he doesn’t know won’t hurt him.” That’s Mlamuli giving orders.

Why are they so dedicated in this? I have reasons, but what are theirs. It can’t be that the Gumedes subjected me to humiliation.

Do they love me this much that they are willing to destroy my haters?

“I have a house in Sandhurst, here are the keys.” Mlamuli holds them out, and I somehow can’t get my hand to move.

He sighs, ogling at me with lazy eyes.

“Take the keys son, that house is under your name. I bought it when I found out you moved to Joburg. Deep down I was hoping that one day we will reconcile and you’d come back to me.” There is sincerity in the tone of his voice.

“I’m fine here, I don’t need to live in a fancy house.”

“You will need that house if you are going to carry this mission through. Besides, this place does not fit your status now that you have accepted your inheritance.” –Mlamuli.

I know manipulation when I hear it

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I take the keys anyway.

He stands with hands in his pockets.

“I will hire some men to help you, you will need backup.”

Mlamuli adds.

I feel a bit uncomfortable having to accept things from this man.

“I will be here too bhuti, ready to lend a helping hand.” He winks when I link my eyes with his.

This is overwhelming, my trust issues are showing me red flags.

“I have to go, I will talk to you tomorrow.” Mlamuli announces and takes his leave, I don’t know why he is leaving his son behind.

“Are you not leaving with your father?”

Instead of answering my question, he lets out a hearty laugh. I frown when he kicks off his shoes and shuffles my pillow to lay his head on it.

“Ndoda, you said you will leave with your father.” He can’t have forgotten.

“I did, and I am allowed to change my mind. I’m sleeping over, I want to spend quality time with my brother.” He is like a child, I can’t keep up with him.

I take my phone off the charger and switch it on, it beeps with notifications and missed calls. Four are from Joe, he owns a tavern not from far here. One is from Bonisile. I call her back first, wanting to ask about the night of the party.

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“Hello Pastor Mbatha!” She greets.

“I’m no longer a pastor, Bonisile.” The whole church knows I was removed from my position.

“In my heart you are still our pastor, and I believe that in God’s eyes you are still pastor.” She says.

That really doesn’t matter to me anymore.

“Are you okay? I’d like to come over and check on you, maybe wash your clothes and cook for you.”

That is a strange ask from her, she has never done any of those things for me.

“Don’t stress yourself Bonisile, I’m fine.”

The kid in my room is looking at me, and judging me with the amusement in his eyes. I don’t know if he can hear Bonisile on the line.

“I heard from my mother that the charges against you were dropped. I’m sorry that you had to go through such humiliation. I have always known that Siza is selfish and heartless. What kind of person would accuse an innocent man of ra*pe? That girl needs to pay for her sins, I hope you pressed charges...”

“That’s not why I called you.” I cut in.

I am not going to talk about Sizalobuhle with her, or anyone from church.

“Were you at the party that night?” I recall seeing her.

“Yes, I left early. My mother wanted me home early.” She replies.

“Did you happen to see anything suspicious?”

“Besides Siza throwing herself at you? Nope, nothing out of the ordinary caught my eye. Siza was all over you, all giggly and flirty. That’s one of the reasons why I left, I couldn’t stand to see her touching you like that.”

I hear bitterness in her voice, I don’t want to read too much into her words. Bonisile has shown a bit of interest in me, she and many ladies in the youth. I have never taken them seriously, it’s common for unmarried church ladies to see a potential in an unmarried youth pastor.

“Do you know who was in charge of the drinks, or who came with a plus one? There must have been an outsider who didn’t know the church rules.” I say.

“Thembi was in charge of the guest list, she wrote down everyone’s names that came through the gate. I will talk to her and get back to you.”

That's promising.

"Please do Boni, and find out if anyone brought unauthorised alcohol. I know the youth talks among themselves, keep an open ear for me."

"You know I'd do anything for you Pastor Mbatha." She speaks with a sultry voice.

Mhlauli's quiet laugh confirms that he can hear Bonisile.

I say my goodbyes and cut the call.

"You know I would do anything for you Pastor Mbatha." He mimics Bonisile's voice.

I raise an eyebrow in warning, saying 'don't you dare!'.

He raises his hands in surrender and giggles like a kid.

I'm receiving a call from Joe. We are not close but talk whenever we bump into each other. I can only wonder why he is calling me.

"Joe."

"Siyakhula, I have been trying to get a hold of you. The pastor's daughter is in my tavern. I can't seem to wake her up, I thought you might want to know."

I look pointedly at Mhlauli, I really should turn the volume down. He is on his feet, eagerly staring at me.

“Call her father, she is not my responsibility.” I say to Joe and hear him sigh.

“I don’t have his number, she told me to call you. This girl has been drinking my alcohol for free, she promised that you will pay for it. Plus, I don’t want her sleeping here, please come and get her.”

“Say yes!” Mhlauli gestures as he whispers the word.

I sigh, “I’m on my way, Joe. Please keep an eye on her.”

A second sigh moves past my lips when I see Mhlauli’s satisfied smirk.

I guess this is where Mlamuli’s plan comes to play.

SIYAKHULA-

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“Don’t get cold feet when we get there, I know you have a soft spot for her.”

This is the third instruction Mhlauli is giving me.

He insisted on driving me to Joe’s Tavern, I didn’t even try to get him to stay. I have realized he doesn’t listen to me.

“She is your brother’s girlfriend, why are you doing this?” I have to know why he’s bent on helping me. His loyalty should lie with Phangizitha, they grew up together.

“She hurt both my brothers, I’m not in favor of what she did. If anything, I wouldn’t want her as a sister in-law. If she could betray both of you, who knows what she’d do to our family.”

I steal a look from the passenger’s side, his puckered brow assures me how serious he is.

“Phangizitha won’t be happy when he finds out about this.” I’m testing how far he is willing to go with me.

“Bhuti will thank me for saving him from a loose woman like Siza,” he says, stabbing me with his words.

Siza is anything but loose.

I hold a moment of silence, trying to ease the anger crawling inside me.

“She is not loose...” I tell him through clamped teeth.

Mhlauli doesn't reply, it's a good thing he doesn't. I don't want to argue about Siza.

There is no parking lot at Joe's tavern, we park the car on the side of the road and head inside. The music bursting loud almost gives me a headache. Here comes Joe, looking irritated.

“Over there,” he points to his left.

We pave our way through the sea of bodies on the dance floor, people stop what they are doing and stare.

I'm sure they memorized my face from the tape that went viral.

Siza is laying with her head on the table, her braids shielding her face from us.

“Siza!” I tap her shoulder.

She moans and lifts her head, a whiff of alcohol spreads from her mouth to my face.

“Why did you serve her alcohol, Joe?” My question has Mhlauli clearing his throat, I don’t look at him because I know what he is thinking.

“We don’t say no to our customers, I’m running a business Khula. She said you will pay for the drinks.” Joe says.

I find myself inhaling deeply. What happened to the money she’s always flaunting?

“How many did she drink?” I ask calmly.

“More than two bottles of Amstel and one Black Label.”

That’s insane.

When did Siza adapt this drinking habit?

“Thank you Joe, I’ll take it from here.”

“What about my bill?” Joe asks, holding out an open hand.

“Joe right? I will settle the bill, how much does she owe you?”

That’s Mhlauli, wrapping an arm around Joe’s shoulders and leading him away.

Once I’m alone with Siza, Mlamuli’s words play in my head.

“Siza, wake up.” I shake her hard, and she stirs.

“Two more minutes.” She turns to face the other way, brushing off my hand from her shoulder.

I don’t have time for this.

“Wake up!” I shout into her ear.

It startles her, she jolts from the seat, and falls back down.

“Sizalobuhle?”

“You are an enemy of progress uncle Khula, you won’t let me sleep.”

She’s rubbing her forehead, while pointing a finger at me with her other hand.

“Ouch, my head...” She cries.

“Drunk huh?” I ask sarcastically, crossing my arms in front of me.

A loud giggle is her first response, “Just tipsy.”

“People are watching Sizalobuhle, please pull yourself together.”

She tries to stand up but her unstable feet cause her to fall down on her seat again.

“My head is killing me, it hurts when I move.”

“That is what happens when you drink alcohol like a fish.” I inform her.

Her face is bunched in disgust, it looks like she is trying to swallow her vomit.

“You can’t vomit in here, get up and do your business outside.” I say, gritting my teeth.

“I need help getting up, can’t you see I can’t stand on my own.” She is snappy.

Mhlauli is back, he doesn’t look ecstatic about Siza’s attitude.

“Are you winning bhuti?” He mumbles closely. “Don’t forget the mission.”

He reminds me.

I thought I’d let this go after seeing her. But, who am I kidding? The thought of my mother in pain is unbearable.

“You have a weakness bhuti and it’s this woman, she will be your downfall if you let it take control.” –Mhlauli.

“She is not my weakness,” I deny the allegations.

“There is a look you get in your eyes when you talk about her, I saw it back at the house and I see it now.”

“That is a lie, Mhlauli.” I grunt.

“Then focus bhuti, don’t let her innocence weaken you.”

He’s fueling my anger, and reminding me that this is the daughter of the man who tarnished my reputation, the man who is responsible for my mother’s condition.

I don’t understand this deep urge to get a gun and shoot her right in the head, just to make her father suffer.

But that would hurt less, I crave for revenge and I want to make it hurt so bad that Khuzimpi will come and kneel before me, begging me to have mercy on his daughter.

“Who is this man, malume Khula?” She is sticking to calling me uncle.

Mhlauli and I exchange looks, “He’s a friend.”

She laughs and waves at Mhlauli, “Hi friend. Buy me a drink, or two, or five. I’ll return the favor.”

“Siza, it’s late. Let’s get out of here.” I start.

She shakes her head, “Nope, buy me a drink first.”

The entirety of everything I am yearns for justice, this is what I want, right? Revenge...but I sense purity from Siza as she looks at me with innocent eyes, it has my heart pumping blood for a second. This is where I should draw the line

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rethink everything, and remember what I learned at church about a forgiving God.

“Siyakhula.” Siza murmurs softly.

Her innocence stands out more today, I don’t know why.

Could it be that God is showing me Siza through his eyes?

I feel a hand on my shoulder, it’s Mhlauli silently reminding me of the mission at hand.

“Focus bhuti, remember what our father said.” He speaks into my ear.

This is not the time to remind him that Mlamuli is just a sperm donor.

“Can I sit?”

Siza nods with a smile, “Go ahead.”

She blinks and the adoration flashing in her eyes is visible enough for the next person to see. On cue, I pull a chair and perch myself opposite her.

“Malume Khula!” Siza pinches my cheeks. “You don’t mind me calling you uncle right?”

I mind, it was different before but now it makes my skin crawl. I hate myself for what I did with her, but I can't change what happened.

"You are a beautiful black man, do you know that?" She slightly slaps my cheeks, and releases a burp that makes her laugh.

"No."

"Well, now you know. You would look much better without those ugly work suits you are so obsessed with." She says, drawing a finger over my lips.

It's uncomfortable with people watching, it looks like everyone knows about the sex tape. I look over my shoulder, Mhlauli has found a table to sit at and bought himself a drink.

"Are you okay?" I'm going for a light conversation.

Siza laughs, burying her face in her hands.

"I am so drunk, but you can't tell anybody about it. Okay Khula?" She presses a hand to her lips, gesturing that I keep my mouth shut.

"I won't tell a soul, I promise."

"Good boy," She says out loud, playing the table like drums. It's my first time seeing her drunk.

Her naivety is tugging a personal organ in my body, one that only belongs to the ones I love the most.

I can't let that weaken me, not when I'm so close to hitting bull's eye.

"Let me take you home, it's late."

"I don't have a home anymore, my father cut me off and took everything I had. My phone, my bank cards and my clothes."

Oh! This I didn't know.

Think Siyakhula, think.

"You can stay with me until your father comes back to his senses." I say.

She looks at me with glossy eyes, "Really?"

"Yes, I don't mind."

Her smile is bright. I stand and extend my hand to hers.

"Come on, let's go home."

Siza chews on her lower lip, eyes narrowed inquisitively. I can tell she wants to accept the offer and hope she does, I don't want to take her by force.

A sense of accomplishment rushes over me when her hand lands on mine. I intertwine our fingers together, my gaze lingering there for a while. Siza's small hand in my large hold

triggers something. I'm trying to fight it, whatever it is. It's something beautiful, yet so wrong.

Focus Siyakhula! I mentally remind myself.

"Can I use your phone? I need to call Hlelo and tell her I found a place to stay." I am not okay with this announcement.

"I don't have it with me." I lie.

"That's alright, I'll call her tomorrow."

Music to my ears.

We leave the restaurant and head to Mhlauli's car, of course the plan was not to do a messy job. I help her in the back seat and wait for Mhlauli, he is purposely taking his own time.

He walks out of the tavern with a woman strapped to his side, I hope he's not bringing her along.

They stop at a far distance, he gives her money and kisses her before she goes back into the tavern.

"Don't tell me you slept with her." I say as he approaches.

His shrug is unbothered, "Not yet."

He dashes into the car, I sit at the back with Siza.

The rest of the ride is quiet, Siza is leaning against me, her head on my shoulder. I prefer a distance between us, the less I bond with her the better. Getting attached would be a mistake.

In not more than forty five minutes, we arrive in Sandhurst.

Drunk as she is, Siza can still walk.

“Whose house is this?” She asks.

“Mine,” Mhlauli answers too quickly.

He’s saved me from having to explain why I have a big house.

Siza is holding on to me as we make our way into the house, the lights are on which could mean that there is someone in there. Upon entering, she gasps in shock.

“Wow!”

“Do you like it?” Mhlauli asks.

The question comes when Siza starts scanning the mansion with curiosity in her eyes..

“It's beautiful.” She's spinning, admiring the interior of the house.

I can't keep my eyes off her, she is absolutely oblivious to what fate has instore for her.

“Are we going to be staying here, Khula?” Her arms wrap around me in a tight hug.

“Yes.”

Doubt suddenly fills my heart, I hate that I’m having second thoughts. This can't happen to me, not when I have gone this far. Mhlauli pulls a gun out, and I instantly know what we discussed is about to happen.

“It’s time,” he mouths, aiming the gun at Siza.

Clenching my jaw as I try to fight the voice of reason, I gently push her off me. A gun is the first thing she sees the moment she turns to Mhlauli’s whistle.

A common person would be terrified to wits, but Siza’s brain hasn't grasped the word danger yet. Her eyes though widen with disbelief, they seek for answers.

“Siyakhula?”

I stare back impassively, putting on a good façade. One thing I can't deny is the guilt pulling at my heart.

“Welcome home princess.” I’m trying to sound brave.

A big bodied man appears from the corridor and stands beside Mhlauli, he’s almost as tall as I am.

“Khula, what's going on?” Fear is marked in her voice.

“Take her away.” Mhlauli commands coldly.

Siza hides behind me as the man attempts to grab her hand.

“No!” She shouts when I step aside and let the man grab her.

“Wait Siyakhula! Khula, I don't understand, please. What's going on? This is not funny.” She screams as the man drags her away.

Her scared voice stirs something in me and whatever that is will no doubt make me lose sleep.

“I want to go home, Khula take me to my father right now ” Her voice disappears down the long corridor.

PHANGI

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Distance makes the heart grow fonder, and that's the case with Phangi. He's back in Joburg, and hasn't heard anything from Siza. Her phone is off. He's been trying to get a hold of her for two days straight, not only is he worried, he's terrified as well.

She is not the kind that goes days without turning her phone on, she is obsessed with it. He'd go over to her house, but he doesn't want to deal with the special case; Khuzimpi.

Lunchtime is around the corner, he's wrapping up a few things in the office before he leaves to grab a snack. His little brother Mhlauli walks in looking like he jumped off the devil's motorbike in his black clothing and endless tattoos.

Phangi's first feeling is of gladness that he is okay, until he remembers that Mhlauli left Bergville to get their big brother out of prison.

Irritation flashes within Phangi's gaze.

"Did you do it?" He asks, leaning back on his office chair.

"No, he was proven innocent and released before I arrived."

Relief covers Phangi's face, "Stay away from him."

"I can't, he's our brother and he's here."

"He's here? Why?" Phangi spits, eyes running to the open door. Siyakhula strides in Just in time, their aggressive eyes meet.

"What are you doing here?" Phangi asks, pushing his chair back to meet Siyakhula's height.

"I'm here to get everything that belongs to me."

"There is nothing for you here, get out." He points towards the door.

Siyakhula is standing in the middle of the room, hands hidden in the pockets of his pants.

"Request denied, I'm not going anywhere. You will have to get used to me because I'm going to be in your face all the time." Maybe Siyakhula meant to sound arrogant, maybe he is trying to fit in. Phangi is not sure.

Mhlauli tries to reason with him, "Bhuti..."

"You shut up, you betrayed me. You chose this man over your brother."

"Siyakhula is our brother, we have longed for him and we should be grateful that he acknowledges us."

“He slept with the woman I love, don’t you get that?” Rage bounces in Phangi’s voice.

“What happened between Gundi and I was...”

“Don’t call her that!” Phangi’s fist meets Siyakhula’s jaw, the elder returns the punch.

“Stop!” Mhlauli intervenes before things get dirty. “Are you two insane? You are brothers for Christ’s sake.”

“He is not my brother, I will never recognize him.” Phangi fires, pointing a finger at Siyakhula.

“The feeling is mutual, you mean nothing to me.” Siyakhula is just as bitter.

There is no hope here, Mhlauli’s desperation for his brothers to reconcile will never work in his favor.

“Like I said, I am here for what’s mine and nothing more. You people mean nothing to me.” –Siyakhula.

Mhlauli is hurt by his words, it’s nothing he’s never heard before. The week he spent with Siyakhula didn’t get him anywhere. His big brother still harbors hate and resentment.

“Did you do this Mhlauli? Did you create this monster? A poor man does not have this kind of confidence.”

“You don’t anything about me,” angry words simmer out of Siyakhula’s mouth, eyes turning predatory.

“Phangi please...” –Mhlauli.

“Don’t you get it? This man hates us, he will never accept us. If you think he is here to make amends then you’re a fool. Even a blind man can see that this man is hungry for revenge. He is going to suck us dry and leave us with nothing.”

Mhlauli narrows his eyes at Phangi, the resentment in his brother’s eyes is as clear as daylight. Before the sex tape, Phangi would freely talk about Siyakhula. They would both reminisce about him finally coming back home.

“You are just upset, and I understand. Phangi we have our brother back, can we embrace him and move on with our lives?”

“I don’t want him, get him out of here.” There is a challenge in Phangi’s eyes, but hatred dominates.

“He doesn’t have to get me out of here, I will leave on my own. But I’ll be back, after all, I own half of the company.” Siyakhula announces and gladly leaves the brothers to face each other.

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SIZA-

I don't know what day it is or how long I've been in this room. That damn coward Siyakhula has not even come to tell me why he's kept me in here, why he tricked me.

My pounding head feels like it will explode. The lighting in here is too bright it gives me a headache.

"Siyakhula!" His name tastes sour in my dry mouth.

He came as an angel, and I blindly trusted him. I can't deny that I felt safe with him, not once did I think my life was in danger. My sixth sense did not even twitch to alarm me of the danger ahead.

"I have to get out of here." I whisper to myself, the door seems so far from my reach with how weak my body is. It happens when you deprive your body of food.

I won't eat a damn thing they give me.

I manage to crawl to the door after failing to stand to my feet. The cold hard tiles do nothing but make my body shudder to the icy touch.

I'm worn out by the time I touch the door, I don't care. I need to get out of here. Weak and deprived of strength, I tap on the door, the sound is so light I can hardly hear it myself.

“He... help... please... open the door.” My throat hurts when I speak but that does not stop me from calling out for help.

“Shut up.” A mocking voice laughs from the other side of the door, I instantly lose hope. How am I going to escape? The place is probably heavily guarded.

I hear more laughter, I don't really care what those people think about me. I have never cared about people's opinions of me. They can laugh till their tongues are numb.

“I want to see the person in charge, get that bastard here... now.” I need answers as to why I am held captive. More laughter erupts from outside at my command.

Could it be that my voice is not as authoritative as I would like? Traces of anger are visible in it, however my voice is too small that a mouse would compete with me in a voice competition and we would draw.

“Siyakhula... you coward, get your ass here now.” I manage a shout this time, continuously banging the door.

How will Siyakhula hear me when those idiots are laughing like they are at a comedy show?

“Siyakhula Mbatha.” Yelling is draining the strength I have left. Silence suddenly takes over, I wonder if they have moved from the door. Which really doesn't matter, I can't even stand to my

feet. How will I muster up the strength to break the door down? Firstly I will need to get up, my legs are like a bad Wi-Fi at the moment.

At the sound of the door knob twisting

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I agonizingly attempt to scoot to the side.

The door opens barely a crack, I'm lying in the doorway when someone slides in through the crack. My eyes catch a glimpse of the man who is responsible for me being locked up. I'm not entirely sure, but I see a tint of guilt in Siyakhula's eyes. It vanishes before I can fully distinguish what it really is, whatever that look was is traded by a cold glare and there's a smirk accompanying it.

He looks... rich?

For a change he is not wearing his work overalls, but tight fitting black chino pants and a matching button-up shirt. He smells wealthy too.

Who is this man?

"Gundi."

Oh! It is Siyakhula.

“Is the bed not of your taste? We can get you a smaller one if that would make you content.”

As if the bed is not already small.

The bastard jumps over me and stands in the middle of the room. I push my body to a sitting position, my back rests against the door. The deadly glare I give Siyakhula must have been ordered from the deepest pits of hell.

I hate him right now.

“Take me home Siyakhula.” I go for an icy tone, and miserably fail.

He falls into a chuckle, the amusement is wiped off his face by a puckered brow. He folds his arms across his chest, standing tall and intimidating.

I don't know the man I'm looking at, he is not the Khula I have known for years.

“I would, but I love having you here Gundi.”

Why does he keep calling me that after I told him not to?

“Why?” I question.

“Because I love having you here.”

What the heck?

I am not satisfied with his answer.

“Man up you bastard, if you are going to keep me here, the least you could do is tell me why I have been taken away from my family.” I refuse to take the little of what he is giving me.

“All in due time Gundi, we are not in a rush. Relax...”

To hell with him!

“NO.” I whisper-shout.

My strength diminishes when I speak.

“You don't get to lure me into this hell and leave me to guess my sin. I demand to know why you're keeping me here. I demand to know why I am locked up like a prisoner.”

“Patience Gundi.” Siyakhula calmly retorts.

Patience is something I can't offer. Needless to say, the smirk on his face feels like worms crawling under my skin.

I'm getting irritated, Siyakhula is not saying anything and that only upsets me. I narrow my eyes at the man towering over me, I hate how he is not moved by my anger.

“What the hell do you want from me?” I scream.

He simpers as he looks down at me.

“Please, they are looking for me. My father must be worried sick, I don't know how long I've been here. I don't know what day it is. Have mercy please, let me go back to my family.”

I try for calmness in hopes that he will have a heart and release me. The frown on his face grows, it's his cold demeanor I cannot stand. For a second, I could swear I'm in the presence of evil... the devil himself has left his throne in hell and is standing before me in a form of the most beautiful man my eyes have ever tasted. Siyakhula Mbatha.

He starts to move from where he's standing, I can't help but notice that he moves like he owns the world. He stops, hands in his pockets and looks at me.

"Five days and four nights." What is he talking about? I wonder and wait for him to continue, which he does.

"That's how long you've been in here, anything could have happened to you. You know you should thank me, you're still alive Gundi."

"Fuck you." I spit, provoked by his stinking attitude.

"Oh my?" He feigns shock. "I didn't know princesses have foul mouths, the world must be coming to an end."

"What is going on? Please make it make sense. You cannot be Siyakhula, you are an imposter. I know my Khula, he would never do something like this. He is not a cold hearted bastard. You're an imposter, a fake." It's the only thing that makes sense.

He looks satisfied with himself, “People change Gundi. You didn’t think I would be the good pastor all my life, did you? That you and your father would play me like a fool and I’d sit back and clap for you?”

“What does my father have to do with this?”

“You know exactly what your father did, no one is innocent in all this. We are done playing church, it’s time to let the real games begin.”

“What are you talking about?” I yell. He’s starting to annoy me.

“I begged you Sizalobuhle, I told you my mother wouldn’t be able to handle my arrest but you didn’t care. You never care about anyone but yourself.”

“What are you saying Siyakhula? Did something happen to your mother?”

He doesn’t say anything, his eyes are cold and empty.

“Is this some sort of punishment? Are you going to kill me? ”

He continues to stare without saying a word.

“I asked you a question dammit.” I snap.

He seems to be asserting power from my weakness, the smirk on his face tells me so.

Irritated and tired of his face, I attempt to stand. I get on my knees, hands palm the cold floor.

“You are so stubborn even when you’re down and powerless.”
Siyakhula taunts me.

I ignore him, the little strength left in me is not enough to help me push my body up, and this idiot is only staring.

I moan and groan in pain, wheezing as my feet finally hold me up.

I would rather die than let him see me crawl. I take a step towards the bed. My head spins as I do that and that has me stopping, head dropped and fingers pressed on my forehead. My head spins again like all the blood rushed to my brain. I stagger, but Siyakhula catches me before I could fall.

“Be careful.” He angrily growls.

“Don't touch me.” I snarl, yanking myself from his arms. Bad idea, my little dramatic show makes me stumble. He catches me and easily scoops up in his arms.

He puts me on the mattress, his eyes are on mine.

“What?” I snap in annoyance and he lets out a cold chuckle.

“I'll get you something to eat.” He introduces, standing up straight and wiping whatever worry is written on his face.

“I don't want your stinking food.” Vile words leave my mouth.

“You don't have a choice but to eat Gundi, I need you alive. Your corpse is of no use to me.”

I'd be damned... the audacity.

“I'm not going to let you get what you want, I would rather die.” If hate had a taste or an aroma, I would either be tasting it or smelling it. It is literally hovering around me, threatening to consume me.

“Suit yourself Gundi, make sure you don't die, okay? Or I swear to God, I will bring you back to life.” Siyakhula's tone hints at anger and extortions.

I should be trembling with fear, but I feel nothing. I am livid though.

“You are not going to get away with this Siyakhula.”

“I already have princess.” He says and disrespects me with a snort before walking out on me.

I'm left feeling like the world is slowly swallowing me, I'm not going to let him have the last say.

SIYAKHULA

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Siza looks like a mess, she hasn't eaten anything in days and refuses to eat. I'm terribly worried and I don't understand why. Each time I close my eyes, her face flashes before me... the dark circles around her eyes and the weight she's slowly losing.

None of this sits well with me, the it saddens me, but I need to control my emotions. Mercy is for the weak, I can't accept defeat.

Mlamuli allocated men to guard Siza and this place, he's anticipating some kind of war. I doubt Khuzimpi has got it in him.

This house is overwhelmingly big, I live alone with the guards. Mhlauli sleeps over sometimes, he is serious about this brotherhood.

He's slowly growing on me, I can't say the same about Phangizitha. He rubs me off the wrong way.

A knock at the door of my bedroom catches my attention, my hand clasps around the glass of scotch in my hand. This drink has been the only thing giving me strength, the only thing that makes sense to me at the moment. I can hardly recognize myself.

My mother's condition has not changed, I haven't been able to go and see her. I'm comforted by the fact that my aunt is with her.

The second knock cancels my train of thoughts.

"Yes?" I respond, one of Mlamuli's men walk in.

They walk on eggshells around me, he must have warned them or something.

"Boss, I found this. Someone is searching for the girl." The man gets to it, without wasting any time.

He hands me a flyer with Siza's face plastered on it. The word MISSING is written on it in bold letters, it says a reward will be given to whoever finds her.

I knew this would happen, of course her family would go searching for her. Thinking back to the day I lured Siza out of that tavern, we didn't cover our tracks. Joe knows that she left with me. If he speaks, then our plan will be ruined.

“How many?” I ask.

“I couldn't count them, the boys and I managed to remove every flyer we could get our eyes on around Boksburg.”

“Well, it's not shocking that someone is looking for her. Her father must be going crazy.” The thought of Khuzimpi losing his mind over his daughter's disappearance is exciting.

“Do you think it's him, boss?”

Yes, they insist on calling me boss.

“It could be anyone,” I shrug, not wanting to dwell on the topic.

“What about social Media? Is there anything there?”

“I'm not sure boss, I haven't...”

That's not the answer I want.

“Dammit!” I snap under my breath. “What do you mean you're not sure? What am I paying you for?”

“Sorry bo...”

“What will I do with this apology? Will it give me answers?”

I don't want mistakes, I can't afford them or my plan will backfire on me. These men are slowly proving to be incompetent, incompetent men will lose focus and in return I will lose Siza.

“I don’t like excuses. Get Mhlauli on the phone, tell him I need him here. And find out how many ads of Siza were posted on social media. I want her father to hear it from me not anyone else that I have his precious daughter.”

“Yes boss.”

“You may leave.” I discharge him.

I want Khuzimpi to come crawling to me, and give me an apology. I want him to tell his church that he had me arrested under false accusations, and I want him to suffer for putting my mother in hospital.

By the time I’m done with him, he will be poorer than I was.

There’s a call coming through, I don’t recognize the number.

“Hello!”

“Siyakhula?” It’s a man’s voice.

“Speaking.”

“You’re speaking to Siza’s uncle, Qeda. I’m at a coffee shop in Benmore Gardens, I’d like a word with you if that’s okay.”

He wants me to travel all the way to Benmore?

“I’m kind of busy bhuti, you can tell me whatever it is over the phone.”

Could it be that he's found out that Siza has been abducted?

"I can't, it's really important that we meet."

What does he want?

"I'm on my way." I drop the call and head out.

Lunchtime has passed, so traffic is light. It doesn't take me long to arrive at the shopping center. Qeda is sitting at a table with Simengaye, sipping on drinks.

"Uncle Khula." She jumps on me.

"Hey baby." I greet her with a kiss on her forehead.

I didn't realize I missed her until now.

"Thank you for coming." Qeda shakes my hand, eyeing me from head to toe.

It must be the clothes. Simengaye goes back to her seat and focuses on her milkshake.

"Is everything okay?" I pull a chair, I don't want to waste time here, I need to be home.

Qeda sighs, "No. I don't know if you have heard, but Siza is missing. No one knows where she is."

So he's responsible for the flyers?

“Really? When did this happen?” I ask, hoping he buys my shocked expression.

“I’m not sure, I was away for a few days. When I came back, Khuzimpi told me he cut her off and threw her out. I looked everywhere for her, no one knows where she is. Even her friends don’t know her whereabouts.”

“Did you ask Khuzimpi? He must know something.” Interesting what a small flame could do to a house.

Qeda’s brows rise keenly, “You think Khuzimpi knows where Siza is?”

I shrug to deepen the doubt I have placed in him.

I don’t want to say what’s on my mind in front of the child.

“Uncle Khula, please find my sister. I really miss her.”

Simengaye’s innocence plays with my emotions.

These kids are my weakness, I was there when they were born and throughout their lives.

“Please uncle, use your powers to bring my sister home.”

If I didn’t know better

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I would think someone has put her up to this.

“I don’t have super powers baby.”

“But you’re my super hero, and super heroes have powers. Please find my sister and bring her home.”

Qeda gives me a dry smile, almost as if he is apologizing for the trouble Simengaye is causing.

“She wanted to come with me when she heard I was coming to see you. The kids have it harder, they miss their sister. Nomazulu is a mess, and Khuzimpi thinks Siza is hiding to get attention.”

That sounds more like Khuzimpi, he has always been strict.

“I will ask around, I’m sure Siza is fine. She’s a big girl, one thing I know is that she can take care of herself.” I tell him.

“You know she confessed in front of the congregation, she told everyone that you are innocent. That you’re both at fault, Khuzimpi didn’t like it. That’s why he cut her off.”

Any feelings I should feel after hearing this vanished the day I heard my mother had a stroke. Siza’s confession does not change anything. However, Simengaye’s pleas have me feeling all sorts of things.

If I’m going to let Siza go, it will be for the girls.

“You are an earnest man, Siyakhula. That’s why I think you and Siza should get married, it’s the only way this church thing will blow over.”

As if Khuzimpi will ever let that happen.

“I will talk to my brother, and convince him to let you two get married.” He says, like he read my mind.

“Don’t bother, you will be wasting your time.” I dispute.

“Don’t worry about it, I know how to convince my brother. You just keep a look out for my baby, we need her home.”

I’m not interested in that, plus, after what I went through with the Gumedes, I don’t trust any of them to hold their word.

“I will let you know if I hear anything, I have to go back to work now.”

They accept my goodbyes as I take off.

I’ll speak to Mlamuli and convince him to leave Siza out of this, my fight is with Khuzimpi. Sure his daughter is his weakness, but I can get to him without involving Siza.

“Pastor Mbatha!”

I know that voice, I turn my head and see Bonisile running to me. She is carrying plastic bags with groceries.

She invades my space by throwing her arms around me.

I don’t hold her back but wait for her to detach from me.

“What are you doing here, Bonisile?” As far as I know, she lives in the east rand.

“Shopping for my boss, I work for an old white man not far from here.” She puts her groceries down and places her hand on her hip.

“I see...”

“I haven’t heard from you in a week, where are you hiding?” There's a smile on her face.

“You never hear from me, Bonisile. We are not friends, you need to stop calling me.”

She already updated me regarding the information I asked from her, which was very useless by the way.

“Are you complaining?” Her voice is laced with pain, it is something I am not going to divert my attention to.

“I don't complain, I speak my mind.” I’m a straight forward man who does not fill his words with frosting.

“Well, try to be nice at least, for the sake of being nice. I just want to be your friend, that’s all.”

“There is no reason for me to sugar coat words, and I don't do friends anymore. Why did you stop me?”

Tears glaze her eyes, my comeback won't be nice if she lets them out. This is for her own good, entertaining her will give her wrong ideas.

“What's going on Siyakhula? You sound distant and cold.”

There is no reason for me to answer her, but I do anyway and what I'm about to say might hurt.

“I have never been close, we are not friends and we'll never be. Excuse me, I have somewhere to be.” I stride away, without so much as a goodbye. I don't have time for women, especially after what happened between Siza and I.

I'm driving back home when my phone rings, it's one of the man guarding Siza.

“Sir it's the girl, she... she” The man is stammering, fear has him by the throat; I can tell.

Of course the guard is talking about Siza, my ears have perked, and my cold heart wants to jump into a pool of hot water so it melts.

“Speak.”

“We heard a loud clunk from outside the door, when we went in, she was on the floor. She is not waking up, we've tried everything.”

The rest of his words sound gibberish, worry has clogged my ears. I'm speeding home like a maniac.

What did Siza do?

SIZA-

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Heaven? This must be heaven, but if it is. What is the devil doing here? I cannot mistaken that voice even if I were drunk... my heart drums at the sound of it, I can't put into words why his voice covers me with a safety net when I hate the owner.

There's an unfamiliar female voice conversing with the first one. I want to open my eyes and inspect my surroundings, I breathe in slowly, and that has my thumping heart calming down a bit.

“When will she wake up? How is she? Will this affect her mentally? I don't know why she is so stubborn, I told her to eat something.” The familiar voice is filled with worry, a pang of panic laced in it.

“Calm down Siyakhula.” The female voice gives a warning.

Why did I have to wake up here? I should've died and won against Siyakhula. Death was my only defense, it would have stripped Siyakhula of the power he thinks he has.

“Why keep her against her will if you're so worried about her?”
The female voice speaks with condemnation.

“Don't question me, Zoe, and I am not worried. I want her alive and healthy. Her fate is in my hands, not hers. I will decide what happens to her, not her.” This is the new Siyakhula, ruthless, cold-hearted son of a gun.

Did I imagine the concern I heard in his voice seconds ago?

“Don't shoot the helper okay. If I'm going to help you, then you need to respect me.” The Zoe lady says.

“Mlamuli said you won't ask questions, you'll help this woman and go on about your day.” Siyakhula and his arrogance are so annoying.

“Mlamuli is my uncle, not my boss. I'm here as a favor to him not because I'm in support of this.”

An intense pain shoots through the veins in my head, compelling me to wince and groan in pain. My eyes instantly shoot open to find Siyakhula glaring at me from the middle of the room, hands struck in his pockets, and the black attire he has on adding fire to his dark aura.

Is that worry in his eyes or I'm imagining it as well?

“Siza look at me.” My eyes shift to the woman sitting on the edge of the mattress. This must be Zoe, I think. That's what Siyakhula called her.

“How many fingers am I holding up?”

“Two.” I respond as my eyes count Zoe’s fingers.

My throat burns though, so I send a hand to rub away the uncomfortable feeling. Zoe notices and offers me a bottle of water, with her help I take two sips. The water goes through the wrong pipe, and forces a cough out of me. She sits me up halfway and starts rubbing my back.

“Take it easy Siza.” Zoe gently says.

“Dammit Gundi, you can’t even drink water properly.”

Siyakhula grunts, and again I am sensing worry in his tone.

Why is he bothered that I am choking?

The tall dark man takes a step towards me, his eyes rapidly meet mine. He’s scaring me and I’m trying to hide it but failing. Somehow he rethinks his move. Chest rising and falling, eyes glaring and fists locked, Siyakhula turns away from my wide stare.

This puts a frown on my face. He is acting strange.

“At least take her to a better room with a proper bed and wide windows.” Zoe snaps, annoyance loud in the tone of her voice.

My bed is a mattress and a blanket, this room might as well be a storage. There's this and that on every corner.

"Comfort is all that matters and Siza is more comfortable than the guards who have to share a small bathroom."

Siyakhula replies before marching out of the room, you would think he is running away from something. The door bangs so loud, I think it cracked.

"Are you okay?" Zoe asks.

I don't give an answer. My eyes are cast on the door, I don't know what is happening to me. It feels like my emotions have been thrown into a soccer field and someone is kicking them in all possible directions.

"Why are you starving yourself, Siza? Don't you know how precious you are? What about your family? What would happen to them if you die?" Zoe interrogates me.

"Does it matter?" My throat is starting to get its normal feeling back.

"It does, there are people that care about you."

Yeah no... I don't believe that.

“That man.” My eyes point to the door, Zoe turns to it then back to me.

“He thinks he's got the power of life and death in the palm of his hand, he thinks he's a god. I want to show him that he is just like me, human and powerless. That I don't belong to him.”

Zoe heaves a sigh and mumbles, “It seems the apple has not fallen too far from the tree.”

“What?” I ask for a repeat.

She shakes her head and asks, “Can you sit up?”

I nod and let her help me up. She places a thin pillow on my back for comfort. My head presses against the wall as I release a heavy sigh.

“Who are you? Are you also in on this? They are going to find me, you know? And all of you will be arrested.” She doesn't look frightened by my threat.

“I'm sorry Siza, I never thought my cousin would be capable of something like this. I came here to help, he didn't want to take you to the hospital. Don't worry, I'm a doctor.”

Gee Zoe, like that makes things better.

Anyway, I have never met any of Siyakhula's family members.

“So, you and your cousin are criminals?”

“Like I said, I'm a doctor. A resident actually, I have no interest in the life of crime.”

“I don't care.” I sputter with malice. “I'm going to get out of here, even if I have to kill myself. I'm not afraid of your cousin.” Honestly, I will starve myself until Siyakhula decides that it's enough.

Zoe is just like all doctors, a smiley face and hopelessness in their eyes.

“Just so you know, Siyakhula will never give up.” Zoe introduces.

“I stand corrected, but something in his eyes has changed. If ever you manage to escape, he will find you.”

“I don't believe it, Siyakhula is not a god. Why do you make him sound like he's one?” I refuse to believe Zoe's words, there is no way a human can possess such skills.

“Siyakhula is Mlamuli's Donda's son, and believe me when I say Mlamuli Donda is not a nice man. If the father is ruthless, you can imagine what the son is capable of.”

I'm close to rolling my eyes, this is the most absurd thing I have ever heard.

“Who is Mlamuli? I have known Siyakhula my whole life and never has he mentioned a man by the name of Mlamuli.”

Zoe stands and starts packing her equipment.

“I shouldn’t have said anything, Siyakhula will tell you if he feels that he should. It’s not my place to narrate his past. Don’t fight him, Siza for your own safety. Don’t try to escape either, there are men guarding this place, they might hurt you.” –Zoe.

Great, just when I was soaring high with hopes to one day escape this place. Zoe has just sent me back to square one. I gulp as thoughts of being locked up forever harass me.

“What does he want from me? Why is he keeping me here?” I’m asking about Siyakhula.

He wasn’t clear about what he wants from me, perhaps his cousin will shed some light.

“I’m not entirely sure.” How useless can a person be?

I take her hands into mine. Desperation written in my eyes.

“Help me escape please, he's your cousin

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he won't hurt you.” I’m sure of it, then again, this is Siyakhula we're talking about. A shake of the head from her fills me with disappointment.

“Even if I try to help you, Siza.” Zoe slips her one hand from my hold and cups my cheek. The only emotion present in my eyes is desperation.

“We won't make it out the gate, we'd be dead before we step out of this room. You don't know who you're dealing with Siza. My uncle is not a man you mess with.”

“You keep talking about your uncle, who is he and what does he want from me?”

I'm sick of this uncle I don't even know. What wrong did I ever do to him?

“Mlamuli is his name, he protects his children like a lion protecting its cubs. His biggest obsession is Siyakhula, his first born. He would do anything for him, Siza that man would kill for Siyakhula. A guide to piss Mlamuli; touch a strand of hair on his son's head.”

She is scaring me. I didn't mean to get Siyakhula arrested, I told him to run before the police came but he was too proud to do it.

This is what I will tell this Mlamuli person she keeps exalting.

“My advice to you would be to stay vigilant, take care of yourself and the baby.”

We are the only ones in the room, otherwise I would ask someone else to confirm if I'm hearing her correctly.

"I'm sorry, did you say baby?" I ask, completely shaken.

"Yes, you're pregnant Siza. I thought you knew."

How could I have known? Oh Lord, what a bomb you have dropped on me.

"I'm not pregnant, you must be mistaken." I can't accept this.

Zoe pulls a confused face, "You are pregnant Siza. I'm a doctor, I know these things."

"No! It's my body, I would know if there is something in my tummy."

"That's not how it works." She is so insistent on this.

This is not happening to me, my life is over. I'm a kid, I don't want to be anyone's mother.

"I want it out." I don't have to think twice about this, I'm not going to have this baby.

"You want to have an abortion?" Zoe asks.

Why does she want me to repeat myself?

"Yes, I want an abortion. Get this thing out of me, right now—I want it out." I announce with a shaky voice.

“Sizalobuhle Gumede!” A voice booms from the door, we turn our eyes there to find Siyakhula glaring, the rise and fall of his chest depicts the length of his wrath. His blistering gaze is hooked on me, if his eyes shot balls of fire, I would be history by now.

Zoe looks startled not that she was doing anything wrong. Nevertheless, this new Siyakhula can convict you of a crime you know nothing of and sentence you to a lifetime of guilt.

“You are not killing my baby.”

That’s very forward of him to think I’m carrying his baby.

The hope I felt of getting rid of this baby has packed its bags and left me exposed to fear. Siyakhula is like an angry bull teased with a red flag, a predator ready to tackle its prey.

“Who said I’m carrying your baby?”

He looks at Zoe and asks, “How far long is she?”

“A little over two weeks.” I can’t believe her, isn’t that supposed to be confidential?

Siyakhula turns to me, “Do the Math Siza. The baby is mine and we’re keeping it.”

Yeah hey! I'm about to give this man a taste of his own medicine.

"There is no we Siyakhula and who said you are the only man I have been sleeping with?"

I'm enjoying pressing his buttons and seeing the confusion dancing in his eyes.

"Don't play with me, Gundi. I know that's my baby in your womb."

I ignore his claims and look at Zoe, "I want an abortion."

"And I said no, we are keeping the baby." Siyakhula sounds like a broken record.

"Oh please! There is no baby, it's just a blood clot, and Zoe is going to pop it. Right Zoe? Tell him that I have the right to get rid of this thing in my womb, this man is not my husband, he has no say over anything regarding my body."

If I had the strength to shout, I would be yelling with everything in me. Zoe opens her mouth to speak but Siyakhula interrupts her.

"That is where you are wrong Sizalobuhle, you are in my house—under my watch. That means I'm in charge of everything in here, including you and that baby in your womb."

“You think that scares me, bhuti? I am not your property, nor am I afraid of you. I swear on my mother’s grave that you will never hear the cries of this baby, I am going to abort it no matter what it takes.”

Look who is on the driver’s seat now? That’s right, I’m in control. If this man thinks I am keeping this baby, he’s got another thing coming.

“Who the hell do you think you are?” His rasping voice rumbles in the room, causing me to shudder with fear. I hate his mood swings, he changes like a chameleon.

“You know exactly who I am, never in my life have I ever taken shit from anybody. You kept me in here to punish me for getting you arrested, and for whatever happened to your mother. Well Mr. Mbatha, it’s my turn to punish you. I will kill this thing you call a baby, whether it’s yours or not.” I grab the bed covers, pulling them up to my neck and lie down. All this talk is making me dizzy.

Siyakhula grabs the covers and throws them on the floor, he crouches down in front of me, and looks me dead in the eyes. It’s so hard for me to recognize the cold man I’m looking at.

“I was going to let you go, Siza. I was ready to send you back home. I change my mind. You are going to stay here, until you give birth. I am going to watch you like a hawk, you will eat

every meal offered to you. That baby in your womb will grow, and you will give birth to it. After that, you can do whatever the hell you want with your life, I don't care." He hisses, maliciously.

"I'm not going to do as you please, Siyakhula."

He smirks, tilting his head a little. "Yes you will, if you lose that baby whether by accident or intentionally, I will kill you and everyone you consider family."

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SIZA

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“You shouldn’t count your chickens before they hatch, Siyakhula.”

He straightens his back, eyes flickering down at me.

“Excuse me?”

“I took the emergency pill that night, so I can’t be pregnant.” I burst his bubble, desperate to get him off my back.

“You... you took the pill?” There we go, the bastard is stuttering.

“Yes, and I don’t blame your cousin. She’s a Resident, you should’ve gotten a real doctor bruh. You wouldn’t be gawking at me like an idiot if you had.”

“I’m a real doctor, Siza, and you are pregnant.” Zoe says.

I guess there will always be someone ready to burst my bubbles.

“Emergency pills are not always a hundred percent effective, and it’s possible that you were ovulating that’s why it didn’t work.” She continues to bore me.

“When was your last period?”

Argh!

My periods are like the bad weather, it’s hard for me to keep track of them. I used to have a calendar where I’d mark my days, but that fell away when I started getting them twice a month. It wasn’t regular though.

How could I be so careless?

“Last month.”

“That’s settled then, congratulations mommy, we are going to be parents.” Siyakhula proudly says, a cringing smirk twitching on his lips.

“But I have a boyfriend, and we are very much sexually active.” I make sure to link my eyes with his, I mean he has so much bubbles I need to burst.

I love the look of defeat on his face when I do.

“I slept with him weeks ago more than once. We didn’t use protection.” I take joy in the millions of emotions going through Siyakhula’s face. He looks like a sick puppy.

“I don’t want any part of this, I’m done.” Zoe takes her medical bag and rushes out. I’m left with this man who challenges me more than anyone I’ve ever known.

He is staring at me and for goodness' sake, I can't tell what he might do next.

"Is it his baby?"

Don't roll your eyes Siza... don't roll them.

"It is." I lie with confidence and get the pleasure to see him crumble to pieces as his face falls.

The fool picks his crown up too quickly. He's back to being a menacing fool.

Why is he shaking his head?

"I don't believe you, Gundi. At this point, I know you would do anything to piss me off."

I'm actually working overtime.

"You hate me, Siyakhula, clearly and it's safe to say that the feeling is mutual."

He doesn't say anything but stares, it takes what feels like a long moment for him to speak.

"It's possible that this child is mine, and not my brother's."

Huh! What?

“Your brother?” What is he saying? And where is he getting that prideful look after kicking him down so many times?

“Phangizitha Donda is my brother.”

No, he’s lying to me. They don’t even look alike, how is that possible?

“Is this one of your plans to torture me, Siyakhula?”

He folds his arms, “I would say ask him but you’re stuck here.”

The cold chuckle erupting from his lips is bone-chilling, he emits a presence that has me shaking like a leaf.

Phangi would have told me, why didn’t he tell me that Siyakhula is his brother?

“Who are you?” I ask.

“Wouldn’t you like to know?”

My father let this man into our home without knowing anything about him. Now it’s starting to make sense, his quietness... the mystery behind his eyes. Was he hiding his real identity from us? Pretending to be a good man of God. Was it all a hoax?

“I want to go home Siyakhula, this is not funny anymore.”

“Give me what’s mine first, then I’ll let you go.” He’s talking about the baby, no matter what I say, he won’t believe that it’s not his.

“I don’t want this baby, I don’t want you living inside me.” I go for a shout which was a bad idea.

My head spins, it’s a good thing I’m laying down.

“So you agree that the baby is mine?”

Me and my big mouth, I just gave myself away.

“I will never let you have this baby, God is my witness, you will never see it.”

His face transforms into rage.

“I hate losing Siza, and that’s another reason why you’re still here.”

“Well... what a bummer. We have something in common. I hate losing too, Siyakhula. That’s why I will never make you a father.” I return, mouth formed into an unpleasant twist.

A rumbling sound grumbles from this one’s chest, his jaw thrust forward with outrage. Every day he proves to me that he is not the man we thought he was.

“Don’t play games with me, Gundi. Remember, you’re under my watch. One word from me to those men out there, and it’s lights out for you.”

I burst out in laughter, nothing he said is amusing. In actual fact, I want to burst out in tears.

“That would surely work in my favor.”

He looks shocked by my declaration, hence the confused expression on his face.

“I don’t care whose son you are, or how much money you have in your account. Whether you kill me or not, you will never be a father Siyakhula.”

“Excuse me?” He breathes tilting his head to the side with a smug look accompanying his face.

“You can kill me or spare my life, either way, you are not going to win. I won’t let you.” I am so sure about it that I welcome a grin that mocks everything he is.

I see anger clinging on to him like leeches on a body, in a split second his footsteps thunder towards me. I try not to show my fear but my eyes betray me by widening with fright.

Siyakhula grabs my arms with merciless pressure, forcing me up to my feet and because I have not recovered fully, my head

throbs and I feel lightheaded. My knees refuse to fully support my legs.

“Let me go.” I mutter furiously, but Siyakhula is not listening.

He wants to prove a point.

He pins me against the wall, his nails dig in my biceps as he hooks his hands around them.

My eyes expand... fear painted in them. I want to hide it, but luck is not on my side.

“Siyakhula you are hurting me.” I squirm for release.

The look in his eyes is almost sadistic.

Perhaps this is what he wants, he feeds on fear.

“Is that a challenge, Gundi?” He snarls as he leans in, too close the bridge of our nose almost touch. “Are you sure I will never see my baby?”

My mind is temporarily blank at this point.

“You belong here princess, with me. Nothing will happen to the baby inside you.”

“You’re hurting me.” I express, wincing in pain.

Siyakhula blinks and something soft flashes in his eyes. I have seen this look before. It vanishes faster than I can blink.

Loosening his claws from me, he gradually draws back. He's staring at me, probably noticing how weak and shaken I am, and the unshed tears I'm holding back. He doesn't help me back to the bed, instead turns to walk out.

His feet falter a bit, he stops. I'm waiting for him to say something but nothing comes.

"I hate you Siyakhula." I let out screams of frustration.

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SIYAKHULA-

I want to give a befitting response, I would if I was not exhausted. If I was not drained emotionally, the sudden happenings have put a toll on me. The sex tape, the arrest, my mother's stroke and my heart giving up on humanity once again.

The grudge I nurtured after my father sent me away with my mother turned me into something I didn't want to be, I never thought I'd find myself back here again. Siza is bringing the worst in me.

What is fate trying to prove anyway? Why am I losing sleep over that girl who has me questioning my sanity?

My mind is lost in a world of confusion as I walk down the corridor.

“Siyakhula, a word please.” The tone Zoe uses with me brings a frown to my face. I ogle at my cousin seated in the lounge

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her face void of a smile.

“I’m busy Zoe, what is it?” I say from the hallway, but she will not have it. The look on her face forces me to join her in the lounge. I sit across from her and stare.

“You’re so arrogant even when you’re quiet.” I don’t believe her words.

“There is a difference between arrogance and fury. Don’t mistake the two, I’m seething with rage Zoe.”

She runs a hand over her face and lets out a shallow breath.

“I think you should take some time off and go see your mother.”

“I can’t, Siza needs me...” What am I saying?

“I mean... I need to keep an eye on her, I don’t want her killing my baby.”

“I can’t believe this is my cousin, the pastor everyone in the family was proud of. How does a person change overnight?”

Zoe is judging me like the Dondas did when my mother and I were sent away. Mlamuli’s family kept contact with us, I believe it was to brag to my mother about his new wife, and how she was a good luck charm to him.

They called her weak because she let another woman have her husband, my mother didn’t have the strength to entertain them. She would listen while they spoke, offer them tea and walk them out when they were leaving.

Not once did she complain about Mlamuli, and I resented her for that, I didn’t want to be angry alone.

Zoe and our other cousins were good to me though, maybe that’s why I kept them around.

“Take time off Khula, you will go crazy if you lock yourself in this house.”

I know that look she’s giving me, she doesn’t trust me alone with Siza.

“I’m not going to kill her if that’s what you think.” The thought slips out of my mouth.

“I don’t know if I should believe you.”

“I would never hurt her like that, especially now that she is carrying my child.”

“Now that she is carrying your child is the right time to let her go.”

Zoe doesn't get it, the Gumedes are not good people. They will never let my child live, once Khuzimpi finds out, he will convince her to get rid of it.

“It's not that simple Zoe, you heard her. She wants to terminate the pregnancy.”

“It's within her rights to do so, in case you didn't know, abortion is legal in this country.”

“Not my kid, my baby is going to live.” I don't want to argue with her.

This was not the plan when Mlamuli brought her here, she was supposed to check on Siza and leave, not ask questions.

Now she is in too deep.

“I don't want to be part of this, if anyone ever finds out, I will lose everything. All the years I spent studying medicine will go down the drain. My parents worked hard to get me into med school, not all of us have privileges.” She's pointing fingers and I don't like it.

“What is that supposed to mean?”

“Your father is rich, you are covered for life Siyakhula. But I have to work damn hard to give my parents money at the end of the month.”

She thinks I have it easy in life, she of all people should know that’s not true.

“You think my life is a walk in the park? You don’t know anything Zoe. My father singled me out amongst my siblings? He chose me to go with my mother, he could’ve chosen Phangizitha or Mhlauli. He could have kept all of us. But he didn’t. Now you sit there and judge me, you know nothing about the life I lived.”

When she quirks a brow, I see an insensitive clap-back coming.

“I know enough, yes Mlamuli wasn’t fair. But he wanted to be present, he was a present father. You were too angry to acknowledge him. That man has done so much for you Khula, at least be grateful and stop walking around like the world owes you something.”

If she was a man, I would shut her up with a punch.

“Mlamuli has done nothing but destroy my life.” I move to the edge of my seat, examining her under my gaze.

“For the love of God Khula, learn to be grateful. Was it not your father who made your criminal record disappear after you were arrested for...”

“Zoe!” I snap, it startles her.

I refuse to let her take me back to the past, I was young and reckless. Maybe I needed attention, maybe I felt rejected. Nevertheless, I am not proud of the decisions I made in the past.

“Is that why you called me here? To judge me?”

“I’m not judging you Khula, I’m just stating facts.”

“Facts I didn’t ask for.”

“Fine!” Zoe sputters, jerking up from her seat. “I’m asking you not to involve me in whatever is happening in this house. I’m leaving, if anything happens to Siza, don’t call me. Take her to the hospital, I’m not going to lose my career because you and your father want to play god.”

She continues to judge me like her parents, I’m tired of arguing and having to explain myself.

“The plan was not for you to stay anyway.” There is shock in her eyes, before she’s shaking her head and standing.

“You are right,” She looks at me like she pities me. “I don’t understand how you changed overnight. You were not this cold stone-hearted person. You used to be kind and compassionate, I can hardly recognize this person I’m looking at.”

“What has kindness done for me, Zoe? I lost my dignity.”

“So, you’re punishing that innocent girl?”

Siza is far from innocent, she has her own scabs to peel.

“I don’t owe you an explanation, we are done talking.” I get up, ready to walk out on her. The look of pity lingers in her eyes.

“Clearly you have built walls around your heart, and there is no breaking them down. I hope when you’re done with whatever it is you think you’re doing, it won’t be too late for you. Life has a way of humbling you, Khula. I can only pray for it to be kind to you.”

She takes her things and dashes out.

My mind is upside down, apart from Siza and Khuzimpi, confusion is my biggest enemy at the moment.

As I sit back on the couch, the last words uttered by Siza keep replaying in my head like a broken record. “I hate you, Siyakhula.”

There is an undeniable sting in my heart. How is it that I’m affected by her hateful exclamation? I stand and find myself pacing up and down the room, roughly rubbing my face.

“AHHHH!” I roar with anger, flipping the coffee table over.

My hands are trembling as I sit back down, I clench my fists to stop them.

There's a war going on between my mind and heart. I'm slowly losing my mind, and in the process losing myself.

My phone buzzes in my pocket, I fish it out. Mhlauli's name flashes on the screen.

MHLAULI has added you to DONDA FAMILY

What is this boy up to? I check the participants in the family group, Phangizitha and Mlamuli are part of the group. I don't remember saving their numbers on my phone, Mhlauli must have done this.

MHLAULI: Family meeting tomorrow lunchtime.

PHANGI: What is this group for?

MHLAULI: Read the first message dumbass.

DAD: Language son, respect your big brother.

PHANGI: Don't stand up for me, I don't need you.

DAD: Did I do something wrong?

MHLAULI: Phangi is nursing a broken heart.

SIYAKHULA left the group.

MHLAULI added SIYAKHULA

PHANGI: Great we're taking in stray dogs.

DAD: Phangizitha behave, we don't insult each other in this family.

MHLAULI: Cut him off dad.

DAD: Siyakhula why did you leave?

PHANGI: Because he doesn't belong here.

SIYAKHULA left the group

MHLAULI added SIYAKHULA

PHANGI left the group

MHLAULI added PHANGI

PHANGI: Leave me alone, Mhlauli.

ME: I don't want to be part of this.

MHLAULI: We are going to have this meeting and you two will be there, if you leave this group, I will disown you both.

Great! I don't know why Mhlauli is growing on me, and I don't see anything good coming out of this meeting.

PHANGI

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He wants nothing to do with this meeting, and he is not going. Mhlauli thinks he can make him do things he is not comfortable with because he has a soft spot for him. Maybe 10 out of 10 he can't say no to him, that doesn't mean he should always agree with every decision he makes.

Mhlauli has not left his house, and it's getting late.

"Are you sulking over the one that got away?" His little brother says when he finds him lost between space and the characters on TV.

Phangi tears his gaze from nothing and glances at him.

"She didn't get away, I needed space." He really doesn't have to explain himself to this little one, or anybody else for that matter.

Phangi has a bit of OCD, he's the type that wakes up too early and cleans up for the day. His space has to be clean, or else he won't be at ease. While Mhlauli is the total opposite. Mhlauli sits down next to him.

“You deserve better, bhuti. There are plenty of beautiful girls out there.” This is not something he wants to hear right now.

“Nobody is perfect Mhlauli, Siza made a mistake. I’m not going to replace her, it’s either her or no one.”

That does not sound good to Mhlauli, he lets out a low chuckle and puts his legs on Phangi’s lap.

“Get off me,” Phangi pushes him but the little brother puts them back and lies on his back.

“Don’t take your anger out on me, I’m just a kid.” Mhlauli says in a teasing tone.

Phangi gets lost in thought again, he has so much love in his heart for Siza that he doesn’t know what to do with it.

“I’m worried about her, her phone is off. Something is not right Mhlauli, I can feel it.”

“And who are you? Sis Thembi?” Mhlauli mocks him, it’s a way to divert the topic.

What he’s done is a betrayal to his big brother, he thinks he can fix it when all is said and done.

“I’m serious, it’s not like Siza to go AWOL. Can I ask for a favour?” –Phangi.

“I’m a busy man, bhuti.” Mhlauli is afraid to find out what the favour is.

“Go to her house and ask to see her, you’ll say you’re a friend from high school. You saw her on Instagram or something.” There is desperation in Phangi’s voice.

“No, I’m not going to do that. Are you trying to get me killed by her father?”

“He won’t do anything, you’re in her age group. He won’t be hard on you, maybe he will give you a slap or two. If I go there, that man will surely kill me. I look older than I am, Mhlauli. Please.”

They’ve done favours for each other before, including covering for each other in such matters But this is different, Mhlauli knows where Siza is. His other brother has her and that’s something he can’t tell Phangi.

“She will come back bhuti, give her some time. Desperation does not look good on you.” That’s Mhlauli, removing himself from Phangi. “I’m going out, don’t wait up.”

He gives Phangi a gentle hug and exits the house.

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SIYAKHULA

I had to get out of the house, I felt suffocated in there. I drove until I got to this bar in Rosebank, I have lost count of the number of drinks I have drank.

It's a funny theory that alcohol soothes your soul and helps you forget your troubles. The one I have been drinking has done nothing but remind me of everything. I'm not coping.

Someone sits beside me and slides a hand towards mine on the table, it's a woman's hand.

"I'm not interested," I say without looking up.

"Buy me a drink and I'll leave you alone." Her voice is so smooth it makes me lift my eyes.

She is beautiful no doubt, I don't respond to her small smile but wave for the barman and order a drink of her liking.

I think she will leave me alone after saying thank you, but she starts a conversation I am not interested in.

Five drinks later, she is failing to hold her words together. This is the part where she should stop talking. I guess I am asking for too much.

“Don’t go anywhere, I’m going to the ladies.” She runs a hand down my arm before stumbling away.

The music roars in my ears, I’m not a dancer. Heck I can’t dance to save my life, but I drag myself to the dance floor and stand there like a robot waiting to be told when to move.

The music is helping me forget, and release. This is new and weird at the same time.

As I move in a daze of alcohol, I feel hands slip up under my shirt, stroking along my chest.

My skin burns from the contact as I imagine Siza’s hands.

I rip the thought out and turn to a woman wearing almost nothing. It’s Ms talkative, she’s back. Only now I notice how tight her dress is, it’s almost like a second skin.

“Dance with me, handsome.” She seductively strokes the edge of my pants, eyes heavy.

The smile on her face is of hunger as she sways her hips, and I know what it means. She wants a fuck with no strings attached, just what I need too.

Apart from the night I spent with Siza, I can't remember the last time I engaged in meaningless sex, it was before becoming a pastor.

I encourage the lady with a smile, she wraps a hand around mine and walks me to the back alley. The street lights give life to the dark corners.

She slams my back against the rough wall and gives me a messy kiss.

I don't like being dominated, by anyone. But I'm too drunk to care. I just need release, a few moments of lustful pleasure to take my mind off Siza.

The lady closes in on me and rubs her hips against me, her soft lips harden against my mouth as she skilfully directs her tongue to mine. She tastes like alcohol.

A desperate moan builds up in the back of her throat as she deepens the kiss, it's a drunken kiss.

My hands are all over her. Despite the alcohol flooding my body right now, I am well aware of my painful erection.

She drags her hands down my stomach to grope my erection, and with her eyes kept on me

Advertisement

the lady goes down on her knees.

She unzips my pants and swallows me whole. The next seconds are unclear, I can feel her sucking me. I can't get Siza's face out of my head, in my head it's her on her knees, taking every bit of me.

Throwing my head back, I grab a hold of her hair and fuck her mouth. The orgasm that hits me makes me feel worse than I did. There's a funny feeling in my stomach, it rises up and spews out of my mouth.

"Ewww! Ewww!" She screams, jumping away from my vomit. "You disgusting pig, you almost threw up on me."

She runs inside complaining.

My stomach feels empty by the time I'm done, I fix myself up and go back inside.

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"Don't look, there is a man watching you. Three O'clock."
Mhlauli? When did he get here? He's just sat beside me, and the man he's talking about is possibly on my right.

"Do you know him?" I ask, accepting a drink from the bartender. I shouldn't be drinking after throwing up everything in my stomach.

“Never seen him before,” Mhlauli snatches my drink and gulps it down. “Give him water please, and another scotch on the rocks for me.”

He tells the bartender, I don’t protest.

“When did you get here? Were you following me?”

“I’m not that obsessed with you yet.” He says.

“You’re obsessed with me?”

He shifts his eyes from the man who is supposedly watching me, to me.

“You were not answering my calls, bhuti. I went to the house, one of the men told me you’d be here.” That explains how he found me.

“I needed time to think.” I say. The bartender has brought our orders.

“How is she?” His eyes are wandering over my shoulder, he’s keeping a close eye on this person.

“Fine,” that’s all I’m going to give him. I don’t want him finding out that Siza is pregnant.

“Khuzimpi knows that you have his daughter.”

“How?” Damnit! I wanted him to find out from me.

“Joe, the tavern guy. I knew I should’ve gotten rid of him.”
Mhlauli talks like he’s some kind of killer.

“What do you mean gotten rid of him? You get rid of people?”
He laughs and hides his face in his glass, “No. I’m a good boy.”
I don’t believe him.

“Anyway, mission shut-down the church is in progress. Our first target was the congregation, we got through to most of them. Come next Sunday and Khuzimpi will be preaching to an audience of twenty; plus; minus.” –Mhlauli.

I almost forgot about the plan to destroy the church, I was too engrossed on keeping Siza with me.

“Does he know yet?” I ask.

“He has a clue, some of them didn’t go to church last Sunday. Soon the church will be bankrupt and caught in a flood of criminal activities.” Mhlauli speaks with pride, this must be the works of his hands.

“I don’t care what happens, as long as Khuzimpi loses it all. I want him begging for food on the streets like a dog.” I say to him, patting my pants for my wallet. It’s time to go back home.

Where is it?

“What’s wrong?” Mhlauli asks upon seeing the panic on my face.

“I can’t find my wallet,” I get up to search my surroundings.

“When was the last time you saw it?”

“When I swiped over R800 for the drinks I bought for some lady.” I don’t remember if I put it back in my pocket or left it on the table.

Mhlauli should be helping me, not laughing.

“The ladies in this place don’t play bhuti.” I don’t get what he is stalking about.

“Your lady took it.”

That’s impossible, I would have seen her take it.

My cards and driver’s licence are in that wallet, I had a few cash as well. I scan the bar, looking for her.

“She’s over there.” Mhlauli points to the lounge with his eyes, and yes the lady is there. She’s entertaining another male, he looks moneyed.

“There’s nothing more sexy than a woman that knows how to hustle.” Mhlauli says, staring at the thief with admiration.

I don't reply but rush over to the lounge. Her eyes widen when she sees me.

"You stole my wallet." I don't beat around the bush.

"Fuck off, I don't know you." She spits dirty words.

The audacity of this woman.

The man with her is puzzled, he jumps up and runs for his life.

"Great, you've cost me a blesser." She guides her eyes up and down my body.

"I don't care, give me my wallet now."

She gives me a probing look, probably thinking of a lie to tell me.

"I don't have it with me, I gave it to a friend. She went home." She's lying to me.

"I'm not playing with you woman, give me back my wallet." I hold my hand out.

"Fine, can I go to the bathroom first. I'll call my friend when I get back." She stands but someone pushes her back.

"That's over R800 you're going to shit in the toilet, sit your flat ass down." Mhlauli says, and sips his drink.

I didn't see him coming.

The woman grabs her bag, pulls my wallet out, and throws it at me.

“I’m glad I didn’t sleep with you, you would have missed my G-spot with your short penis.”

She clicks her tongue as she walks past me. I am not fazed by her insults.

My eyes lock with a man from across the floor, he quickly averts his gaze. That’s the man Mhlauli was talking about, I wonder what he wants.

I pick my wallet from the ground, everything is there, except the money.

“Don’t let her words get to you bhuti, you are a Donda, and we are gifted down there.” Mhlauli pats my back, he thinks my ego has been bruised.

I don’t know the girl, her insults mean nothing to me.

“Unless you got it from your mother’s side.” He leans in to whisper in my ear. “I know a guy who can make it big, cheap price.”

I push him away from me, I’m going home.

SIYAKHULA

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Mhlauli is driving me home, he thinks I'm too drunk to be driving myself. I actually sobered up after throwing up in the alley.

I'm slowly starting to think that having him around is not such a bad thing, he is trying and it's only fair that I meet him half way.

"Are you ready for the meeting tomorrow?"

I'm not and I'm not planning on going. I'm going to be busy tomorrow, I will have to put my phone on flight mode to avoid Mhlauli's calls.

"Is it compulsory for me to be present?"

"You are family, you have to be there."

I don't have to be there.

"My presence won't make a difference, just have the meeting without me."

He meets my glare with his.

“I’m not going to argue with you about this, bhuti. We’re all going to be present at that meeting.”

“What is it about anyway?” I snap, irritated by his persistence.

“Family, our mother and Siza.” –Mhlauli.

I don’t like this, Siza should never be a topic when Phangizitha and I are in the same room.

“What about Siza?” I ask out of concern.

“I want Phangizitha on our side, if we manipulate him against Siza, he won’t be mad when he finds out what we did.”

And I thought Mhlauli was smart, he sounds like a guilt stricken man.

“Have you ever been in love before?” If his answer is yes, then he should know that his plan won’t work.

“Is that a name of a girl or something?” He’s serious.

“Look, from what I’ve heard. Siza and your brother are in love.”

“Point of correction, our brother.” He interrupts me as he switches gears, I don’t have the strength for this.

“Everything will be in vain if you tell your brother, he will want to rescue Siza.” That’s something I can’t allow.

“Bhuti...”

He is interrupted by my ringing phone.

Why won't Qedakonke leave me alone? I can't give him what he wants, not when Siza is carrying my child. I don't trust them with my baby.

"Take it," Mhlauli advises.

I take a deep sigh and prepare to spew more lies.

"Siyakhula, we need your help. The church is in trouble, you are the only one who can help." Qeda speaks without greeting.

Helping them is the last thing I want to do, I would be contradicting myself. I look over at Mhlauli and find him grinning. He loves trouble.

I have to act normal when talking to Qeda, I don't want him suspecting anything.

"Calm down and tell me what's happening, Bhuti."

I hear him breathing heavily, "The church has gone bankrupt. We are losing the congregation, Khuzimpi is out of options."

We? I thought he didn't do church?

"What do you want me to do, bhuti? I'm an outcast, I was thrown out of the church."

"But Siza repented in front of the whole church, if you come and speak to the congregation, let them see that there is no

enmity between you and Khuzimpi, they won't leave the church. Right now, everyone is convinced that my brother is a crook."

That's the plan Qeda.

I get to see a satisfied smile on Mhlauli's face when I look at him.

He looks into the rear view mirror and concern takes over his features.

"Let me sleep on it, I'm not promising anything." I tell Qeda.

"Thank you, please consider your friendship with Khuzimpi as well. You two were once inseparable, it would be good for the girls to have you back."

"Not promising that either, goodbye bhuti." I disconnect the call, not wanting to hear more from him.

"There's a car behind us," Mhlauli gives me a heads up, I look through the rear view mirror and indeed we are being followed.

"Do you think it's that guy from the bar?"

He nods, "I bet you all my sneakers it's him."

“What do we do? Stop and let him pass?” I ask, checking the number plates of the car. We might need them if we lose him.

“It’s time we find out who he is and what he wants.”

Mhlauli turns the steering wheel, spiralling the car out of control. Everything is happening so fast that I lose focus and spiral downhill until the screeching sound forces me back to focus.

The car stops, facing the empty field in front of us. My eyes snap to the passenger’s side to see Mhlauli running out of the car, the same eyes follow his fast movement to see him rushing toward a vehicle.

I dash out after him, the driver is on panic mode.

Eyes wide, he’s trying to restart his car.

Just as he reverses, Mhlauli jumps and pulls the driver’s door open. He holds a gun to the terrified-looking man and commands him to get out.

“Phuma Satan!” (Get out)

He repeats when the man doesn’t move, I feel so useless standing here and watching everything unfold.

Now I am more than convinced that I don’t know my brother, I look at his hardened hand drag the man out of the car and

wonder how he is so strong. The air of confidence around him shocks every living thing inside me.

“On your knees now,” Mhlauli presses the gun on his head.

The man’s trembling hands are held high as he kneels down, I watch my little brother pushing his head down to the concrete floor.

He presses a foot on his neck and demands answers.

“Who are you, and why are you following us?”

He doesn’t answer, and that aggravates Mhlauli. He puts pressure on the man’s neck so much so that he starts groaning with pain.

“I’m not afraid to shoot first and ask questions later. Who are you?”

“Please don’t kill me, I’m a family man trying to get home to my wife and kids.”

Yeah, that’s a lie.

“How about you arrive home with bullets riddled all over your body?” –Mhlauli.

It’s late, the road is not busy. The cars passing by are not bothered by what is happening.

I move closer to be useful.

“You carry a gun around?” I have seen him with one before, I didn’t think it was an everyday thing.

“I can get you one if you like.”

“I fight better with my fists.” I answer, eyeing the man on the ground. I have never seen him before.

“Fists don’t kill a man, guns do.”

My mother will die when she hears about this, he is her last born.

He takes his focus back to the man on the ground and riddles him with questions he refuses to answer.

“I’m killing him bhuti, call me a priest and get me a lawyer. I’m going to confess my sins before going to jail.” He’s a bit dramatic as he cocks the gun and presses it back on the man’s head.

“Tell me who you are, I don’t want to go to hell.”

I have caught on, he’s trying to scare the man.

“I swear on my wife and kids, I wasn’t following you.”

Mhlauli forces his head up, “Do you see these tattoos on my body?”

He pulls his t-shirt up, revealing a front covered in tattoos. From his neck down to his lower abdomen, every inch of his skin. The bravery of this kid amazes me.

“I didn’t get these for fun.” He says. “Bhuti, tell him the story behind the tattoos on my body.”

I don’t know the story behind his tattoos.

“Tell him how every tattoo represents every soul I took.” Oh I see where he is taking this.

I don’t have to say anything, the man starts talking.

“I don’t know the boss’ name

I have never met him. I was approached by a third party, he paid me to follow you, and make sure you don’t get home on time.” He’s looking at me as he confesses.

“Why? Who is this third party?” I ask, a sudden fear taking over my heart.

“One of your guards, he didn’t tell me why. My only job was to follow you around and stall you.”

Siza!

Mhlauli and I exchange looks, we’re thinking the same thing.

“We have to go, now.”

I tell Mhlauli with urgency.

“He’s coming with us, I want him to point out the guard.” I say, hurrying toward the car.

I take the driver’s seat while Mhlauli sits at the back with the man.

Confusion and panic are clenched around my chest, I don’t know what to think. Do they want to rescue Siza or harm her?

SIZA

My body is slowly giving up on me, they keep bringing me food and I have rejected every dish served to me. I refuse to eat anything, water is also not an exception. My heart is numb, I doubt it’s still beating.

I haven’t taken a bath since the day I was abducted, I feel dirty and sticky, and I smell. How can life be so cruel? How did I end up in such a predicament?

I have ceased to turning my gaze to the door each time it opens.

“You have got to be kidding me.” The irritated voice belongs to one of the men responsible for giving me food. “You’re one ungrateful brat.”

At this, he is observing the plate of food on the floor. I have not touched it, I want to prove a point to Siyakhula.

The guard saunters towards me, a smug look plastered on his face.

“You know,” he turns to the door.

I don't know what he's looking for, and when he turns his eyes to me, I feel disgusted by the way he looks at me. I curl up on the mattress, my body shuddering from weak joints due to lack of food.

“I have been waiting for that idiot Siyakhula to leave the house, so I can have my alone time with you.” He's whispering like he doesn't want to be heard.

I'm confused by what he's saying, I want to speak but my heart is racing a million times a second.

I want to move back when he kneels on the mattress, and touches the strands of my braids, his next words shake the world beneath my feet.

“Such a young beautiful woman, pity your life will be cut short.”

“What are you talking about?” I ask, weakly pushing his hand away.

The smirk playing at his face feels like mockery to me.

“Someone wants you gone sweetie, you are a threat to their future and I’m here to do the job.” He strokes my cheek with his rough hand.

I am disgusted by his touch, but I’m not there. I have seen this man before, he brought me food yesterday and this morning.

Siyakhula is a coward, if he wanted me dead, he should’ve done it himself.

“Did Siyakhula order my death?”

“If you want to call him that, then suit yourself. Names don’t matter to me, I clean up the mess and receive money for it.” His hand feels like a plague on my face.

He looks behind him to the shut door once again, then retrieves a syringe from his back pocket.

“This will take a second, the pain will be over soon. I promise.”

I have been afraid in my life before but this one is the suffocating kind.

My stomach churns violently, unexpectedly I release gas but something watery sprays out of my hole. I just messed myself.

“Wait, I don’t want to die like this.” I plead, he thinks I’m joking because he releases a quiet laugh and holds the syringe up.

“Say night-night sweetie.” He says with a smile.

For a while I’m bewildered, in utter shock. This is how I’m going out? By lethal injection?

I curl my hand around his wrist.

“Please! My father has money, name your price. I can double whatever it is they are paying you.”

I’m so bad at negotiating, his face lights up with a huge smile.

He takes my hand by force and targets the vein on my arm with the tip of the syringe.

“No.” I push his hand away, the syringe falls to the floor.

“The boss is not around, I can do this the whole night if you like.” He’s laughing as he moves to take the syringe.

I drag myself up, the aim is to get to the door. I’m not weak, I may not be physically strong but I trust my will to stay alive.

“Help!” I shout frantically, hoping the other guards are not in on this.

This man tackles me and I fall on my face, he roots me to the ground with his foot on my back.

“Do that shit again, and I will snap your neck and dispose of your body in the river.” The seriousness in his voice is palpable.

He sits on my back, crushing me with his weight.

“Now be a good girl and take the sting.” I see from the corner of my eye that he is trying to inject me on my neck.

Accepting defeat, I remain unmoving and wait for my death.

The door casually opens, the man that walks in freezes in the doorway.

“What are you doing?” He asks the one sitting on top of me.

“He’s trying to kill me.” I answer instead, allowing tears to weaken me.

I feel him gradually getting off, “She’s lying. She was trying to escape and I stopped her.”

“He’s lying, he wants to inject me with a lethal injection. Search him if you don’t believe me.”

I can’t confirm if he believes my words, his intent gaze is on me. They are all menacing I can’t read their faces.

“Don’t believe her Vuyo, she’s desperate for an escape, so she would say anything.”

Oh God, if he continues to lie, I might get in trouble.

I get on my knees, and let my tears speak for me first.

“Search him, I swear he is trying to kill me.”

“Empty your pockets.” Vuyo says to the man behind me.

I'm not imagining him gulping.

"Come on man, it's me..."

Vuyo pulls out a gun and aims, "Empty your pockets now!"

At his loud command, two more guards rush in.

"Lock him up, the boss will deal with him."

They move at Vuyo's command, and drag the man out.

It's just me and Vuyo now, he's staring, face scrunched up in disgust.

I stink.

"Go back to your bed, and eat something." He says and turns to leave.

That's it? A man just tried to kill me and that's all he says to me?

I want to scream and cry and throw something against the wall.

SIYAKHULA

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Vuyo is waiting for us in the foyer when we arrive, he narrates what happened. My first thought is Siza and if she is okay. I can't trust her with anyone, leaving her alone was a mistake.

"Where is Siza?"

"She's in her room." Vuyo tells me with a scrunched up nose. "I suggest you don't go in there boss, you won't like the smell."

I don't like his attitude.

"What smell?" Mhlauli questions him.

There was no smell when I left earlier.

"I will check on her, will you be okay?" I speak before Vuyo does.

I can't have him embarrassing Siza like that, I might have a clue what he is talking about.

"I will deal with this, you go check on her. I see how worried you are."-Mhlauli.

I'm taking his advice when Vuyo blocks my path.

“She’s fine boss, I think you should deal with this first.”

Who is he again?

I don’t give him my time, but rush to Siza.

I find her laying on the floor, next to the mattress. Fear grabs my heart as I run to her.

“Gundi.” I’m afraid to touch her. What have I done?

“Khula.” Her attempt to get up fails, I was ready to hold her steady.

I will have to carry her out of here, something I should’ve done when Zoe suggested it. Our eyes meet when I take her in my arms, it’s almost as if she weighs nothing.

There’s a fully furnished bedroom next to mine, I place her on the bed there. I’m sitting beside her, somehow I can’t find the will to leave her alone.

“Gundi!” How do I make it better? How could I be so cold and resentful to her when I once cared about her?

Nonetheless, the path I have taken is dangerous.

“I smell, get away from me.” I believe if she had the strength, she would push me off the bed.

I want to tell her that I'll make it all better, but I can't summon the courage to speak. For the life of me, I'm waging war with my heart and mind.

"I'm sorry for everything Gundi," I place gentle kisses on her head. "I deeply apologize for locking you up and that you are hurting because of me."

She breathes, and presses her forehead against mine. I wrap my arms around her, she buries her face on my chest, holding me back.

"Does that mean you are letting me go?"

"Not today," my lips brush against her ear.

I would take her back but it's too late. I'm far gone.

What will I say when I bring her to her father? How will I explain her weight loss, her sunken eyes and the kidnapping?

"I'm begging you, please." She grabs my clothing.

No, I can't let this happen. Mhlauli was right, I am weak for Siza. If she continues pleading, I might just agree and release her. Her freedom will cost me my child.

I release my arms from her, and get off the bed.

“I don't owe you anything, Siza.” I say without looking at her.
“You are going to have to eat something, starving yourself will not guarantee your freedom.”

I finish and see frustration grow on her face.

“Fuck you, I will never do as you say you piece of shit.” She curses me and I completely understand. I have put her through shit.

“You might not believe me, but I really am sorry Siza.”

I brush her braids off her face, her skin feels so cold.

I want to bath her and put her in clean clothes, but I know she won't let me.

“Your apology means nothing to me, Siyakhula. You are ruining my life and I will never forgive you for it.”

That stings, but I don't let it show.

I need Zoe back, she's the only one I trust to take care of Siza. I think of sending someone to bring food for her. We will fight if I come back here, she has made it clear that she hates me.

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I find Vuyo in the lounge sipping from a whiskey bottle, I clear my throat and he puts it back to its place.

“Where is Mhlauli?”

“He left with the suspects and two of our guards.”

Why didn't Mhlauli tell me that he is leaving? I dial his number, he is not picking up.

“Tell the cook to prepare food for Siza and take it to her.” I instruct Vuyo.

“Yes boss.”

“From today, you will be her personal guard. No one else is allowed near her, am I clear?” It's best I get someone to keep watch over her. I can't trust everyone, but Vuyo gained my trust when he held captive the man that wanted to kill Siza.

“I will boss.”

He heads to the kitchen.

I try Mhlauli's number once more, it's off. Seeing that I can't get through to him, I call Mlamuli instead.

“Son.”

I cringe whenever he calls me that.

“I'm trying to get through to Mhlauli, his phone is off.”

“The last I heard from Mhlauli was during the group chat. Is everything okay son?”

“Please stop calling me that.”

He clears his throat, “Sorry. I want to help, tell me what’s going on.”

“You said your guards can be trusted, one of them tried to kill Siza.”

“The men I appointed have been with me for years, I trust them with my life. Unless you hired someone new.”

“I didn’t, this is serious. If any of them can accept a bribe to kill Siza, then I can’t have them around.”

“Siyakhula

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I assure you that they are very trustworthy. Have the traitor sent to me, I will deal with him.”

“Mhlauli has him, I don’t know where they went.”

“I will find Mhlauli, don’t worry. Everyone who crosses you will pay with their lives.”

“Including Siza?”

He says nothing, meanwhile my suspicions are growing.

“Mlamuli Donda, did you hire a hitman to kill Sizalobuhle?”

“No, why would I go behind your back and do something so stupid?”

“I hope you are telling me the truth, for your sake.”

“You are my son Siyakhula, I live for you and only you. I swear on the love I still have for your mother, I would never go behind your back. Only you will decide when to kill her, right?”

He’s crazy, I am not going to answer him. I put the phone back in my pocket. Vuyo walks in as I settle down on the couch.

“She still refuses to eat.” He reports.

It's been days and Siza continues with her hunger strike.

I have never met anyone so stubborn. It angers me how she could put her life at stake for the sake of freedom.

Seeing how she has lost so much weight is unsettling, I can't take it.

I bury my face in the palm of my hands and exhale deeply, it helps calm my raging heart. I’m trying to avoid going to her room, I don’t trust my heart around her.

“What do we do boss?”

I’m as clueless as him, Siza’s stubbornness knows no bounds.

“I don’t know, there has to be a way to make her eat.”

She will die if she doesn’t eat, I can't have that. Her death would be a great way to avenge Khuzimpi, but things are different now. Siza can't die, she just can't. She’s carrying my baby.

“Get all kinds of dishes, anything women like to eat. I want that woman fed, Vuyo, get on it.” I would order her favorite foods if I knew them.

Vuyo hurries out, I kind of feel bad expecting him to work a miracle. When it comes to Siza, I panic somehow.

An hour later, Vuyo is back with bad news.

“We ordered the food sir, there is one problem though. She doesn't want to eat. I told the cook to prepare a home cooked meal, something different. She is trying to convince her to eat as we speak.”

God Sizalobuhle! What are you trying to do?

The cook enters, excuses are written all over her fear-filled face. I take it as excuses because how can they not make a dish scrumptious enough for Siza to want to eat?

The cook nears with her head dropped and eyes on the ground. She stops right next to Vuyo, and says nothing.

“What is it?” I’m already annoyed by the coming excuses.

Siza is working extra hard to piss me off.

“Sir, she won't eat.” Her voice is a whisper, it annoys me even more that she's not vocal.

“I don't care if you have to cook up a storm, make sure that she eats.” Once again, I let anger consume me.

If that girl does not eat, god-knows what will happen to my baby.

“We did sir.” The lady says, her eyes still lowered.

“You did what?”

“Co- Cook up a storm.” Her reply makes Vuyo chuckle. They think this is a joke.

He covers his mouth to restrain his laughs, when I shoot him a glare.

“Were you not hired to cook sisi?”

“I was sir.” She bites her lower lip and rubs her eyes.

“How many of you are in the kitchen?”

“It’s just me sir, the other lady gave herself a day off.” She says.

I didn’t know workers give themselves off days.

“Are they allowed to take unauthorized leave?” I ask Vuyo who shrugs in response.

“I don't know boss, Tumi is the one in charge in the kitchen. She probably did it herself.” –Vuyo.

I never cared much about the kitchen and what happens there. What I am hearing now is absurd, if I'm going to be paying them, I will need to keep them in check.

“Call Tumi, I want her at work first thing in the morning.”

The cook's eyes widen, “But sir it won't make a difference. The lady won't eat.”

“Keep quiet Fikile, have you forgotten your place?” Vuyo reprimands her. She gives Vuyo a death stare, coils back and drops her eyes once again.

“I'm sorry sir.”

All this formality is too much, Mlamuli went above and beyond with this employer and employee thing.

“Go back to the kitchen and prepare something else.” I say.

She raises a shocked face.

“It's late sir, can't she eat what we prepared? There's more food Vuyo ordered. Preparing something else will be wasting food.”

She's got a point. However, her stubbornness reminds me of Siza and I don't like it one bit.

"Go," I release her.

She shoots Vuyo another ugly glance as she walks away.

"You were too soft on her, boss. Fikile is lazy and stubborn."
That's Vuyo, extremely irritated by the cook. I don't give him an answer, but let my feet lead me out of the lounge.

"Boss, where are you going?"

"To force food down Siza's throat," I reply, gesturing that he follows me.

SIYAKHULA

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The plan was to walk in here and tell Siza where to get off, but seeing her curled up on the bed like a sick puppy is unbearable. My plan goes down the drain, a new feeling arises, not entirely new. It's been there for days now, probing, pushing and changing me.

I clench a fist as I observe her undernourished body. She has her back turned, I can't see her face. She's whimpering.

Dragging Siza into this war is plain cruel, she's a frail woman. The mother of my unborn child, I need to take care of her.

A need to comfort her has me laying down behind her. My arms itch with the need to tighten around her.

Being a man who acts first and asks questions later, I spoon her.

Siza does not react to the touch, her quiet sobs are like fire to my heart.

Desperate for her to stop, I hold her closer, and bury my face inside her neck. Truth be to God, I don't know what I'm doing. The war is back, my heart and mind are in conflict again.

“Siza, you will die if you don't eat. Please have something.”

How hypocritical of me to ask for such when I won't release her.

“No.” Her voice breaks.

I hold on to her thinking her body will cease to tremble, and my thoughts are right. It takes a few seconds for Siza to stop shaking. Relief surges through my bones.

“Will you eat?”

She shakes her head.

“Please... Allow me to take care of you, I won't let anything happen to you.”

She slowly nods leaving me puzzled, this was never a game to begin with. However, things have gotten more serious than before.

Now I have someone to look after, a prisoner who has an effect on me more than anyone I have ever known.

I can't put into words what the fuss is about between my heart and mind. Whatever it is, I know now that I can't let it get in the way of me keeping this young lady safe.

“Good girl.”

Vuyo is waiting outside the door with the food I asked for, he hands me the tray.

“Thank you Vuyo.” I dismiss him, he marches out and closes the door behind him.

There is a plate of hot porridge, she has to eat something light first. I move to the other side of the bed where I can see her face, our eyes meet and my heart stops beating for about a good second.

I'm not sure what the feeling is, if I like it or not. Her eyes pull me in, they are enthralling that I feel inhumane for what I have done to her.

I sit on the edge of the bed.

“Sit up for me,” She blinks rapidly causing tears to fall down her face, she's having trouble raising her body. So I place the plate back on the tray and help her, I put two pillows on her back so

she's not sitting up straight but rather leaning back on the headboard.

“Are you comfortable?” She says nothing, anger is visible on her face and dancing in her eyes.

I extend my hand to wipe away tears from her face, but her eyes quaver, refusing to let go of the tears.

Of course she is in pain, I don't know how it feels to be deprived of food. My mother and I struggled, but that woman made sure I had food in my stomach every night before bed. I can't begin to imagine what it feels like.

“I'm going to feed you, you have to eat Siza.”

As I move the spoon to her mouth, Siza slightly opens up as if it hurts to even move her jaws. Our eyes clash each time I bring a spoon up, no words are shared between us.

A few spoons later, she shakes her head, declining the portion held up. She has had enough.

“Okay, you have to eat something solid now.” I take the plate, but she shakes her head no.

“Later,” she says, her voice scratchy and narrow I can scarcely hear.

“I'll run you a bath then,” I don't wait for her to respond, I'm in the bathroom in a flash, filling the bathtub with warm water and add foam bath.

Going back to the bedroom, I find her laying down again. There's a heavy silence that lingers between us, too awkward that one can taste it.

“The water is ready.”

Siza tries to get up, it's taking her forever, I'm aware she won't be able to stand let alone take two steps. After concluding this, I carry her to the bathroom.

Her feet wobble the second I put her down, our bodies pressed against each other, faces a whiff away from each other.

My hand glides to the small of her back before asking, “Will you be able to bath?”

She looks at me like she wants to kill me, “Does it look like I can bath myself?”

Okay, still the spicy Siza I know.

“The water temperature is bearable, you'll lay down while you bath.”

She scoffs, and I am startled by her feistiness.

“You put me in this position Siyakhula, the least you can do is help me.”

Is she asking me to bath her?

“Are you...”

“It’s not like you have never seen me naked before.”

I know, but we were drunk. The confidence she has of me seeing her naked is baffling, I don’t know what to say really.

“Okay, I’m going to remove your clothes now?” The statement comes out in a form of a question.

She nods, giving me consent and lifts her arms as I pull her dress up, I school my eyes not to wander to places it shouldn’t.

She gets inside the tub with her panties on, her eyes are all over the place. Flashes of shame swiping over her face.

Water fills up to her chest when she sits, I’m glad I won’t be avoiding looking at her breasts. That thing that's pushing me to protect this girl still hovers about, annoying and forcing me to accept the call. I blink the feeling away and proceed to bath her.

Once I’m done

I help her back to the bedroom. I'm stunned by how Siza holds on to me, it's as if she has trust in me to keep her safe.

There are no clothes in this bedroom.

"Stay warm, I'm going to get you something to wear." She hides her body with a blanket.

There's something lingering in the air, something about the way she looks at me. I'm certain that if she had a knife, she wouldn't hesitate to stab me with it.

I feel her eyes piercing my back when I walk out.

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BONISILE

I was convinced that I'd be staying with my uncle, not this old white man who is dependent on me every second of the day.

Where does he get the money he pays me when he's forever at home with his face stuck in the newspaper?

He gave me a room when he asked me to be a live-in housemaid.

“This was my daughter’s room, she died ten years ago.”

Haibo! I must sleep with a ghost?

I won’t lie it’s scary, white people know how to become ghosts, and they do it well.

I can’t sleep, thinking about Siyakhula. I don’t get why he’s so detached and cold towards me. He wasn’t an ass during his pastor days. I have a feeling he’s angry at the world.

I check my phone to see who loves and misses me. No notifications from all three apps. I need friends, real friends.

Siyakhula’s last seen is a week ago. What’s he doing with a phone if he’s not using it for WhatsApp? That’s how people communicate in this generation.

It’s a little over 11pm, that doesn’t stop me from dialing his number.

‘Boni you brave bitch.’ I like having my heart shred to pieces. He will tell me nonsense again.

It’s ringing, and by God’s grace he answers.

“Is everything okay?” oh wow! Who died and put him in a good mood?

“Is this Siyakhula?” I have to make sure I’m not talking to my alter ego.

“What is it, Boni? Do you know what time it is?”

Time to jump for joy, that’s what. I can’t believe he answered my call.

“I thought I should check up on you, you were not in a good mood the last time I saw you.”

Don’t bite your lip Boni, rather cross your fingers that he doesn’t turn on you.

“About that, I want to apologize. A lot has been happening and...”

Why did he stop talking?

“I understand.” I wanted him to tell me more, communication is good. It brings people closer.

“Life has not been fair to you, you are going to be okay.” More than okay, he’s a strong man.

“Is there anything else, I’m kind of busy.” He says.

At this time? People are sleeping, what’s he doing?

“Let me not keep you,” I hope not from riding a woman.

Should I ask if he’s drank anything today? He doesn’t look like the type that would fornicate without a ring on his finger, unless he’s being helped by alcohol.

“Siyakh...” Ti... Ti... Ti...

Eh! He's dropped the call.

"Bhoni!!!" Jesus Christ! What does he want now?

"I'm coming." I shout back.

Did I mention the old man doesn't sleep? I have a boss from hell.

He's in his room, I knock once and he permits me to enter.

How many newspapers does he read a day?

"Make me tea."

At 11pm? Uyanya.

"Yes sir."

Not even John and his addiction to tea can put me in a bad mood.

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SIYAKHULA

When I come back with a dress shirt, she is still glaring.

"It was the only fitting thing I could find."

“Thanks.” She puts it on, and lays back down, slowly covering herself with a duvet.

“Do you want to eat?”

Sure she needs more food, porridge does nothing to the stomach. I’m waiting for her answer, it's not coming and that compels me to sit on the bed, facing her.

“Siza?” Her freshly washed face is drenched with tears.

“You are evil, you know that?” I’m evil? After everything they did to me, she thinks I’m evil?

“You must have skipped Sunday school, do you know the definition of evil?”

Siza lifts her eyes, glaring with hatred.

“Yes, you. What I did to you is nothing compared to this, Siyakhula. What man in their right mind would keep a woman captive? You are not different from a trafficker.”

What did Fikile put in that porridge? I know audacity is one of the ingredients.

“You are not in the position to be pointing fingers, sisi. Please don’t tell me you are still addicted to your princess throne.”

“You see, that’s your problem Khula. You are bitter because I had everything and you had nothing.”

This is a joke.

“What you’re saying makes no sense, you make it sound like I’m competing with you.” For what exactly?

“Maybe.” I see she’s gained the strength to snap at me. “We wouldn’t be here if that wasn’t the case.”

“We wouldn’t be here if you were not selfish and jumping when your father told you so, you ruined my life Sizalobuhle.” My voice is rising, I don’t want to argue with her. She’s deliberately provoking me.

“You kidnapped me, that’s why I’m here.”

“No, you came here willingly. Anyone who saw us that day can attest to it. You willingly came to my house, I only put you in a room and locked it.” I’m playing mind games, simply because she is pissing me off. She always does when she opens her mouth.

“That reverse psychology won’t work on me, Siyakhula. I am not a naïve woman, I know my rights. I know the law, what you did is illegal. I promise you, once I am out of this place I will tell anyone who wishes to listen what you did.”

I knew this was coming, this is the person she is. She is cornering me and I don’t do well in corners.

“You can broadcast it if you wish, and I’ll join you on the same platform, and tell the world what you and your father did. We’ll see what law enforcement thinks about that.”

The wrath in her eyes draws back, and a hollowing feeling empties my insides.

“The world is too small for us both, I don’t like you Siyakhula.”

I’d like to say the feeling is mutual, but I’d be lying to us both.

Why am I still here? My job is done, she’s clean and fed.

“I’m sorry I lied.” She stops me with an apology. I look back at her. “I didn’t mean for anything to happen to your mother. She shouldn’t be caught in all this. When you talk to her, tell her I’m sorry.”

And here I was thinking she is apologizing for having me jailed.

“Is that all?”

She shrugs, “We are even now Siyakhula. I don’t owe you an apology.”

Unbelievable.

“You will never admit to your mistakes, will you?”

She stares, folding her arms on her chest.

“Will you ever admit to yours?” She sounds so odd, I don’t like the tone she’s using with me. It’s giving me a different view of her.

“You are something else Sizalobuhle.”

“I’m a Gumede, we don’t grovel.”

This is the only woman that knows how to make my skin crawl, and feel sorry for her in one sitting.

I’m done here.

Vuyo is waiting outside the door, he takes over the handle and pulls the door shut.

“Yeah neh, boss.”

He heard the conversation.

“Let me take her back to that small room, it will humble her.”

He says.

I don’t know about that, but I know Siza needs to eat some humble pie.

25

PHANGI

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Today has been a long day, he's tired and wants to take a nap before supper. He still hasn't heard from Siza, Mhlauli refused to help him talk to her family. Surely but slowly, his patience is running out.

A knock at the door puts him in a foul mood, he is not in the mood for people. Especially this man standing before him.

"It's late." Not really.

"Is your brother here?" Mlamuli lets himself in, and heads to the living room.

"Oh come in Mr. Donda, my home is your home." Phangi sarcastically complains. He shuts the door and joins his father.

"Why are you here?" He's bored by his presence.

"I can't find Mhlauli, is he around?" -Mlamuli.

No one ever asks about him, it's always the younger siblings or that self-entitled, big brother who has turned his life upside down.

“Do you see Mhlauli here?” That’s a bit hush, his father frowns. Their relationship needs Dr. Phil’s touch, they have a lot to work on, yet no one is willing to take the first step.

“What’s wrong with you?” Mlamuli asks, watching his son throw himself on the couch.

“What’s wrong with you?” Phangi returns.

There’s a glaring competition. Somebody better say something. It’s getting heated in here.

“Son...”

Phangi chuckles. That’s such a funny claim for a man who favours one son over the others.

Mlamuli sighs and sits far from Phangi, there’s so much to fix here.

“What did I do?”

“Typical Mlamuli Donda doesn’t know what he did wrong. You are perfect Ngonyama.” He claps for him.

“What are you talking about? How will I know when you keep going around in circles and talking gibberish?” Mlamuli is not yelling but he wants to, Phangi sure acts like a brat that needs a hiding.

“Why did you bring Siyakhula back into our lives?” What a strange question. They are brothers.

“For years you begged me to reconcile with him and bring him back, what has changed now?” -Mlamuli.

“Everything?” That’s a shout. “Do you people expect me to walk around with a sign that says ‘Siyakhula Mbatha slept with my girlfriend?’”

“Is that why you’re angry and talking to me like I’m your friend.” Mlamuli is beyond baffled. “You need to grow up Phangizitha.”

“He slept with the woman I love baba, does that even matter to you?”

“No!” That’s an honest answer from the dad. Phangi is shattered.

“I can’t believe you, you’re saying it’s okay that Siyakhula slept with Siza?”

Scratch shattered, he’s drowning in pain and suffocating.

Mlamuli is shaking his head, “You need to stop crying over that girl and focus on your mother, she needs you now that she’s hospitalized.”

This can’t be, he spoke to his mother today.

“What happened to MaKhuzwayo?”

“Not her, MaMbatha. She had a stroke.”

Phangi’s heart jumps, that’s his queen. The woman who gave him life, he loves her more than he loves MaKhuzwayo.

They are not close but he’s kept in touch with her over the years. He hopes that one day she will come back home to the Donda premises.

“When did this happen? Where is she?”

“A hospital in Cape Town, I’ll give you the address. You can take Mhlauli with you, he’s still delaying his visit.”

Still delaying?

“Mhlauli knows? When was my mother hospitalized, baba? What happened to her?”

He feels it coming, it’s not the first that he’s kept in the dark. Phangi is not a favourite and this old man reminds him every time he looks at him.

“It’s been days, yes Mhlauli knows. Siyakhula too, obviously.”

Obviously? That’s the most insensitive word and tone Phangi has ever heard.

“Why am I even part of this family? Siyakhula is back, give him my spot in your life baba. ”

“Hau, Phangizitha? What is this?” Like he doesn’t know.

Phangi is tired and has work tomorrow, talking to this man will birth nothing but more heartache.

“Don’t let the door hit you on your way out.” He’s going to take a nap.

Just as he climbs the first stair, Mlamuli’s phone rings. Phangi huffs, and continues walking. But his father’s next words stop him.

“What do you mean the girl’s uncle is on TV?” That’s Mlamuli trying to keep his voice down.

MLAMULI: “Of course they won’t find her, Siyakhula is careful. He knows what he’s doing.”

This gets Phangi thinking, he runs to his room and turns to the news channel.

The only person he is familiar with is Nomazulu, beside her is a man kindly asking people to help look for his niece, Sizalobuhle Gumede.

Phangi remembers his father’s previous words and it hits him that Siyakhula has Siza.

“How dare you challenge me, Siyakhula.”

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SIYAKHULA

Siza is doing fine, she is eating and growing stronger every day. Her strength means my baby is also growing.

If she keeps this up, we might just be the best of friends. But chances of that happening are next to nothing.

I allowed her freedom to walk around the house, of course with a guard following her every move. I don't trust her not to leave this place.

Even though she is free to move around, she hasn't left her room.

I'm checking up on her like I do every day during my free time, I knock and peek through the door. She is sleeping, I like her more when she is sleeping. Then I don't have to listen to her vile words and curses.

It has taken us two weeks to get to this semi-peaceful place.

I see progress.

I step out and shut the door.

“Should I wake her up, Boss?” Vuyo, standing by her door asks.

“Why?”

“She sleeps too much, even my dog doesn’t sleep this much boss.” He is not fond of Siza, she doesn’t like him either.

“Let her sleep, Vuyo.”

I make my way to the lounge, while dialling Mhlauli again. He disappeared on me for two weeks, I should not be worried like this. I don’t know when I developed a soft spot for him.

“Do you know how much I hate gadgets?” Is he breathing heavily?

“I’m out here worried sick about you and you are having sex?”

“Continue worrying about me, bhuti and let me have my fun.”
This idiot.

“At least tell me you are okay? What happened to those two men? Where are you Mhlauli?”

“Whoah! You are ruining the mood bhuti, I’m kind of busy here.”

I laugh at him snapping at me, like I care that he is blowing off some steam.

“Sex will kill you one day, mark my words.”

I hear complaints in the background.

“Dying in between the thighs off a woman is a good way to die, trust me. I will call you later and brief you in, I was seconds from coming, now I have to build up again.”

That is disgusting.

“I hope you are wearing a condom.” I say.

He laughs and drops the call.

There is a lot I don’t know about him, he has a lot of skeletons in his closet. I don’t think Mlamuli has a clue what his son gets up to when no one is around.

“Boss.”

Vuyo storms in with a face barely containing anger.

“There is someone here to see you.” He doesn’t have to announce the person, she is standing behind him.

The last time I saw her was when the police were dragging us out of a police van, taking us to different jails.

“Thank you Vuyo.”

He gives the guest a look that tells me they had a misunderstanding of sort as he leaves the room, and bumps her with his shoulder.

“Be a good spot and bring my bag in, will you hot-stuff?” She shouts after Vuyo.

“Marete.” (Sack of balls.)

Vuyo shouts back, and shows her a middle finger.

She clicks her tongue, returning the middle finger.

“What are you doing here Nadine?”

“Put your dog down Khula, I’m not a nice girl when provoked.”

I know she is not, I can count the number of dead people she has to her name with my fingers and toes.

“Who is that stupid boy anyway? I don’t like him.”

Vuyo is far from being a boy, he is almost as tall as I am. His body is made of muscles and if I were to exaggerate his looks, I would add iron to it.

“Why are you here? How did you find me?” She hasn’t answered my question.

“Wow! So this is you huh? You live like a king now, Khula?” She’s looking around the house, touching this and that.

Her presence makes me nervous.

“Did you win the lotto or something? Or the prodigal son went back home to daddy?” She questions.

I was once stupid enough to tell her about my past, Mlamuli and my siblings.

“You still haven’t answered my question, Nadine.”

She smiles, the smile that used to make me weak and agree to everything she said.

I step back when she tries to hug me and stare at her. But I know if it comes to a staring contest

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she would win over me any day.

“What’s wrong? Are you not happy to see your Nay-Nay?”

I refuse to answer that question, I can’t associate myself with Nadine again. She is nothing but bad news.

“Don’t tell me you’ve forgotten how we were the Bonny and Clyde of South Africa? Unstoppable and feared.” She sounds astounded, and a little bit annoyed.

“You haven’t told me why you are here, and how you found me.”

The smile is back, “Don’t be such a bore Khula. I heard daddy is back and you’re rolling in money.”

I don’t even want to know where she heard this from.

Vuyo walks back in and throws a heavy duffel bag on the floor, then walks out.

“You need a place to stay?”

“Yes, and you are going to let me stay in this mansion.” It’s not a mansion, exaggeration is her middle name.

Nadine is a past I would hate to visit.

I was fresh from KZN when I met her, young and naïve and trying to find a job.

I had an interview that morning when two druggies cornered me and took everything I had. She was passing by when she noticed what was happening and I hate to say that she saved me.

Unfortunately they ran with my money, Nadine was kind enough to drive me to my interview. I didn't get the job, that's when Nadine said there were no jobs in Joburg. One has to hustle to get money.

Her definition of hustling was robbing banks, card fraud and other sinister things I'm ashamed to admit.

I liked the adrenalin, the feeling of being noticed by her and feared by the people we robbed

A month after our meeting, we were rolling naked in the same bed sheets. We were official and very toxic for each other. She was bossy, I kind of liked it. It was fascinating for me, women in KZN were different and submissive. Not Nadine, it must be the coloured in her.

She looks as black as the next African person, brown skin, 4c hair. It's only when she starts speaking that you can tell she is an Afrikaans speaking woman, straight from the Cape flats.

She still looks the part, dressed in a black latex dress and high heeled boots that reach up to her thighs. Her braids tucked

back in a slick ponytail. The only colour on her is the red lipstick.

“Nadine...” She shuts me up with a harsh kiss on the mouth. Startled to my wits, I don’t notice her hand going down to my sack. She moans into my mouth and stops kissing me, she bites her lower lip, smiling like we are okay. Like we never went our separate ways.

“I missed you daddy, did you miss me?” She tries to kiss me again, I move my head to the side, and her hand from me.

“What the hell Nadine! You can’t do this.”

She closes the distance between us, and puts her arms around me.

“You know there is nothing your Nay-Nay can’t do,” the seductive tone is not motivating me to push her away.

She pushes me on the couch, and the heel of her shoe on my manhood.

The pain gives me a pleasurable feeling. I squirm a little, clearing my throat. Her eyes drop to the obvious bulge in my pants and she hisses under her breath.

“At least Junior is happy to see me, I can’t say the same about daddy.” Nadine says, lowering herself so that our faces are touching.

“Don’t do that, Nadine.” I say against her lips.

“Remember how we used to do it back in the day, Daddy?”

Gone are the days when I found her dominatrix behaviour sexy, I guess it still is. She is the only woman I ever allowed to control me in bed because she is Nadine, she loves taking control.

“I know you want to touch me, Daddy. Beg to touch me and you can.”

Shit! She keeps using that word against me, she knows how it makes me feel.

“I don’t want to touch you, Nadine.” I don’t, she might still have the same effect on me as before. But I can control myself, I’ve got this.

“Is that so?” She questions with a raised brow. “Then why are you hard, daddy?”

Her hand runs over my bulge, a tingle rushes up my spine at her touch.

I need her to stop calling me Daddy then I will be fine.

Abruptly, I hold her by her waist, lift her up, and pin her on the sofa beside me. She gasps, grinning at our faces that are almost touching.

“Ooh Daddy! I always loved your wild side.” That word again.

Nadine is hot, there is no part of her I haven’t discovered. She is also bad news.

“Still selling your p#ssy to get what you want I see.” I say, wanting to get her off the mood she’s in.

“What?” She questions, close to irritation.

“You want a place to stay and you’re willing to sell your body in exchange for a roof above your head. It’s true that bad habits die hard.”

Nadine knees me on my groin, I didn’t see that coming. I’m on the floor, nursing my painful balls.

“Fuck you Khula, you know damn well you were the only man I allowed to touch me when we were together.”

There were rumours that she was riding some coloured boy.

I believed the rumours, Nadine was a druggie and when the money we stole ran out, she did anything to get a fix.

We were always broke, she overspent our money.

“That hurt,” I confess as if she cares about the pain I’m in.

“You owe me, I saved your life once, remember? I don’t have to sleep with you to stay here, I’m collecting a favour you owe me.”

It’s not a lie that I owe her.

The pain is fading and I’m strong enough to stand and face her.

“How long?”

“A week, then I will be out of your hair.” I know that look, she’s in trouble.

“What did you do, Nadine?”

“Must you always assume the worst of me? Just let me lay low here for a couple of weeks and I’ll be out of your hair before you know it.” She sits on the sofa, arms spread and leg crossed over the other.

“You said a week.”

“Did I? I meant a month.”

I forgot that she plays mind games so well, it almost seems natural.

“Your phone is ringing,” she lays down on the couch, making herself too comfortable.

I'm too occupied by Khuzimpi's name flashing on the screen of my phone to tell her to get her feet off my sofa.

"Yes!"

"Is that how you answer a call from a friend?"

"We are not friends anymore Khuzimpi, you made sure of that."

He laughs, I don't know what's funny.

"Where are you? We need to talk." Now he wants to talk, a lot would have been avoided had he wanted to talk before calling the cops on me.

"I'm busy." I lie.

"Oh trust me, you want to hear what I have to say Siyakhula. Meet me at my office in church." Khuzimpi ends the call after giving me an order.

I feel arms wrap around me from the back, "Nadine stop."

As I push her off of me, I see Siza standing in the door way. She hardly ever comes down, what's changed today? The nasty look on her face is directed to me, then to Nadine.

“A prostitute Siyakhula? It’s true that you never really know a person.” Siza says, dragging her eyes up and down Nadine’s body.

Nadine pushes me aside to get into Siza’s personal space, and pulls out a pocket knife from her bra.

“Jou ma se poes! Who are you calling a prostitute?”

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SIZA

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The nerve of this woman, I am not fazed by the knife on her hand or her ghetto behavior. I am disappointed in Siyakhula that he is associated with such a woman.

She is breathing down my neck, with her chest pressed against mine. If it were not for that knife, I would have slapped her.

I fold my arms, and hold the stare with confidence, knowing Siyakhula won't let her touch me.

“Did I hit a nerve?”

She snorts and laughs, “Don't test me girlie, don't test me.”

She looks ready to stab me, the dark expression says it all.

“Siyakhula, get this woman away from my face.” I say in a cold tone, Siyakhula holds her by her waist as he pulls her back.

I didn't say touch her like that, I said get her away from me. Can't he take a simple instruction?

“Who is this ugly thing, Khula?”

Did she just call me ugly?

I look at the man who is slowly becoming irritated, “How did this dirty trash get into the house?”

She gets into my space, “Hou jou bek, girlie. I am not afraid to use this knife on you.” (Shut your trap.)

She kisses the knife while glaring at me.

“That’s enough,” Siyakhula intervenes, pushing her to the side and stands closer to me. “Siza meet Nadine, an old friend. ”

Is he seriously introducing us? He is wasting his breath.

“Play nice.” He adds.

“I am not about to play buddy-buddy with a stranger, strangers make me cringe.”

“Khula let me mark her face, please let me mark her face.”

Nadine is a gangster, her behavior is disgusting.

“No, stop or leave.” He tells her, and she replies with a tongue click.

Siyakhula tries to take my hand but Nadine grabs his hand, the way she is touching him makes me uncomfortable.

Why is she touching his arm like that?

She leans in to whisper something into his ear, he looks at her as if astounded and Nadine purrs like a cat, dragging her long nails down his back.

I wonder what she said to him, he seems uneasy now. My mind keeps busy with a million questions.

I'm not okay with what I'm observing.

"Siyakhula." I don't know what happens to me, I grab his hand from her and drag him to the kitchen.

"What is it?" He questions, showing me a confused face.

"Who is that girl, Siyakhula?"

"I told you that she is an old friend."

"If she is a friend, why was she touching you like that?"

My blood boils when I think about it.

"I don't know what you are talking about." He is lying to me, I saw the chemistry between them.

If that woman is here to claim this man, I won't allow it.

"If she is going to live here with us, then let me go." I am not going to stay here and watch these two playing lovey-dovey in front of me.

He rolls his eyes, faintly visible.

“I don’t have time for games, Siza.”

“Then tell her to leave, I’m not going to stay in the same house as her. I’m not going to share you with that woman.”

That was definitely not me, it’s too late to take it back.

“I didn’t mean it like that,” I try to redeem myself.

Siyakhula seems confused for a minute then he smiles as the realization of what I meant shows on his face.

He crosses his arms over his chest, “You are jealous Gundi?”

“No I’m not.” Maybe a little and I don’t understand it.

“You like me, don’t you?”

Men and their egos will be the death of this world.

“I don’t, you are not my type.” I tell him.

“Excuse mm!” She followed us? “Your time is up, it’s my turn to have him now.”

I’m going to need a pastor and holy water once I’m done with this girl.

“You...” Siyakhula holds my shoulder to stop me from clapping back.

“Don’t let her get to you, Gundi. Nadine means no harm.”

Something is wrong with this man. Should I tell him that this Nadine is crawling under my skin as we speak?

She makes her way to him, her hands are all over him.

“Daddy, do you still have my name tattooed on your ass?” She is looking at me while touching him and sounding like she’s having a fake orgasm. Siyakhula shrugs her off of him but slutty Nadine traces a finger over his jawline.

“You have her name tattooed on your butt?” I’m dumbfounded.

Siyakhula grits his teeth, “There is no tattoo.”

“Why are you lying to her?” That’s Nadine, I should use that knife to cut off her tongue.

“Nadine stop, stop trying to stir trouble. What the hell is wrong with you? If you are going to be staying here, you will have to respect Siza.”

I knew it.

“So she’s really going to be staying here?” I’m not sharing a space with her.

She smirks, mocking me with a sadistic look.

“Yes, do you have a problem with it?”

I shouldn't have a problem with it considering that I am kept against my will, but also the thought of leaving them together makes me want to puke.

"The last time I checked, this was not a brothel." I answer her question, she tries to come at me and Siyakhula holds her back. It's not enough for me, I want her gone.

"I think it's time you show me my room, Khula." She says, touching him again.

Everything is wrong here, this Nadine woman standing next to Siyakhula, her telling him what to do and wanting to leave with him.

It's all wrong, it has to be wrong. Then again, whatever I'm feeling is wrong.

"I'll be back," Siyakhula looks at me like he is sorry.

At this point, I am thinking the worst. I don't trust Nadine not to take advantage of him when they are alone.

It's time to bring out the demon in me, show this skank that two can play that game.

"Ouch!" I scream

pressing a hand on my stomach and bending over the counter.

“Siza!” He is beside me before I can fake another scream. “Are you okay?”

“My tummy hurts, I think it’s the baby.”

That’s right Jezebel, be shocked.

Why is she laughing?

“Please tell me the baby is not yours Siyakhula because the Khula I know would never get a woman like her pregnant. He has taste.”

What is that supposed to mean?

I look up at her. “Well the Khula I know would never associate himself with a prosti...”

I don’t know how it happened, but his lips are on mine—gently kissing me.

He slowly slides his hand across my body, and then rests the other on my cheek, giving me a shocking flood of butterflies. When he breaks the kiss, my eyes are wide and lips slightly parted.

“I didn’t know how else to shut you up,” he justifies the stolen kiss.

I’m speechless.

“Should I get someone to check on you? On a scale of 1 to 10, how bad is the pain?” He is genuinely worried.

“Take me to my room,” he tries to lift me up. “I think I can walk, don’t carry me.” I stop him.

He lifts me up instead.

My main goal has been accomplished, seeing Nadine squirming with jealousy feels too damn good. I will go to great lengths to get his attention... and I cannot believe I am saying this about a man I couldn’t stand.

I can feel Nadine watching us as Siyakhula walks us to my room. I don’t know what is happening to me, why I have these feelings of jealousy. I want him all to myself, perhaps these feelings came during our days of arguments or they have always been there. I am not sure.

Siyakhula puts me on the bed and asks, “Will you be okay?”

He’s asking because he wants to go back to Nadine.

“Stay.” I pull his hand until he is sitting beside me, his body stiffens when I lean in against him, wrapping an arm over his stomach.

“I have a guest, Siza.”

He doesn't get it, I don't want him alone with that woman.

"Please Khula, don't go." I plead with him.

Who would have thought that it would ever come to this? Siyakhula shuffles in my hold, I'm hoping that I am not alone in this. Whatever it is I am feeling.

His eyes widen as I climb on top of him, my head on his chest and arms enwrapped around him.

"What are you doing, Siza?"

"I need you... please stay... stay with me." I glance up at him and cup his shocked face. "I feel so down."

"You are probably tired, get some rest and you will feel better when you wake up."

How do I tell him that I'm jealous of him and Nadine?

That I hate the way she looks at him and I want to chop her hands each time she touches him?

"I want you to make me feel complete, Khula." He hears me but his face says he doesn't understand what I'm asking. Siyakhula looks into my eyes, a frown deepening on his face.

"Make you complete? I don't..."

I swallow the rest of his words by brushing my lips against his. He blinks as a form of shock, I initiate the kiss, taking full control.

Why is he not kissing me back?

He knows what to do, and how it's done.

Siyakhula draws back, rejecting my desperate plea. "What are you doing?"

"Please Khula." I place a kiss at the corner of his mouth.

"What do you want from me, Siza?"

"There's this thing inside me." I take his hand and place it right where my heart is.

"Your heart?"

"Yes, it has a normal beat. Beats like a heart should, but right now it's not. It's racing and I don't understand it."

"Okay, what does that have to do with anything?" He continues to interrogate me. I'm still on top of him with no plans of moving anytime soon.

"It happens when you're around, when you touch me. When I hear the sound of your voice. The second you go away from me, I start overthinking things. Asking myself where you are and what you are doing. I'm always waiting for you to walk

through the door. What does that mean, Khula? Why am I affected by you so much? Why do I need you with me all the time? It's not normal, it can't be normal. Right?"

He nods, there is a distance in his eyes.

We are forbidden, I haven't forgotten about Phangizitha or my father. I haven't forgotten that this man was once a father figure to me.

As he clears his throat, his hands slide down my waist, they linger there for a while... holding on tight and intimately. Our eyes are locked, no one blinks. There is so much I want to say, but I am not sure where to begin.

"Siza!"

Nerves tackle me, I don't want him to reject me. How will I ever look at him if he does?

"Khula I..." My words don't go past my lips, Siyakhula places a hand over my mouth to shut me up.

"Don't speak." The man says, shaking his head in disapproval. "I don't want to hear anymore, please stop."

I knew it, I'm such a fool.

He gets me off of him, placing me on the side of the bed. He's now on his feet, I'm thinking he is about to walk out on me, so I sit up.

"Where are you going?"

"I'm trying to think Siza, if this is really what you want."

"It is." My answer comes too fast.

Siyakhula raises his eyebrows, I want him to tell me what he is thinking. I am slowly going crazy here.

"You want us to try?" He questions and I give him a slight nod.

He is standing there, silent and I am sitting here with my heart beating hard against my chest.

"Siza." Finally he speaks. "I need you to know that if we do this, there's no turning back. You will belong to me, body and soul. You will be mine Siza, only mine and no one will have a claim on you. Not in this lifetime."

I don't know why I'm crying, but I'm crying.

"What are you saying, Siyakhula?" Is he going to let us be a couple?

"You want something from me, right?" He asks, it's strange that he is not going straight to the point. "You want me around you

all the time, you want me to touch you and make you feel good. Right?”

I nod because that’s exactly what I want.

“More than that, I want you Siyakhula. I want your attention, I want you to make me feel like I’m the only person in the world. Like my existence matters.” I am courting a man. Wow!

“Okay.” The reply from him is fast, like he doesn’t have to think about it. Like his decision was made before this conversation.

I get off the bed and throw my arms around him. Heaven knows what we are getting ourselves into.

“Okay?” I ask.

“Okay.” He says, pecking my lips.

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SIZA

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“So Nadine is leaving, right?”

He pushes a strand of braid from my face, ignoring my crinkled brows.

“Jealousy looks good on you, you should wear it often.” He adds , smirking when I roll my eyes at him.

“I’m serious Siyakhula, I don’t like that girl. She’s too... ghetto and carries a knife. Who walks around carrying a knife in their bra?”

“Nadine.” He is not taking me seriously which makes me irritated.

“Is she a criminal? She looks like a prostitute though.” I say, trying to sound calm.

“Come on Gundi, she’s harmless. She wouldn’t use that knife on you, trust me.”

I’m learning to trust his kidnapper-ass alright, which will take time.

I might have these knew feelings that confuse the shit out of me, but that doesn't mean I am going to blindly walk with him into the dark.

"I do, the one I don't trust is Nadine."

Softly, he grips my chin and runs his thumb across my lower lip.

"Can we stop talking about her? I want to talk about us."

I will talk about Nadine until she is out of this place.

"What about us?" I ask.

The way he is looking at me makes me nervous.

"It's not going to be easy, you know that right?" I know, my father might buy me a coffin, dig me a grave and perform my last rites.

"I know," and it's not going to be a walk in the park.

"I'm sorry about everything I put you through, the fights and..."

"I don't want to go back there," I interrupt not wanting to be mad at him all over again.

"Do you really have her name tattooed on your ass?" Maybe asking about that isn't a good idea, I blame it on jealousy.

He reaches up to scratch the back of his head, something close to embarrassment etched on the dark lines of his face.

I can't believe him, "Siyakhula?"

"It's not even that visible, I was young, stupid and drunk."

I need a shot.

"Can I see it?" What's the worst that could happen? I already know they were once fuck-buddies.

"Siza..."

"Please, otherwise I will always wonder and it will drive me insane."

He looks significantly uncomfortable.

He turns his back to me and slightly pushes his pants down, slightly revealing his butt.

"I don't see anything," he's as dark as the night.

"And that's a good thing, I don't want you to see it," he says.

"Where is your phone?" I push my hand into his pocket before he protests, and use the torch light to check out this tattoo.

And here it is, Nadine's name. You can barely see it but it's there.

Siyakhula turns back around when I click my tongue, he takes his phone from me.

“Does she have your name tattooed too?”

If he says yes, I’m going to kill two sinners. They can share a bed in hell for all I care.

Somehow, his body seems to be towering over me. The smell of his cologne giving me goosebumps, this man is different from the one I once knew. It’s true that you are never ugly, but broke.

His mouth smashes into mine in soft gentle display of... I don’t know what but his lips feel good on mine.

He grips the back of my thighs, and lifts me putting my legs around his waist.

I always felt heavy when Phangi lifted me, it’s different with Siyakhula. Or it could be that I lost so much weight while with him.

His tongue fights to find mine as my hands wrap around his neck and our bodies press against each other, his hands glide to my butt cheeks, grabbing.

I almost lose all my senses when he grinds his pelvis into me, making me feel how hard he is.

Drawing his mouth along my jawline, he nibbles the spot below my ear and my whole body spasms.

“Are you going to tell me what you want, Gundi, or will you keep me waiting?”

“I want you to fuck me.” I say and hear him chuckle, I think he can’t believe what just came out of my mouth.

Before I can write my corrections, he sucks on my neck and my body spasms the second time, making me moan.

Siyakhula sets me down, “I want to see my Gundi without anything on.”

I allow him to undress me, and drop a small smile when he kisses my shoulder, my collarbone and neck. My body is yearning for the touch of his hands.

There is a moment of silence, we are staring at each other and this gives me time to grasp what is happening and what I am about to do.

We are moving too fast, but I know I want him. I have been fighting this for too long.

“I’m clean, but we can use a condom if you want.” He says, reaching for my waist to drag me closer.

“It’s not like you are going to get me pregnant or anything.” I tease.

His laugh is deep, there is a glow in his eyes I have never seen before.

“Get on the bed Gundi and open wide.”

Confused as I am, I crawl on the bed and support myself on the pillows.

He unbuckles his belt and strips down his pants, leaving only his trunks. My eyes are unrelenting, they refuse to look at anything but his hard shaft. I swallow when he gets rid of his underwear, and wraps his fist around his hard di-ck, thrusting it a few times.

He takes his time to crawl toward me, and stops beneath my thighs.

His finger grabs the hem of my panties, and pulls it down to my ankles. I open wider, willingly giving him a view of my dripping wet pus-sy.

He lifts his half hooded eyes, smirking. “You are soaking wet?”

He kisses the inside of my thighs, the palm of his hand pressed on my lower abdomen.

I'm shameless, he didn't do much to make me wet but here I am.

When I think he is going to put it on me, he plunges two fingers inside me.

"Mhh! Khula." The slippery, wet sound pushes into the room.

I squirm and whimper when he circles his fingers against my swollen clit, and thrusting them in and out of me.

His name occasionally leaves my mouth, my back arching as I grind into his hand.

"I wish I had a mirror on the ceiling, so you would see how good you look fucking my hand." He grunts, his voice lower than usual.

I'm losing myself when he stops and trails kisses up my body, until the bridge of his nose is touching mine.

"Hi." He whispers, looking at me like he wants to eat me up.

"Hi."

"How bad do you want me, Siza?"

Why is he talking? I want all of him.

"Don't make me beg please."

He smirks, rubbing his mushroom head against my clit. We both shudder at the feeling.

He holds my cheek to press a kiss to my mouth and slides into me, slowly stretching me.

I cry with satisfaction, my hands are desperately searching for something to hold on to.

“I’m going to fuck you like you were always mine, and you my little saint are going to take every inch of me.”

I thought I wanted him to shut up, I don’t. My naked body squirms beneath him, I moan and gasp when he rolls his hips. My walls are gripping his d-ick so perfectly.

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SIYAKHULA-

We are moving too fast, it’s crazy but I can’t help it. When she said she wanted me, I was sceptical. I didn’t believe her, over the past weeks she has expressed how much she wanted to escape this place and how much she hated me.

Her jealousy episode was a bit shocking for me, I had no idea she felt like this.

I don't know what will come out of this, but I will fight to keep this woman with me. I also don't know how it came about that we are naked in bed together.

It has never occurred to me how much bigger than her I am until now.

I found Siza's jealousy extremely sexy, I had to kiss her. She holds on to me as I slowly grind my hips. I make sure my strokes are slow and deep, giving her only half of me.

Her teeth sink into my shoulder, before she runs her tongue over the same place.

"You're in too deep, Khula." She moans into my ears.

I pull back a little and keep it to myself that not every inch of me is inside her.

"No, I want it all. Give me all of it." She pleads.

I thrust onward, giving her all of it. She arches her back, pushing her hips into mine.

"Jesus!" her legs wrap around my hips, her ankles locking my back to push me deeper inside her.

"You feel like heaven, Sizalobuhle."

“Mmmh, Khula, I feel it... all of it.” She whispers with a trembling breath.

My head falls on her neck, I press a kiss trailing my lips up to her mouth. She accepts my kiss, our tongues meet in a sloppy wet kiss.

Her hand claws down my back, her hips deliciously moving into one accord with mine.

“I’m so close.” She says.

I can feel it as my c-ock repeatedly brushes against her G-spot, her face is covered in ecstasy. I reach down to rub her clit with my thumb, her body bucks up, and lips part.

“Can I come? Please let me come.”

“Come for me, Gundi. My co-ck is all yours, cover it with your sweet juices.”

Her body stiffens, nails sink into my skin as she presses her mouth into my neck and calls out my name.

Her body is lost in a rhythm of trembles, chills run down my back at the feeling of her p#ssy pulsing around me.

“Are you okay?” I ask, watching her body twitching like she is being electrocuted.

She answers with her eyes closed, “Mmhhh!”

I don't wait for her to recover fully, but continue grinding and giving her deeper strokes. I'm close to my orgasm when I feel another orgasm ripping through her.

“Here comes another one Gundi, you love coming on my co.ck, don't you?” I tease her.

This time we finish together, I'm enjoying the way her body is trembling and how her fingers dig into my skin.

She mumbles something that's all over the place, a tired look on her face while I give her final strokes.

“Khula you were...” I'm not done with her.

I grab her waist and flip us over so she is sitting on my lap, her eyes snap open.

“No more, please.” She breathes under her breath.

My thumb lightly rubs her clit, and she explodes like shards of glass. Her legs are violently shaking, her hips jolting as she rides out her orgasm. It took me rubbing her clit for her to ride my di-ck.

“You are merciless Siyakhula.” Her head collapses on my chest.

I cup her face, and take time to look at her.

“Is this how it feels to be happy?” I allow myself to be weak.
She doesn’t answer but gives me a sluggish smile.

Her legs wrap around my waist when I stand us up from the bed, I put her down and kiss her lips.

“My legs are still shaky, I want to lie down.” She says.

“I thought we should go for one last round.” I say.

Her eyes widen, “A woman can only take much, I don’t want to die because of an orgasm.”

“Tapping out already, Gundi?” Another tease from me.

She bites her lip, “I’m no quitter, Siyakhula.”

This is the Siza I know, feisty and a fighter.

“I thought so, now baby bend over.”

I’m loving her lazy smile, she turns around and holds on to the bed showing me her glistening wet p#ssy.

I circle my tip on her sensitive clit, and smile victoriously at her shuddering body. I sink into her, she pushes her ass back, meeting my thrusts. I almost lose my mind at how her ass bounces against my pelvis, propelling me to go harder and deeper.

My hands are on her waist, a good fit. The sounds she is making are going to make me explode.

“I want your body against mine.” Like she understands what I mean, she lets go of the bed and I pull her back to my front.

I graze my tongue along her neck, tasting the saltiness of her sweat.

With my one hand, I reach over to cup her tits and play with her nipples. The other one is between her thighs, rubbing her clit while my di-ck moves in and out of her.

“You’re my good girl, bouncing on my di-ck like it’s yours.” I continue to tease her.

She huffs, hips grinding and bucking. “It is mine.”

Sassy!

Siza is the first to crash, I will never get used to her body shattering due to an orgasm. It’s nice to watch.

Her p#ssy is throbbing around my co-ck, squeezing me too tight that I spill every drop inside her.

It feels like my body has been thrown into a sea of fire, for a while I think I can’t breathe. My body goes into a spasm as the pleasure floods inside me.

When I pull out, her knees fail her and she falls ass down on the floor, panting with her eyes closed.

I sit down beside her, our backs against the bed.

“Should we go on our knees and ask for forgiveness?”

She laughs, “The only person who needs deliverance is you for ripping me apart. Leave me out of it, Khula.”

I look at her hand on the carpet and take it, she puts her head on my shoulder.

“Are you ready to fight for us?” I ask after a few moments of silence.

“I know there are people who won’t support us, but I am ready.” She worries me with her declaration.

“We are going to have to trust each other, if we want to win in the end.” I tell her.

She looks at me with a smile on her face and says, “I think we should have gone into prayer and fasting before having sex.”

SIZA

Siyakhula received a call and left without saying where he was going, if Nadine was not in this house, I would be going out of my mind thinking they are together.

I'm in his t-shirt as I leave the room to get a drink in the kitchen. The night is getting older by the second, I'll grab a drink and go back to bed. He said I can sleep in his bedroom, yes we are moving that fast.

Crazy, I know!

"Sisi, you forgot your trousers." Vuyo startles me, I forgot about him following me around.

"I'm fine Vuyo." The t-shirt is not showing anything he is not supposed to be seeing.

"Are you sure? We have male guards around, I don't want my boys to get into trouble because they looked."

I reprimand him with a narrowed gaze. Why would he even say that to me?

"I'm going to get something to drink in the kitchen, it would be nice if you stopped following me."

He grins, showing me all his teeth.

“Not a chance.” He’s shaking his head like a child.

“Then keep a safe distance, I can’t breathe with you breathing down my neck all the time.” I proceed walking to the kitchen, he is behind me, keeping the safe distance I asked for.

“Can’t get enough of him, can you?” Someone says in the dark, I turn the kitchen light on and... oh look, the whore is still around.

“Excuse me?” Although I know what she is on about, I dare her to repeat it.

Her heels are loud on the floor as she walks to me, I don’t know if that thing on her face is a smirk or what.

“I heard everything, how you were screaming his name like a slut.” Hee!

“Would you rather he were screaming my name? If it makes you feel better, he did call out my name when he came.”

This is petty of me, but she asked for it.

“Don’t be so quick to rejoice girlie, it’s too soon to walk with confidence. Anything can happen, then it’s bye-bye to your relationship.”

I don’t think I have ever expressed how much I don’t like this woman.

“Why are you here Nadine?”

“Wouldn’t you like to know.” I don’t like her answer, she has something up sleeve.

“I am so going to enjoy watching you two, a pastor’s daughter and a former pastor. What a match you two are.”

I see she’s been doing her research, and this woman is low-key challenging me.

“You might want to grab some popcorn while you at it, we promise to give you one hell of a show.” I retort.

Her smile has that mysterious thing going on, making me think she knows something I don’t.

“Sweet dreams.” She says.

I want to wipe out that smile off her face with a slap, but there she goes, leaving me with itchy hands.

If Siyakhula does not get that woman out of here, I will drag her out with her flat ass.

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SIYAKHULA

I completely forgot about Khuzimpi wanting to see me until he called.

Siza and I were at it again, I never thought we could ever be like this, her and I. I have no regrets about us, she feels right.

I walk through the church doors, the lights are on. The last time I was here was the day I was humiliated and bashed by church members.

Nostalgia washes over me as I walk into the main auditorium, memories flood in. I see through the mirror dimly, myself standing on the podium and preaching to hundreds of people.

I don't think I will ever go back to being that man, however, that changes nothing about how I feel about God.

I was a pastor long enough to know that he exists and that he is GOD.

“Pastor Siyakhula.”

Bonisile? I'm starting to think she is following me. She's looking up at me, a wide smile on her face.

“What are you doing here?”

“To see Pastor Gumede,” as I answer, a group of girls giggling catch my attention.

They are looking at us, blushing and whispering to each other.

Bonisile looks at them then at me, "Sorry about that. My friends can be childish. We're preparing the church for tomorrow's service, the choir just left. They have a new worship leader, did they tell you? He is not as good as you though."

"Is pastor Gumede here?" I ask.

I'm not interested in talking about the church.

"Yes, he's in his office." She points toward Khuzimpi's office.

"Thank you, excuse me." She blocks my path when I try to pass.

"I was wondering if you are free tomorrow, maybe we can grab something to drink or lunch." She looks at me with innocence in her eyes. That's the thing about Bonisile, she is too innocent and naïve. She can never handle me.

If ego allowed me a stage to speak, I would say I'd split her to pieces.

"Maybe next time," I try for a smile.

Hers shimmers, I hope she does not take this as a promise.

"Siyakhula!" That's Qeda, he waves as he rushes to us, looking rather happy to see me.

He catches me off guard with a hug I do not return.

“It’s good to see you here, please tell me you are coming back to the church.” He’s speaking too fast, not giving me a chance to respond.

“I’m not back, Khuzimpi called me here.” As I answer, I can’t help but notice how withdrawn Bonisile has become. I can’t tell if it’s out of respect for her pastor’s brother or something else.

Qeda looks absolutely normal.

“Bonisile, are you okay?” I enquire.

She nods without raising her eyes.

“Are you done cleaning the chairs? It’s getting late, get to it.”

Qeda chides her.

“Sorry bhuti.” She runs off, like a scared little mouse.

“We have important guests coming to church tomorrow, the only thing these people have to do is clean the church but you find them standing in a circle and gossiping.”

I didn’t think Qeda cared about the church before. He never did, why is he taking it seriously all of a sudden?

“Have you heard anything about Siza? I was on TV today asking the nation to help us look for her. Did you see me? I’m sure you did.”

Great! He's never going to stop talking.

"I don't watch TV." I say flatly.

Siza and I will have to talk about her freedom

what she will say to her family when she goes back home.

"You don't have a TV? That's a shame, come over to the house tomorrow. We will watch the repeat together. Siza will be proud of me when she gets back, I can't wait to see my baby."

"I'll take my leave bhuti."

He is shouting after me as I walk away, something about beer and watching TV.

The door to Khuzimpi's office is open, he's with his wife. This better not be an ambush.

"You are late," he tells me something I know.

I pull a chair and sit.

"You called?"

He chuckles, giving his wife a look I cannot make out.

Nomazulu still hates me, I see it in her eyes. She stands and walks out, closing the door behind her.

"You look different, did you trip and fall into a pit full of money?" I will take that as a joke.

“Is that why you called me here? To ask me about my looks?” I query, there is a smile on his face that is unsettling.

“No, I’m only asking. Qeda did say you look like a different man, he wasn’t lying. Come on, for old time’ sake, tell me what happened.”

I should be enjoying the confusion on his face, but I’m not. I am not a boastful man.

“Why am I here, Khuzimpi?”

Sadness takes over his face, “Do you know how much our friendship meant to me?”

“That’s bullshit!” I snap, forgetting I’m in the house of God. “A selfish man like you can never care about anyone.”

“You betrayed me, Siyakhula. Everything I did was out of anger, I ousted my baby out of the house and cut her off because of you.”

“I told you it was a mistake, we were drunk.” Why am I explaining myself to him?

“I am not going to go back to the past, Khuzimpi. What is done is done. Now tell me why I’m here, so I can be on my way.”

He exhales, leaning back on his chair.

“That day I left you and Siza in charge, I was convinced that you would make me proud. I had so much faith in you Siyakhula. My plan was to ordain you and Siza as junior pastors of the church. But you failed the test I gave you.”

What he is saying is news to me.

“Junior pastors? Why?”

“Before the sex scandal, we were in the process of building another church, that’s where I had gone that day, to finalize the deal. You and Siza were going to be in charge of this church, while I was going to lead the other one. But you slept with my daughter and ruined everything.”

No, I don’t believe him.

“Why now? Why are you telling me this now?”

“My anger has subsided, I was fuming when I found out about you and Siza. I wanted my baby to marry while still a virgin, I didn’t want her to make the same mistake I did. After much consideration, I found you worthy to marry my daughter.”

Everything around me crumbles, what is he saying to me?

“Khuzimpi...”

“I know it was a crazy thought, considering the age difference. I wanted Siza safe from the world, vultures who would want to marry her because of who she was, not for love. I wanted a

humble man who respected my daughter and loved her as much as I did, you were that man consideration

I push my chair back and start pacing up and down his office. What normal person would think like him and not say anything? I honestly have no words. It's hard for me to believe him, although he looks and sounds genuine.

“Did Siza know?”

He shakes his head, “The only people that knew were Nomazulu and the board. Mr. Hendricks and Pastor Ngcobo opposed the idea, there was a big argument that day but I stood my ground. We voted, Gwala and other board members were on my side. So, Hendricks and Ngcobo were outvoted. We came to a decision that you and Siza will be put on the podium to preach.”

A stupid decision, he should have told me.

“The plan was to see how well you worked together. Then the sex tape happened, I was devastated when Nomazulu called to tell me what went down. I wanted to kill you, but I ended up taking everything out on Siza.”

I take my seat back, things are starting to fall into place.

“Did Hendricks and Ngcobo ever reform?” I ask.

“I can’t say, they spoke more with their expressions than words. Hendricks wanted me to appoint Ngcobo as pastor because he has more experience than you. Of course Ngcobo favoured the idea, I couldn’t let an outsider take over the family church.”

That’s understandable.

“I knew I could be easily be voted out of the church by the board and having you, and Siza as pastors of this church would have strengthened my position in the church. Living Waters is my children’s legacy and the only person within the board who seems to understand is Pastor Gwala. He is the reason I am still seated on this seat, and preaching every Sunday.”

“So why are you telling me all of this now? What do you want from me?”

“Find my daughter and bring her home, I want to fulfil my wish. The church is dying Siyakhula. Only you two can bring it back to life, if you get married and take over the church, the past will be wiped out.”

“You want to use us to save yourself, Khuzimpi?” I’m not falling for his lies.

“I want to save my children’s legacy, Siza is important to me. A father’s anger can be justified, I was going crazy with rage. You disappointed me, both of you.”

Khuzimpi is the reason I refuse to put my guard down.

Did Qeda perhaps talk to him like he said he would? Qeda did mention this marriage thing, but he didn't go this deep.

"I can't agree to anything right now, nor can I speak for Siza." I tell him.

First I need to find out what happened that night.

"I understand, please think about it." He says.

There really is nothing to think about, I don't want to lead his church.

"I will," I lie.

Now that I have heard his story, I am convinced that someone came to the party that night with the intension to drug us. Hendricks and Ngcobo are first on my list of suspects.

SIYAKHULA

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“I think Siza’s life is in danger.” Khuzimpi says.

We’re standing outside, both heading home after this.

“What makes you think so?”

“Her phone is with me, she’s been receiving death threats.”

“And you kept quiet about it?”

I am not lying when I say that I’m starting to question Khuzimpi’s thinking process. Again, he proves to me that he lacks a sense of urgency.

He lifts his hands, surrendering or whatever is going on in his mind.

“I wanted to go to the police, but I didn’t know if I could trust them. You and Qeda are the people I have told.” He says, looking around the empty parking lot.

I follow his line of sight to see Nomazulu headed this way.

“Where is the phone, I’d like to see it.” I ask, only for him to give me a peculiar look.

“In the car, but I can’t give it to you.”

“Why?”

“It’s evidence, if anything happens to my daughter then I’ve got a leg to stand on. The police will know that something was up from the beginning.”

I have more chances of bringing Siza alive than he does.

Anyway, What does he mean if anything happens to Siza, he’s got a leg to stand on? Is he expecting something to happen to her?

“I’m sorry, are we talking about the same daughter whose whereabouts you don’t know?”

He appears offended by my question.

“I told you why I did what I did, shoot me for being human.”

I hold my hand out, “Give me the phone Mpi.”

I observe as his brows crinkle irritably, “What’s your deal with Siza? Do you know where she is?”

He is wasting my time, really.

“If I did, Siza would be home. I cared about her too.” I have to play my cards right. Khuzimpi is smart—sometimes. He might be on to me.

Nomazulu walks straight to the car, I’m glad she is pretending to not see me. The less people I know the better.

“The phone, Khuzimpi.”

“It’s in the car,” he turns to his car and comes back with it.

“I’ll be in touch.” I let him know, fishing for my car keys.

His gaze moves past me to the vehicle parked by the gate.

“Your ride?” He points with his head. “C class, huh? What happened to the van?”

The van is at a garage in Boksburg, I haven’t collected it since it was towed.

“It’s around.” I reply, sounding the least uninterested in this conversation.

“I see,” he’s nodding his head while ogling at my car.

The car came with the house, one of Mlamuli’s investments on his children. His words not mine.

“We should grab a drink sometime.”

I don't give Khuzimpi an answer, agreeing to meet up with him does not mean I have forgotten my plan. I have a good mind to act on my harbored anger right at this moment, no one would know what happened to him and his wife.

He's left standing in the parking lot when I drive out, leaving him with no promises.

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Mlamuli is calling, he is a strange man. He hardly shows his face, this is how he mostly communicates. I take his call and put it on speaker.

MLAMULI: "What did Gumede want?"

ME: "How do you know I was with him?"

MLAMULI: "You haven't answered my question son, what did he want?"

ME: "Answer mine first, are you having me followed?"

MLAMULI: "No, Vuyo told me that you went to see him."

I will deal with Vuyo later.

MLAMULI: "How will our plan work when you are secretly meeting up with our enemy and not telling me about it? Have

you forgot the plan Siyakhula? Have you forgotten what Khuzimpi did to you?"

ME: "How can I forget? He wants me to pastor his church and I'm not going to do it."

MLAMULI: "Did you tell him that?"

ME: "No, he will figure it out himself."

MLAMULI: "Good, don't forget that your mother is in the hospital because of Khuzimpi and his daughter. They have to pay for the humiliation they caused you and MaMbatha's condition.

ME: "I don't want Siza apart of this anymore."

MLAMULI: "Are you letting her go?"

ME: "I'm considering it."

MLAMULI: "What about Khuzimpi?"

ME: "I will handle him without involving Siza."

MLAMULI: "I don't know what's going on with you, son. But I hope you are not falling for that girl."

ME: "Goodbye Mlamuli."

I end his call because I have no interest in arguing with him about Siza.

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Siza is sleeping when I let myself into the bedroom, the side lamp is on, reminding me that she is afraid of the dark, something she once told me when she was younger.

I strip out of my clothes, put on some boxer shorts before climbing in bed beside her. When I wrap my arms around her, she shifts toward me, wrapping her body over mine.

She sniffs my chest, then lays on it with a smile on her face.

“And that?”

“Just checking if you smell like Pink Happiness, or Avon.” She says, her breath tickling against my chest.

I tip my head over laughing.

“You don’t ever have to worry about me entertaining another woman.” I put her at ease.

“Yet Nadine is sleeping in the other room.” Her answer is justified.

However, Nadine is one person she should never worry about. I am not attracted to her anymore.

“Nadine is not a factor, you should know that Siza.”

I feel her shrug.

“Where did you go?”

I will have to tell her, eventually. If her life is in danger then she has to know about it, and now that she is no longer my prisoner, I’ll let her make her own decisions. If they align with my plans, then lucky me.

“I met up with your father.” I start.

She tilts her head up, her curious eyes staring into mine.

“You told him about us?”

“No, he wants us to lead the church as husband and wife.”

She shoots up, the curiosity in her eyes doubling.

“Come again?” I nod. “No, absolutely not. I hope you told him to shove his idea where sun don’t shine.”

Her brows are raised, I suddenly find her attitude attractive.

“That’s up his ass, right?” I lean against the headboard, a smirk playing at my lips.

Siza entertains my question with a soft chuckle, “I don’t want to be a pastor, Khula. Do you know how boring my life would be? It’s like being a mother

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I would rather die.” She says indifferently, laying her head back on my chest.

My body stiffens, her declaration taking me back to the day we found out she is pregnant. She notices and turns to face me, an inquisitive frown on her face.

“You don’t want to be a mother?”

“I don’t want to repeat my parents’ mistakes, they were young when I was born. You know the story, Khula.”

Yes I know the story, her parents were way too young. Siza’s case is different.

“You are in your twenties, Siza. Women your age have children, some are married.” I say, catching the flame that’s building up in her eyes.

“I am not women my age, I know what I want in life. I have goals Khula, plans that...”

“You are being dramatic. Taking pictures and posting them on Instagram is not considered a goal.” I snap and that was borderline insensitive of me.

Her face twists, revealing a piece of hurt in her soft eyes.

“Gundi, I...”

“Good night, Siyakhula.” She pulls the blanket, and shuffles to the end of the bed.

I am not settled, I need to know how she feels about this child.

“If it was still possible, would you terminate the pregnancy?”

“Yes.” She answers without hesitation.

This changes everything. How will I fall asleep with her blunt answer replaying in my head?

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SIZA

I need clothes, I can't be walking around wearing his shirts all the time. I'm a big girl but Siyakhula is a big man, his clothes don't fit me.

It's hot today, so I'm wearing another one of his t-shirts. With no trousers. I love clothes, how have I not convinced him to get me something to wear?

Then again, we just became something yesterday, meaning I now have rights to demand things from him.

I would demand an abortion but it's late into the pregnancy. He was insensitive last night, I don't like his selfishness.

I'm not on board with this baby, and he can't force me to be happy about it.

He is an early bird, he wasn't in bed when I woke up. I'm hoping that he is around.

Vuyo tells me that he is in the dining room with some guests and not to disturb him, but I am not going to listen to Vuyo.

Eyes turn to me as I walk into the living room, the two men with Siyakhula; their faces suddenly turn sour.

One is young, and has tattoos covering his skin. It's that fool that helped Siyakhula kidnap me.

The older man looks familiar, I have seen him somewhere.

"Siza, you shouldn't be here."

Siyakhula is next to me, whispering like I should be kept a secret.

"Siyakhula, what's going on here? Is she wearing your clothes?"
The old man asks.

Now I know where I've seen him before. The pictures Phangi showed me of his family. This is his father—their father.

I'm about to ask when we're interrupted by a loud voice outside the door.

"We've got intruders."

It's instantly followed by gunshots.

Siyakhula grabs my wrist and drags me toward the staircase.

"Take this," the tattooed guy hands him a gun and dashes out with the old man.

Oh Lord!

"Keep your head down." He says.

"What's going on?" I ask, it sounds like the apartheid police have come back to finish us.

"I have to keep you safe." That's not the answer I want.

We meet Nadine and Vuyo by the stairs, each with a gun in hand.

"What's going on?" Siyakhula questions.

"Men managed to get into the premises, I think we have a snitch in the crew. The gateman and two of our guards have

been taken down.” Vuyo explains, his eyes are alert and darting everywhere.

“I have to get Siza out of here.” Siyakhula adds.

Vuyo and Nadine rush outside. Siyakhula takes me to the bedroom.

“There is something I didn’t tell you.” His hands cradle my cheeks. “There is a possibility that someone wants you dead.”

Go-figure.

“I know that already,” has he forgotten the injection guy? “So whoever is out there came to kill me?”

“I’m not sure, they could be here for me. I don’t want to speculate anything, I want you to hide in the bathroom.”

“But Nadine is out there, with a gun. Can’t I get a gun too?” Nadine will never let me forget that I was treated like a damsel in distress which is something I am not.

“This is not a joke, Siza.” He’s getting upset.

“I know, so give me a gun, I want to fight too.” I’m dead serious, he better wipe out that frown on his face.

“I’m not giving you a gun, go hide like I said.”

“You sound controlling right now,”

“If protecting you is controlling, then fine I’m controlling. Now go inside.”

“But...”

Siyakhula presses his lips on mine, surely to shut me up. The kiss is deep, his tongue plunging inside my mouth. How does this black man know how to kiss like this? When he breaks the kiss, my knees are weak.

“I need you to stay here, I'll be back to come and get you.”

"You're leaving me alone without protection? Tell Vuyo to come then, today is not a good day for me to die.”

“Siza, don't make this difficult. I need to go out there and deal with those people.”

He walks toward the door, I follow him. I don’t know why.

“What the hell is your problem? I said stay here.” He's shouting.

I don’t appreciate being spoken to in such a manner.

“What if they find me, give me a gun to defend myself.” I don’t want to be helpless like I was the day I almost died.

“I won’t let them get to you.” He grabs my hand, drags me to the bed and pushes me to fall on the mattress. My mind goes

blank when I watch him dash to the door, I jolt to my feet and hurry behind him.

“Siyakhula wait.”

I realize my move is a bad idea when he stops and turns with an icy glare.

“I said stay here.” He fires, pointing a finger at me while coming at me like a predator. There are many sides to Siyakhula and this is one of them.

Shocking! I didn't order a serial killer lookalike.

“Fine, but you better come back alive.” I snap, taking steps back into the room.

He does not apologize for yelling at me, but walks out and locks the door behind him.

SIYAKHULA

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I wasn't expecting Mlamuli and Mhlauli to drop by this morning, they wanted to discuss a way forward. I told them about my meeting with Khuzimpi and the death threats sent to Siza's phone.

They were convinced it was all a hoax, some sick game to make me believe that someone wanted her dead.

"She's just the pastor's daughter, what would her death benefit anyone?" Mhlauli had said, refusing to believe the speculations.

He agreed to have the messages check, to see where they came from.

Who knew that we would be ambushed? I was careful on my way home last night, no one was tailing me.

I'm no soldier but I'm pretty sure a warzone sounds and looks like this, this is a gated community and it's not hard to guess that someone has called the police.

There are men I do not know spread in the yard, and firing at my people.

Two guards are trailing behind me, guns loaded. We are outnumbered because I don't have enough men. That won't deter me though.

"Boss watch out!" One of the guards pushes me out of the way, the bullet hits him instead.

I scatter away, finding shelter behind one of the cars parked in the yard. I scan my eyes in search of Mlamuli and Mhlauli, there is no way I will see them in this chaos.

"Mbatha, mgodoyi." I'm startled by the familiar voice that has me turning on my heel with a gun pointed out.

"Nomazulu? What are you doing?"

It's shocking that she is here, aiming a gun at me.

"Argh! Don't look at me like that Siyakhula," she says, rolling her eyes. "It's nothing personal... actually it is."

"I'm going to ask you one last time, Nomazulu. What are you doing?" I snap.

She is not fazed, she smirks arrogantly and shrugs her shoulders.

I haven't been in the game in a while, but I am certain that is not how a gun is handled. She is an immature.

"I knew when I saw you at church that something was up with you, Siyakhula. How did you become so wealthy in a space of a day?"

That's none of her business.

"Put that thing away sisi, you might hurt yourself."

"The only person I'm going to hurt is you." She laughs.

"So your husband sent you to do his dirty laundry?"

"Gumede is a very wise man, Siyakhula. A man that knows what he wants and he is going to get it." She is bursting with pride.

"You chose the wrong day to piss me off Nomazulu."

"A good day to die though."

Another voice echoes from behind me, I crane my head, careful not to take my eyes off of Nomazulu. I have to admit, I didn't think my brother had it in him.

He has a bigger gun, and a victorious smile on his face.

"You are an idiot if you think you can kill me, Phangizitha."

His laugh is arrogant and confident, must be the gun he's pointing at me.

"In case you haven't noticed, Mbatha. You are outnumbered."
He points out and it's only now I realize the gunshots have stopped.

I want to scan my surroundings to look for Mlamuli and Mhlauli, but I don't trust these two not to shoot me.

Vuyo and Nadine are not in sight as well.

"Drop that gun Phangizitha, and go back home."

"You think I'm afraid of you?" He spits.

"You are afraid of me, that's why you sought help from the pastor's wife. How cowardice of you, little bro."

"Phangizitha, shoot him. He's taking you for a fool." Nomazulu gives him an order.

How do these two know each other, anyway?

Phangizitha's eyes widen, his hand starts to tremble.

"What are you waiting for? Shoot him." She yells.

I see my father and brother urgently scurrying toward us.

“I highly doubt that is a good idea.” -Mlamuli.

“Baba?” Phangizitha’s voice shakes.

“Put that gun down Phangizitha.” That’s an order from Mlamuli.

“Are you on his side, baba?” He sounds like he is going to cry.

“I’m on my family’s side. Put that thing away boy.”

Phangizitha shakes his head, holding the gun with both hands.

“Stop telling me what to do.” He roars.

“I say we cut this party short and go our separate ways. What do you say Phangizitha? Maybe I will even be kind and forgive this mess you made today.” I step in, tired of his whining.

Phangizitha folds over laughing, “You might forgive me?”

He’s yelling, rage etched on his face.

“What about what you did, Siyakhula? You fucking took everything from me. First you took Siza and now my family.”

I’m getting bored. Who would have thought that Phangizitha is a brat?

“No one took your family, bhuti. We’re here.” –Mhlauli gets a cold glare for his interference.

“I don’t want to hear anything from you, we are done Mhlauli. You’re dead to me, all of you.” He is dramatic.

“I would hate to cut this family reunion short, but we have to go.” Nomazulu tells him. It’s hard to believe that this is her, there is nothing gangster about her.

They both start to move backward, without turning their backs to us. We follow them, our movements slow and careful.

No one has the audacity to pull the trigger, a shootout at this point will result in someone’s death if not all of us.

As we reach the gate, Phangizitha and Nomazulu step out. A big white van stops on the side of the road.

Phangizitha is suddenly confident, it’s in the way he’s grinning at me. He and Nomazulu jump into the vehicle, as soon as he shuts the door, he rolls down the window with a victorious smirk on his face.

“I got what I wanted. Our job here is done.” He says, winking at me before the car drives off.

Then it clicks... Oh shit.

“Siza, they got Siza.” I tell Mlamuli and my brother while rushing to my car.

“That’s not possible, she is in the house. They couldn’t have taken her, we would’ve seen it.”

“Dammit Mhlauli, didn’t you see your brother’s face? All that nonsensical talk was a ploy to keep me away from Siza, so they can get to her. Their men must’ve used the back gate. I know her father is behind this, I just know it.”

“We should check first

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she’s probably in the house.” Mlamuli’s suggestion is reasonable. But I know what I saw.

I’m considering his idea when Vuyo comes running, Nadine is behind him.

“Boss, I managed to get some of our guys to safety. But the girl is gone, she is not in her room.”

“I knew it, we have to get her back.” I tell them.

“That went well.” Mhlauli expresses, tucking his weapon away.

Confusion settles in a second, then it dawns on me that he thinks nothing of what just happened.

I let out an annoyed sigh, piercing him with a glare.

“Did you hear anything I said, Mhlauli? He’s got Siza.”

His eyes are playful as he answers, “Relax, he won’t do anything to her. Why are you so worried?”

“Don’t be insensitive man,” Nadine argues.

Mhlauli makes a confused face, they haven’t met yet.

“Excuse me, do we know each other?”

“No, but I do know your brother and that that girl they took is his girlfriend.”

Damn, this is not the right time for them to find out.

“Is she telling the truth?” Mlamuli questions, a look of disappointment spread across his face.

“That’s not important right now, we need to find Sizalobuhle.” I answer.

There is a good chance that this man is about to lose it, while my brother looks like he’s given up on me.

“I thought we were in this together, why would you betray me like this, son?”

“I didn’t betray you, okay.” I dispute. “We are wasting time arguing, instead of going after Siza.”

“Your precious Siza will be fine, Phangizitha is a good man. He probably thought he was saving her from you.” –Mhlauli, waving me away with a flip of his hand.

His words are enough to irritate me.

I ogle at him and it hits me that they are not on my side.

“You are not going to help me, are you?”

Both their eyes move away from me.

I have never been struck this hard by confusion.

“You changed the game bhuti, maybe things would be different had you told me that you fell in love with your brother’s girlfriend.”

“What the fuck, Mhlauli? You had no problem with me sleeping with her, in fact you were willing to help me. What’s changed now?”

“That was different, a mistake. But now you are asking me to help you steal Sizalobuhle from Phangizitha. I don’t want to choose between the two of you, it was better when it was you against the Gumedes.” –Mhlauli.

“You are not making sense, right now.” I argue.

“Look, I love you man. As much as I love Phangi, and I don’t like Siza for both of you. If I could, I would pay her to stay away

from you both. If you want us to go against the Gumedes, I'm game. But not Phangi."

I bet he thinks his words are comforting, but they are riling me up.

"Your Phangizitha is working with the Gumedes, in case you missed that part. That was Nomazulu Gumede you saw there. You both saw the messages on Siza's phone, her life is in danger."

"Then let's go after the Gumedes, and let Phangi and Siza talk it out. If she wants to come back, she will. I want nothing to do with the lover's quarrel, I'm not going to lose both my brothers because of a woman."

This is unbelievable.

"I thought you were different, you made me believe you were on my side." The disdain in my voice keeps rising.

"I am different bhuti, that's why I'm here fighting by your side. That's why I called the stupid family meeting that no one bothered to attend, I am different because I am the only idiot in this family who wants to make peace."

His eyes don't drift from me. I want to snort but the pain in them stops me.

I honestly didn't want anything to do with the meeting, maybe that's why it slipped my mind.

I turn to Mlamuli and realize he thinks the same as Mhlauli.

"Look son, we can go after Gumede and make him pay for tricking you. Meeting him last night was a mistake, that coward sent his wife to do his dirty work."

I don't care about them right now, I want to get Siza back, then I will deal with Khizimpi's betrayal.

"I don't mean to intrude," Nadine steps in and I wish she hadn't. She ruins everything she touches.

"Then don't Nadine, go back to the house." I shove her back, she stumbles a foot and doesn't move further.

"But we have to save the mother of your baby." She shoots unpredictably.

Damnit!

"Amen!" Mhlauli raises his hands, and weaves past me to make his way out the gate.

I sweep my eyes toward Mlamuli, "I don't know any more kiddo. I need to think."

Just like Mhlauli, he leaves.

“It’s okay, daddy. I’m still here, I’ll fight by your side. It can be like the old times. Us against the world.” Nadine is such a suck up.

“I’m going, alone.” I put emphasis on alone. “If you follow me, you will find yourself sleeping under a bridge. Is that clear Nadine?”

Her eyes widen, “But I can do this.”

I know she can, I just don’t need her.

“Vuyo, come with me.”

SIYAKHULA-

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I'm speeding to Phangizitha's house, Vuyo is driving behind me. I don't know how things are going to pen out, what I know is that I'm bringing Siza home. Come what may.

"Dammit Khuzimpi, answer the phone." It's the umpteenth time I have dialled him and he hasn't answered nor texted.

I'm ready to throw my phone out the window when he picks up.

MPI: "I hope you have a good excuse as to why you are calling me during a church service?"

ME: "Cut the crap Phakathwayo, you played me, you son of a bitch."

MPI: "Just so you know, I just got off the podium. I'm filled with the Holy Spirit, and we don't appreciate the cussing."

ME: "That meeting last night, you tricked me."

MPI: "What are you talking about?"

ME: "I got the message from your wife, loud and clear. You sent her to my house to ambush me."

MPI: "I don't know what this is about but whoever you saw was not my wife. Nomazulu is at a church conference in Pretoria, she left last night."

ME: "Nomazulu was at my house with my brother, they held me at gunpoint. You know what she said to me? She said Gumede is a man that knows what he wants. You are Gumede, unless you have changed your surname?"

MPI: "Calm down Siyakhula, you are giving me a headache. Besides, that's not how my wife addresses me. She calls me Mpi or Phakathwayo. You are clearly mistaken, the woman you saw is not my wife."

ME: "You better not be lying to me."

MPI: "I'm not, why would I lie to you, and why would I send Nomazulu to attack you? She can't even hold a gun."

Shit! Someone is playing mind games with me.

ME: You better be telling me the truth, or I swear to the God you serve. I will make you pay.”

MPI: “Blasphemy does not suit you Khula, what happened to the man you were before...”

ME: “Before you falsely accused me of ra-pe?”

He says nothing. Thought as much.

ME: “You destroyed that man, I don’t subscribe to bullshit anymore. I know you’re lying to me, Khuzimpi. I’m coming for you, your church and that witch you call a wife. Mark my words.”

MPI: “Siyakhula...”

I disconnect the call and focus on my driving.

We arrive in less than fifteen minutes. The fool that is Phangizitha takes my woman and has the guts to leave the gate wide open. I take it as a challenge.

“Watch the door, I’ll go inside.” I give Vuyo the instructions.

Finding my way in is as easy as ABC, I’m armed and I will shoot anything that moves.

There is no one in the living room, nor the kitchen. I check every room downstairs, the coast is clear.

It's silent until... the sound coming from up the staircase tightens my chest and makes me raise an eyebrow.

“Siza?”

I recognise her moans of pleasure, I have heard them not once but more than twice. They are deeply enrooted in my head.

I follow the sounds, up the staircase to a door that is slightly open.

My world crumbles in a speed of light. I must be seeing things.

The man in the bed, is my brother. I recognise his head from anywhere.

He's having se-x with a woman, they are under a white blanket. I'm trying to get a glimpse of her face, Phangizitha is in my way. But she sounds like my Gundi.

“Oh Siza, I love you baby. I love you so much Gundi.”

Phangizitha says.

I see how he's grinding on top of her, breathing into her ear. It's her moans that are cracking every part of my heart.

I have seen enough.

My legs feel like they are being weighted down by concrete as I make my way to the car.

Since when does my chest feel like it's going to explode each time I try to breathe?

Vuyo is rushing behind me.

"Boss, are you okay? You look like you saw a ghost in there."

"Go home Vuyo, we are done here." I lean against the car, head bowed as Siza's loud moans replay in my head. It's torturous.

"But Boss, where is the girl?"

I face him, fuming.

"It's over okay, everything is over. We came here for nothing. Now go back home."

He takes a step back when I yell, surprise filling his face, along with other dozen emotions.

"I don't get it, explain to me boss. I am not a man that quits, we came here for a mission and I'm not leaving without accomplishing it."

My hands itch, I want to punch something and I would hate for Vuyo to be my victim.

“When you get to the house, pack all your things and leave the house. Tell the others to go back home too, everything is over.”

Everything is a mess.

I dash into the car and take off in full speed, meanwhile trying to understand what’s happening. I did this, I took her forcefully. For weeks, she expressed how much she loathed me.

How could I be weakened by her sweet nothings? She played me, Sizalobuhle played me like a fool and I fell into her trap.

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PHANGI-

“Is he gone?” Her voice is almost inaudible.

“I heard the door shut, I think he’s gone.” He replies, breathing down her face.

The woman beneath him pushes him, he tumbles to the side of the bed grunting, and watches as she jumps out of bed.

“Did he see us?” Her question puts a smile on his face.

“He did.” He glances at her full figure, and can’t find anything attractive about her.

“I can feel you staring at me

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cover your damn eyes.” She quickly adorns her body with a t-shirt and a pair of jeans.

Phangi disciplines his eyes, he steps down in boxers and nothing on top.

“How did you know he was going to follow us?” He asks while throwing in a pair of pants.

He doesn’t really consider himself as the smartest person in the world, but this woman right here has shown him that the human brain can be something to stand in awe of.

“Intuition, Siyakhula is a desperate man who would do anything to get what he wants. I saw his weakness and went guns blazing.”

If Pride-Rock was a real place, she would get a seat there and a crown to match her status.

An appreciative gaze lingers on Phangi’s face, “Thank you for your help. I know we were pretending to be having se-x, but

you were great. Your actions matched with Siza's voice in the se-x tape.

He sounds stupid.

"Although it felt strange being on top of my girlfriend's mother." He finishes, giving Nomazulu a grateful smile.

"Don't annoy me boy, and turn off that damn video. It's getting on my nerves." She fires, pointing at the phone on the table.

Phangi grabs his phone, just as Siza's voice on the video screams 'Harder Khula, harder.'

He clenches his hand around the phone, to get rid of the anger trying to overtake him.

Who would've thought his girlfriend's se-x tape would ever come in handy? He used it as a weapon to destroy his brother.

After he overheard Mlamuli's conversation, he woke up the next day and went to the Gumede premises.

Khuzimpi wasn't home, but Nomazulu was more than willing when he told her what had happened.

It took them time to put their plan into action. Today they are reaping the fruits of their labour.

“Thank you again, Mrs. Gumede.”

Nomazulu shakes her head as she fixes her hair, “Don’t thank me, I wasn’t doing it for you. I have my own agendas.”

“Such as?”

“Agendas that have nothing to do with you. Now when you are done with my baby, convince her to come home.” She side eyes him like he’s some little puppy.

Phangi is not affected by the stare, nothing can ruin his mood tonight.

Nomazulu doesn’t wait for him to respond, but scurries out of the bedroom like a boss.

This one is more than sure that luck is shining down on him, today went so well, he wants to kiss the heavens to thank them.

After making sure he is clean and proper, he heads to the room where Siza is sleeping. He settles on the bed beside her.

“Just a few hours more, sthandwa sam before the drug wears off, then you and I will be united.”

He brushes her cheek, his worried gaze locked on her. Getting Siza out of Siyakhula's house was easy.

He had men enter the house while he kept Siyakhula distracted. They drugged her and carried her out of there like an unwanted old couch.

Phangi can't stop caressing her cheeks. Although he is not saying much, his pain is communicated through his touch.

"You're going to be okay Siza, I swear on our love, that man will never come near you again."

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SIYAKHULA-

It's hard to be happy when everything in life is going against you.

I knew trusting her was risky, but I fell for it. I fell for her innocence and actually believed that she liked me just as much. I'm such a fool to have fallen for Siza's lies.

God, for a while I believed that she was legit.

Emotions are playing a hard one on me, I want to forget or I will lose my mind. Alcohol never helps, but what the heck. It sure numbs the pain.

I pull up outside a pub on the side of the road. There's not a lot of people here, which is expected. The bartender approaches the second I sit and asks for my order.

"Double whiskey on the rocks."

He gives me a judgemental look, it's not midday yet but who cares?

"What? Do you serve juice at a pub now?" I snap, he shakes his head and starts preparing my drink. I gulp down the strong liquor, shuddering as it burns my chest.

"Fill it up," I tell him, he listens.

I gulp it down as well and demand another one.

When the third one does nothing to numb my pain, I ask for shots. He gives me the stare again.

"I'm a paying customer, or you want me to take my money elsewhere?" I'm getting tired of the looks he's giving me.

He serves me two shots, I down them like water and wash down with another glass of Whiskey.

“Anything else sir?” His voice is tinted with attitude.

“Leave the bottle.” I tell him.

He disappears in a split second.

Why can't I get rid of Siza's voice in my head? It's making my heart crack.

I'm going to make them all pay, every one of them will feel my wrath.

My phone is ringing, Mhlauli made his choice.

Why is he calling me now? I screw my eyes shut hoping he will go away, but he continues to annoy me with endless calls. I decide to text him, I might just explode and say shit if I take his call.

ME: Leave me alone.”

MHLAULI: “Where are you?”

ME: “What part of leave me alone don't you get?”

MHLAULI: “I'm your brother, I will never leave you alone. Not even death can separate us.”

His words make me crumble with agony, it's hard for me to believe him. I will never believe any of them.

ME: "Everything is a lie."

MHLAULI: "What are you talking about?"

ME: "My mistake was opening up to people, I'm done Mhlauli. I'm done with all of you."

MHLAULI: "Where are you? I'm coming over."

ME: "I want to be alone, don't try to find me."

I log out of the app, my phone rings. It's him, I reject his call.

MHLAULI: "You're my brother, and I love you whether you believe it or not. Let me be there for you, please."

I don't reply.

MHLAULI: "I never plead with anyone, don't make me repeat myself bhuti."

This is how Siza pleaded with me and I fell for it. I put my phone on flight-mode and shove it into my pocket.

Since when does breathing hurt?

The bottle of Whiskey is almost empty when I feel a hand brushing my shoulder. Everything is blurry but I can still make out Bonisile's face.

"I'm sorry." She says, her hands hovering over my shoulders before she is holding me in a tight hug.

BONISILE

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I had to sneak out of work to come to this place, I don't know how I got myself in such a mess. Deep down I was hoping that Siyakhula wouldn't be here or that he would be sober enough to tell me where to get off.

This is not how I want things to go down, sure I like him and I need him to like me back. But not this way.

"Are you going to help me?" I ask the Uber driver staring at me.

His job is to take me to my destination, but I will never get there if he doesn't help get Siyakhula into the car.

"What's wrong with him?" He takes Siyakhula's arm and puts it over his shoulder.

"He's drunk." That's all I give him, and cross my fingers that he doesn't ask more.

I rush to open the back door and help the driver put Siyakhula inside. He hasn't passed out yet, but he is close.

When my phone vibrates, my heart taps against my chest.

Did you find him?

The message reads, my reply is a flat yes. I don't want to converse with this person. I don't like the person they have turned me into.

Good, I don't want mistakes.

God forgive me for what I am about to do.

Minutes pass, we arrive at my place of work. There is nowhere else I could've taken him. My boss is not around, he didn't say what time he will be home either.

The driver helps me bring Siyakhula into the house, we put him on the couch. I pay the Uber driver extra for his trouble.

Now that it's just us two, I have to put the plan into action before my boss gets home. I'm sure Siyakhula will be awake by then. I will tell him that it was a mistake we slept with each other, we were both drunk and...

God if I had a choice, I wouldn't be doing this.

My hands are trembling as I unbutton Siyakhula's shirt, I have never been with a man before and this is not how I want to break my virginity.

“Siza.” This is the first word he’s said since I found him at the bar.

He is so drunk, I doubt he will know or remember anything that happens today.

A sudden knock on the door makes me jumpy, it must be the Uber driver. No one ever comes here.

I leave Siyakhula on the couch, to get rid of the person behind the door.

“Who are you?” There are two men with menacing faces and guns in their hands. One is covered in tattoos and wearing all black, and the other is intimidatingly tall and muscular.

“This is the girl I saw dragging boss into a car.” It’s the tall man, pointing his gun at me. Fear laughs in my face, I raise my hands to surrender.

“Please don’t shoot me.” I cry.

They push me aside and force their way into the house.

“Why is my brother naked? Were you going to rape him?”

Oh my God! How did they find me?

“No, I...”

“You were what? You’re the type that takes advantage of drunk men, aren’t you?”

I was paid to take advantage of him, but I can’t tell him that.

“What do you want with my brother?”

“I swear on my grandmother’s grave, I am not like that. Siyakhula is my youth pastor...” I say.

“She will never tell us the truth, boss. Isn’t there something we can do to make her talk?” It’s the muscular one, frowning down at me.

The tattoo guy looks at me really hard, I don’t like how his eyes squint.

“Where is the bathroom?”

I point to my left while planning to run once he is in the bathroom.

I will have to distract this one who keeps saying boss.

He winks and gives me a flying kiss as he walks past me, I release a breath and face the man with the gun, while thinking of an excuse to get out of here.

“I need to lock the gate, just in case someone decides to drop by. My boss always has visitors and...”

“Sit down.” Mr. tall points to the couch.

And I thought the tattoo guy was more intimidating.

“Vuyo!” A shout comes from the bathroom.

Vuyo eyes me sadistically, clearly thinking of something diabolical.

“Let’s go.” He says, pointing toward the bathroom with his gun.

The hard look in his eyes forces me to my feet.

In the bathroom I’m met with thick steam, the bathtub has been filled with water. Hot water to be exact.

“Ever been inside a Jacuzzi?” Asks the man in black clothing.

Of course I shake my head, confusion playing a cruel one on me.

He smiles, “Great. Get in.”

With the last line, his smile vanishes.

“What?”

“Get in sisi.”

He’s sick in the head if he thinks I will get in that hot water.

“That’s it, if you people don’t get out of here, I will call the police.”

They laugh... hard.

The next thing I know, Vuyo scoops me up. His arms are tight around my waist, crushing my ribs.

“No, no, no. Please.” I scream. “Please don’t...”

The tattoo guy raises his hand, and Vuyo stops. He has my body dangling over the hot water.

“Are you ready to tell me who sent you or do you want me to deskin that sexy body.” The man who keeps giving orders says.

“I will tell you everything you need to know, please don’t throw me in there.”

He glances at Vuyo and nods, Vuyo throws me down. I land on my butt, it hurts.

I hate men.

“Speak!” Says the tattoo guy.

He is looking down at me, there is nothing kind about his eyes. He will kill me if I don’t speak.

“Siza’s mother approached me regarding Siyakhula’s birthday, she was asking a lot of questions and I answered them all. I honestly thought she wanted to attend the party.”

Vuyo starts whistling, convincing me that I’m boring him.

“The night before the party, she gave me something in a small bottle. She said to put it in Siyakhula and Siza’s drinks. She didn’t explain what it was, the only thing she told me was that it won’t kill them. When I refused, she threatened to embarrass my parents and throw them out of the church. My mother loves that church, she makes money from selling to the congregation. I knew as the pastor’s wife, she had the power to do it.”

I had no choice, honestly. And I had to pretend that Siza was the worst person to have walked the earth for what she did to Siyakhula.

“It wasn’t me who took the video, my job was to spike their drinks that’s all. I went home after that.” I explain.

“So you chose to destroy two people’s lives in order to save your mother’s?”

I don’t need to be judged, rich people don’t know how hard we have it.

“I would do anything for my mother.”

The guy in charge grabs my braids and pulls me up, making me face him.

“You and I have something in common, I will do anything for my brother.” He pushes me back down, I land with a grunt.

“From today, you will not be taking orders from Nomazulu. I will tell you what to do, is that clear?”

Great, I will never be free from these people.

“I said is that clear?” He barks, grabbing my hair once again.

“Yes.” I shout.

Just then we hear the gate, my boss is home.

“Please, my boss is here. I will lose my job if he finds you.” I’m on my knees, pleading. My mother will kill me if I lose this job. Vuyo laughs and walks out of the bathroom.

“You should have thought of that when you brought my brother to this place.” He grabs my hand, dragging me to my feet and out the door to the lounge.

Siyakhula is coming to, Vuyo has a bottle of Hansa and touching the white man’s stereo. A song bursts through the speakers in a split second, my head spins. He is dancing and making so much noise. I am so fired.

“Please...”

My boss walks in, bugling eyes and fuming. His face has turned red, and his nose is flaring.

“Bhoni!” He yells through the loud music.

Siyakhula's brother puts his arm around my shoulders and places a kiss on my cheek, "Baby, is this the old pig you told me about?"

My boss hears him, if I thought he was angry. He is livid now.

"Get out of my house before I call the police." He shouts.

Why won't Vuyo stop dancing, and switch off that damn music?

I try to break myself from the tattoo guy's grip, he pulls me into him.

"Boss it's not what you think, these men broke in here and..."

"Baby, why are you lying? You called us here saying the old pig is not around. Now I see why you call him a pig he looks like one."

This man is destroying my life.

My boss looks short for words, he rushes to his bedroom and I'm left pleading with these men to leave. They refuse to listen to me.

The next thing we hear is a gunshot, I scream and duck. It's my boss, he has a rifle aimed at us. Vuyo and this freak don't look afraid.

“Get the fuck out of my house before I call the police.” The white man commands, shakily. “You too Bhoni, you are fired.”

My life is over.

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SIZA

A knock at the door reveals Phangizitha and I instantly know that he brought me here. Panic attacks me. The last thing I remember is a man walking into the room and putting a cloth over my mouth then it was lights out for me.

“Baby, you’re awake.” He says, grinning at me.

“How did I get here?”

He sits on the edge of the bed and takes my hand, I want to snatch it back but my body is not strong enough yet.

“I brought you here my love. I rescued you from Siyakhula.”

Siyakhula?

My heart leaps at the mention of his name. I told him to come back alive, I can’t imagine what he felt when he found me gone.

“You kidnapped me, Phangi?” He has this smirk on his face, almost as if he is proud of himself.

“Rescued my love, I rescued you.”

“Don’t call me that, I am not your love.” I claim my hand back.

“Relax baby, it must be the drug that’s got you worked up.”

I never thought I’d see his stupid side, I am repulsed.

“Take me back.” My request wipes the smirk off his face.

“Why?”

“I have to get to him, I have to tell him that I didn’t leave willingly—that I would never hurt him like that.”

Siyakhula must be thinking the worst. I don’t want to be on bad terms with him, we just started out.

“Siza calm down please,” Phangi says, stroking my arm with a gentle touch.

It takes me controlled thoughts, timed seconds and heavy breaths to get myself to calm down.

“Are you okay?” I can hear concern in his voice.

“No.” Tears show up, I wipe them away. “Why did you have to do this Phangi? Couldn’t you come to his house and ask to talk to me?”

“I don’t see anything wrong with what I did.”

He’s got to be kidding me, it’s so unlike him not to assume responsibility of his actions.

“You kidnapped me, Phangizitha. If you had done things the right way, I would have listened to you. I would’ve explained to you that I love him, and I have chosen him.”

Hurt flashes in his eyes. This is not how I planned on telling him, but he played dirty first and made me so angry.

I will never forgive him for taking me by force.

I was starting to get over the first kidnapping then this happens.

“What did you say to me?” He says in almost a whisper.

“I was going to tell you, Phangi. I swear, but not like this.”

“Tell me what?” He interrupts, penetrating me with a deep gaze.

“That I love Siyakhula and I’m carrying his child.” Everything should be out in the open. I don’t want to play cat and mouse with him.

He stands from the bed and paces back and forth, it’s my first time seeing him like this. I push my body to a sitting position, keeping my eyes on him. It’s hard for me to recognize him right

now, he reminds me of that night he broke up with me after seeing the sex tape.

“No, that’s not true.” He keeps repeating, popping his knuckles and punching the wall.

“Phangizitha?”

He comes to kneel on the bedside.

“It can’t be true Siza, you can’t do this to me.”

“I’m sorry, I didn’t see it coming. I swear, it just happened.”

“Nothing just happens Sizalobuhle.” He shouts, slamming a fist on the bed.

I try to keep calm, deep down I’m terrified of what he might do. Phangi looks into my eyes, for a second it’s hard for me to recognize the crazed look in his eyes.

“He is my brother. How can you fall in love with my brother? That’s the biggest betrayal.”

“You didn’t tell me he was your brother, I had to find out from him.”

“What was there to tell? I didn’t know you were fucking him.”

That hurts.

“You’re an asshole, Phangizitha.”

Tears invade his eyes.

“Oh I’m sorry, is that worse than being a slut?”

“Fuck you.” I yell, slapping him across his face.

Phangizitha gets on his feet, his chest is heaving. His breathing is loud and ragged. He balls his fists, eyes sharp and condemning.

For a while I think he is going to explode and beat the hell out of me, but he storms out of the room.

“Phangizitha?” I scream his name after hearing the door lock.

I have a fear for enclosed spaces after what Siyakhula put me through. I get off the bed and rush to the door, my strength is not entirely there but I can walk and shout.

“Phangizitha come back here.” I yell with everything I am.

“Open the door, Phangi. Please.”

He’s not coming.

What happens next is something I can’t control, I’m screaming and yelling while throwing anything I can get my hands on against the closed door.

In a while, the door opens. He’s back, leering deadly.

“Take me back to him now.”

“No, you are mine Siza. He will never love you like I do.” His answer sounds final. I don’t want to fight a man, heck I’m not strong enough.

“Phangizitha, I am not playing with you. We could’ve talked this through, but you decided to have me kidnapped.”

“I thought I was helping you, I thought your life was in danger. I didn’t know you were fucking my brother.”

“That’s not how it happened,” I dispute his claims.

I am not loose as he makes it sound.

He crosses his arms over his chest, a shifty smile appears on his face.

“Is he a good kisser? Is he as good as me?”

He moves, trapping me between him and the bed. His breath smells of alcohol, he had a drink when he walked out of here.

“Phangi...”

He pushes me and I fall on the mattress with a scream. My thoughts are all over the place until he gets on top of me and starts trailing kisses all over my body.

“Phangi stop.” He’s too strong for me to push away.

He looks into my eyes, tears fall from his.

“I love you,” he whispers, violently ripping my shirt in two.

Instinctively, I gasp in shock and cover my bare chest. Phangi separates my hands from my boobs and presses them on the mattress above my head. Our eyes meet.

“What are you doing?” My voice trembles.

“I’m going to remove every memory you have of him, I will fuck you until you lose that thing in your stomach.” He leans down to kiss my neck.

“It’s my baby you should be carrying, not his.” He says, reaching down to unzip his pants.

“No, stop.” I scream, struggling underneath him. He is way bigger than me and stronger, I don’t have enough strength to push him off.

He won’t move, he tears my underwear and everything around me slows down when I feel his tip rubbing against me.

“Look at me,” he commands, tears falling down his face. “I love you.”

And without warning slams his length into me, I choke a scream, digging my nails into his biceps.

“Ahhh! Fuck!” He groans in pain, almost jumping off me. My world collides when he begins stroking, I am not going to be rap-ed.

I take a bite full of his ear and pull with my teeth as hard as I can, I can taste the blood in my mouth. It makes me want to vomit whatever is in my stomach.

Phangizitha yells, jolting away from me and falls to the ground while cupping his bleeding ear.

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SIZA

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He's on his knees, crying. I couldn't care less about his tears.

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean to hurt you Siza."

I cover my body with a bed sheet and head to the door.

"Where are you going?"

I don't answer him, I'm getting out of here. I don't know how I'm going to get to Siyakhula's house.

I'm barely at the door when he hugs my legs, his touch triggers what happened a few minutes ago. I can still feel him inside me. So disgusted with myself.

"Please don't go, I'm sorry."

"You are dead to me Phangizitha. I will never forgive you for this."

I didn't expect him of all people to do this to me.

"Siza this is me, your Phangi. I'm the man you love, don't leave like this please."

I wiggle out of his arms, to say I am disgusted by his hands touching me would be an understatement.

“You hurt me.”

“I was angry, I shouldn’t have let it get that far. Please forgive me.”

That’s one thing I will never do, for as long as I live.

“What happened to you Phangizitha? You are not this person. Why would you stoop so low?”

He sits flat on the carpeted floor, and rubs his face, sighing in exhaustion.

“I was driven by rage and jealousy.” He starts to explain.

He is not a bad person, I have known him since I was eighteen. Still, it doesn’t excuse his animalistic behavior.

I stand against the door, my arms clinging to the bed sheet wrapped around me.

“I overheard my father talking on the phone, he said something about Siyakhula keeping you. I did my own digging and found out the last person you were seen with was my brother. That’s when I put the puzzle together, I had to rescue you from him.”

I did need rescuing, but that was before I fell in love with Siyakhula. Now he is my life, I can’t imagine a day without him.

“Then what happened?” I ask Phangi, he looks up with tears in his eyes.

“I went to your house to report the matter. Your father was not around, I met your mother though. She was keen when I told her what happened. That’s when she came up with this idea to rescue you, she had guns and a perfect plan.”

Nomazulu? That’s not possible, the only thing that woman is good at is cooking and pleasing my father.

“Don’t lie to me Phangizitha.”

He drops his head.

“I swear on my love for you, she even told me to convince you to go back home. That she needed you back home for some reason.”

The same woman that said nothing when Phakathwayo threw me out of the house wants me back home? This man is lying to me.

“She has something planned Siza, you need to be careful with her. Don’t trust that woman.”

That’s enough. I know Nomazulu, she raised me. I would know if she wanted to hurt me.

“Take me back to Siyakhula.” I order. I would plead with him but he is not on my good books.

Phangi whips his head up, he’s back on his knees, forgetting his bleeding ear.

“You still want to leave even after telling you everything?”

“Do you expect me to forgive what you did? You harassed me, Phangizitha. I can open a case against you for sexual harassment.”

His eyes tell me he is in shock, “It will be your word against mine.”

“You forced yourself on me, I’m sure the clinic can prove that.”

My words must hit hard because he stands and tries to touch me, I step back, eyeing him with disgust painted in my eyes.

“My father will kill me when he finds out, please don’t do it.”

His father should be the least of his worries.

“Don’t worry about me going to the police or your father, the only person that will know about this is Siyakhula.”

I’m not going to keep such a big thing from him.

“I’m not afraid of him.” He says.

He should be because the Siyakhula I was introduced to doesn’t take nonsense.

“Take me back now.”

Phangizitha sighs, covering his face with his palms. He’s begging me not to go, but I don’t want to be here. I don’t feel safe with him.

He calls me an Uber when I tell him that I want to leave, and requests that I wear some of his clothes.

I am not going to appear to Siyakhula wearing my ex’s clothes.

I take the t-shirt I had on

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torn as it is and adorn my body with it. I grab my underwear and head out.

“Siza, please don’t leave like this.”

He’s behind me, pleading. I know this looks bad, the Uber driver confirms it by looking at me with a deep frown on his face.

“Baby please...”

I ignore Phangi and jump into the car.

“Drive,” I tell the driver.

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SIYAKHULA

We brought Bonisile home with us, I am against it but Mhlauli insisted. I hate how he controls things and sometimes never tells me anything, like what he did to those two men he left with over two weeks ago.

My brother is as mysterious as they come.

I was pushed into a cold shower by him and Vuyo until I came into my senses.

We are gathered in the living room, they just narrated the story about Bonisile and Nomazulu. I should have known that woman was up to something.

“Thank you for coming for me, I don’t know what would’ve happened had you not come to my rescue.” I tell Mhlauli who is judging my very existence with just a glare.

“Your problem is that you think with your heart, you will die Siyakhula.”

I can’t help it, my heart is no longer mine. I gave it away with such ease.

“The old Khula was not this weak, I blame that Siza girl. She is not good for you.” Nadine is here too, sitting beside me. I am not in the mood to reprimand her.

“We have to do something about the Gumedes, they can’t get away with what they did to me.” My mind takes me back to Siza and my brother in bed together, I find myself clenching a jaw and breathing too fast.

“Oh we are definitely making them pay. What about Bonisile? We can’t let her go.” –Mhlauli.

I have no strength to face Bonisile at the moment. “Let’s face the big sharks first, we’ll deal with her when my enemies have fallen.”

Vuyo walks into the lounge, I am grateful that he didn’t listen to me when I told him to go home. Men like Vuyo are hard to find these days.

“Boss, you might want to see this.” He says with urgency.

“What is it?” I ask, not wanting to stand from my seat.

My head is killing me.

“She’s here.” He says and I immediately know who he is talking about.

I want to jump to my feet and run to the door, but no. That would be too weak of me.

“Thank you, Vuyo. I will attend to her.”

Vuyo nods and walks out.

Mhlauli stands with me, asking, "What's going on?"

I don't answer but pull out a gun and head to the door, my heart leaping to my throat.

My eyes widen at the state she is in. Her above the knee t-shirt is torn, hair unkempt. She is standing with her hands on her back, and her head is lowered.

She lifts her eyes, tears instantly stream down her face. I'm not going to be fooled by her again, I know what I saw and heard.

I point the gun at her and pull the trigger, someone pushes my hand, making me miss the target.

"Are you crazy?" Mhlauli yells.

I don't care about him. My eyes are on Siza the traitor. She's on the floor, her hands above her head.

I can't un-see her and my brother in bed together.

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KHUZIMPI-

He's been restless since the call he received from Siyakhula. Although he is finding it hard to believe him, he can't deny that there is something in him nudging him to find out what is really happening.

He arrives to an empty house, as he expected. He left the girls with a family friend, they will be staying there for the week until he sorts out what needs to be sorted.

The first thing he does is drop his bible on the table in the foyer, then head to the bedroom to take a shower.

There are voices and giggles coming from his bedroom, they increase as he approaches. He is not sure what he will find but judging by his suddenly red-rimmed eyes, he has a clue.

He pushes the door open and walks in to his wife on top of his brother, grinding her hips and heaving like a hair dryer. His heart drops into the pit of his stomach.

"Nomazulu?" His voice shakes.

Qeda pushes Nomazulu off him, she tumbles to the ground screaming.

SIZA

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“Stay out of this Mhlauli.” Siyakhula pushes Mhlauli out of the way and points the gun at me again. I get up, with an escape plan into one of the rooms in the house.

“Get out of my house, Sizalobuhle.”

He’s behind me and catches me before I could hide behind the couch. His arms are tight around my waist as he scoops me up and starts rushing towards the exit.

“Siyakhula wait! What are you doing?” I kick and scream, trying to free myself from his grip.

I’m so confused. Was he not looking for me?

“Bhuti stop,” Mhlauli grabs his arm to pull him back, and this stubborn man drops me on the ground.

Has he forgotten I’m carrying his child?

Siyakhula escapes Mhlauli’s grip and rushes to grab me by the neck. I’m still lost in shock when he pins me on the wall, rage evident in his eyes. I have never seen a man consumed by so much anger.

“You have the nerve to come to my house after sleeping with my brother.”

What? No! He’s got it all wrong, I would never do that to him.

“I didn’t do anything, Phangizitha almost rape.d me,” I say fast enough to stop him from wringing my neck.

I fall on my bum when he slowly releases me, then look up to find him frowning down at me.

“Stop lying Sizalobuhle, I saw you two in bed together. I heard you moaning for him the same way you moan for me.”

No, that can’t be right.

“Siyakhula, you came over and watched while I fought your brother? How could you be so cruel? You left me there to fight for myself?”

My words don’t seem to register to him, I watch his eyes then I know. The anger in them is nothing but a shield for pain, I so wish to God to take it away.

When he breathes in slowly, I expect the anger to clatter to the ground. But nothing.

“I didn’t see you fighting, you were enjoying.” He speaks through a tight jaw.

“That is not true okay, go see him right now and you will see the damage I did on his ear.”

“How do I know you are not lying to me? How do I know this is not part of your plan?”

I crumble crying, my life will be over if he doesn't believe me.

“Stop with your crocodile tears Sizalobuhle, I am not affected.”

I hate it when he calls me Sizalobuhle, and with that tone.

“Bhuti, I don't know about you, but I think she is telling the truth. A woman wouldn't lie about something so serious.”

Thank you Mhlauli.

Siyakhula looks deep into my eyes and breaks me with his next words, “Yes, a woman wouldn't. But Sizalobuhle Gumede would. She's done it before. Have you forgotten that I spent time in jail for a rap.e?”

“Khula please believe me, we can even go to the hospital and have me checked for forced penetration.”

“Fine, let's go to the hospital.”

He rushes to the living room, leaving me shocked and cracking into pieces.

My teary eyes catch a glimpse of Nadine, she's arrogantly smirking at me. Wait till everything dies down, I am going to get rid of this woman.

Siyakhula is back, his eyes refuse to meet mine.

"Let's go," he says.

"She can't go out looking like that, at least give her a coat or something." That's Mhlauli, actually making sense.

Siyakhula observes me disgustingly, "She's fine. She likes being a rap.e victim, then let her look like one."

His words stab my heart, violently he grabs my arm and pulls me up. I can walk by myself but this bastard is dragging me to the car. I want to hate him but I can't.

He pushes me into the back seat and joins me, I don't blame him for his anger. I blame his upbringing, stupid fool doesn't know how to treat a broken woman.

I didn't see Vuyo coming, he takes the wheel and drives us to the hospital. The tension in this car is thicker than egg yolk.

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“Vuyo, what is the maximum prison time for drug smuggling and money laundering?”

Why is Siyakhula even interested in that? He should be sitting close to me, comforting me in his arms.

Vuyo looks through the rear view mirror, “Five years or so, boss. Why?”

“That’s not enough.” The fool next to me says, scrolling down his phone. He’s on Google, searching ‘what is the sentence for a drug crime in South Africa.

I can only imagine what he is up to.

“What about money laundering?”

“I’m not sure boss, you could get 20 to 30 years imprisonment or a 100 million fine. But of course you need to have money for that.”

Of course Vuyo would know, he looks like a thug.

Siyakhula is satisfied with Vuyo’s answer, his mouth twitches and for a second chills run down my back. I’m trying to read his mind, shit.

Siyakhula opens his recent contacts and dials Mlamuli’s number.

“I need a favor, I will send you the details via WhatsApp.” He drops the call and hides his phone when he starts typing on the green app.

My head is spinning with questions.

When he places his phone on his lap, it buzzes and a message notification pops up. It’s from Mlamuli.

I’ll get my boys in there, give me less than thirty minutes.

He side eyes me as he hides the flashing screen. What is this man up to?

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At the hospital, a nurse examines me and floods me with a lot of questions. Siyakhula didn’t want to leave the room, he left fuming after the nurse forced him to. I need to address his anger with him, it’s not cute.

“Are you sure you don’t want to press charges sisi? You were rap.ed.” I wish she would stop saying that.

“No, I don’t want to press charges.” I don’t want to associate myself with Phangizitha.

Pressing charges would mean facing him in court, I'm not ready. He forced himself on me, something I never saw coming. To think I once trusted him with my life.

I don't support the pity in the nurse's eyes, "It's normal for rap.e victims to be scared of their attackers. Did he threaten to hurt you?"

"No, and I am not a rap.e victim." My voice rises, she sighs and takes my hand.

"Okay, we can recommend a psychologist..."

I snatch my hand, she's working on my nerves.

"Nurse, the only thing I need is for that man out there to believe me. He thinks I lied about being rape.d."

"Great, at least now you accept that you were sexually violated. That's the first step to healing."

Does she get paid extra to annoy patients?

Breathing in and out should help, but it's not. I'm getting more upset.

"Please call Siyakhula and tell him what really happened to me. I need him to believe me."

“I don’t think you should waste your time with a man who doesn’t believe you were assaulted, you deserve better.” She says.

My ancestors are forsaking me.

“Siyakhula!” I shout, he comes running—eyes out and...

Argh! This man.

“What happened? Are you okay?” –Him.

I knew he cared.

“Nurse, give him the results please. Tell this man that I was almost rape.d.”

The look she gives Siyakhula was made with a double dose of attitude.

“She wasn’t almost rape.d, she was rape.d. We found forced penetration. I tried to convince her to lay charges but she won’t listen to me.” - Nurse.

Is she turning me into the bad guy?

“Did you hear that Siyakhula? I didn’t lie to you, whatever you think you saw was not me.”

His eyebrows scrunch together and his nostrils flare as he turns to the window.

“Is the baby okay?” He asks.

“Yes, I booked her for a sonar. The gynae will be available tomorrow.” The nurse says.

“I’m going to kill him.” Siyakhula mumbles what I hope is not true.

I hope he believes me now, or I will leave his ass and he will never find me.

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Vuyo is driving us back home. Siyakhula hasn’t said much to me, but he is sitting closer and his arm is over my shoulders. He even gave me his t-shirt to wear over the torn clothes, so that’s progress.

I’m not letting this man go without a fight

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he can keep his body tense and jaw clenched for all I care. I’m here to stay.

“I want to go shopping.” I’m not one to be random.

“For what?”

Really!

“Clothes, I have nothing to wear.” I tell him, making myself comfortable on his chest.

“Okay, Vuyo will accompany you.”

Vuyo steals a look on the rear view mirror, he is not interested and I don't want to go with him either.

“Why should I go with Vuyo? Can't you come with me?”

“I'm busy...” He's lying.

“Too busy for me?”

“Yes Sizalobuhle.” Siyakhula is slowly digging his own grave.

I snap out of his arms and glare at him.

“I'm Sizalobuhle now? You're still angry aren't you?”

He frowns at me, and does that ticking jaw thing again.

“What?”

“You still think I slept with your brother even after the nurse confirmed I was telling the truth.”

“I'm not angry, stop trying to put words in my mouth.” He shifts to the door, creating space between us. I move closer, I'm not about to let him breathe.

“Yes you are Siyakhula, it doesn't matter what I say. You will never believe me, will you?”

“Why are we even talking about this?”

“Because talking about it is the only way we’ll resolve it.” I tell him, sounding upset.

Siyakhula looks out the window, I can see a frown from here.

“Well I’m not interested in talking about this, I don’t want to be reminded that you and my brother shared a bed.”

Tired of looking at the back of his head, I pull his shoulder, making him look at me.

“I knew it, I knew you pretended to be over this.”

“What do you want from me woman?” He snaps.

“You have anger issues Siyakhula, that’s your problem.”

He doesn’t seem to like my statement.

“Where is this coming from?”

“From observing you.” I say.

“You’re a doctor now?” That’s said with a raised eyebrow.

“Come on, anyone can see that you harbor so much anger in you. You shot at me and strangled me, if that doesn’t scream anger issues then I must be crazy.”

“Will you stop analyzing me? What the hell is your problem?”

“I’m trying to help you, anger will be your downfall one of these days.”

“Enough Sizalobuhle.”

I watch inquisitively as he pulls out his wallet and throws an FNB card on my lap.

“Go buy your clothes. Maybe that will stop you from playing doctor.” He opens the car door, and slams it on his way out.

Oh! We’ve arrived.

I’m so angry at Siyakhula, that stupid fool.

Wanting to have the last word, I roll the window down and yell.

“It’s Gundi to you, I’m your Gundi.”

If he calls me Sizalobuhle again, I will burn all his fancy clothes and he’ll go back to wearing those ugly overalls.

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KHUZIMPI-

“Baba!” Nomazulu stutters as she snatches her dress from the floor.

Khuzimpi's anger rapidly increases, he loses his senses and runs to attack Qeda with a fist. He straddles him, giving each jaw a violent punch.

"Mpi stop," A frantic Nomazulu's screams fall on deaf ears.

Khuzimpi feels like a wild fire has been lit inside him, he doesn't care where the limbs are, or where his blows land. He's punching his brother mercilessly, rage rising with each punch.

"Khuzimpi stops, please stop." She reaches for his arm but gets elbowed on her left eye, the impact has her stumbling to the ground.

This does not deter her, Nomazulu jumps to her feet, hysterically crying.

"You're hurting him, Khuzimpi. Please don't hurt him." Her desperate cries put a stop to his violence, he turns his gaze to her. Hurt playing in his orbs.

"You're crying for him, Nomazulu?" This must be a dream.

Nomazulu, crying and trembling shakes her head. She looks to Qeda who is trying to get himself off the bed but is failing. She wants to help him, wipe the blood off his face. But...

"You're not a murderer Mpi," that's her justification for stopping the fight.

But Khuzimpi is not blinded by the affection in her eyes when she looks at his brother.

“Is this the conference you spoke about, Nomazulu?” That’s not really what he wants to say.

He is beyond hurt, yet words to express himself fail him.

“I can explain, baba. It’s not what it looks like.” She looks at Qeda who is doing nothing to explain what in God’s name his brother just walked in on. Instead, his head is dropped in shame.

“I will deal with you later,” he turns to Qeda, eyes glistening with pain.

“Qedakonke? Ungidli thende ndoda?” (You’re sleeping with my wife?)

Qeda’s eyes snap up, tears instantly flow down his bruised cheeks.

“Bhuti, she came on to me. You know I would never do that to you.”

Nomazulu gasps in shock, this must be a joke of some sort.

“Why are you lying?” She yells at her brother in-law.

“Thula Jezebel, I should have known this was your plan to separate me from my brother.” –Qeda.

“That is not true...”

they point fingers back and forth.

“Bhuti, don’t listen to anything she says. I just got home, and your wife called me to her room. She said she wanted help with something and when I got here, she was naked.” He scampers off the bed, his soft member dangling in the air.

Disgust clings on to Khuzimpi, it’s nothing compared to the anger he is feeling.

“Enough!” There is something in this shout, a pain hidden behind it.

“I want you two out of my house.”

“Bhuti, you have to believe me. She set me up, I would never do this to you. She is not even my type.” Qeda pleads.

All Nomazulu can do is stare incredulously, meanwhile Khuzimpi is breathing fire, fists clenched and eyes glaring.

“Don’t ever call me that again, Qeda. You have lost yourself a brother. Now get out of my house.”

Like a ticking bomb that's about to explode, he grips Qeda's arm pulling him out of the house, naked as the day he came into this world.

"Wait my clothes." –Qeda.

Khuzimpi hears nothing of it, he pushes him out the door and shuts it closed.

When he realizes Nomazulu is still in their bedroom, he goes for her.

"No, I'm not going anywhere. I'm your wife Mpi." Her cries mean nothing to him.

He carries her on his shoulder and delivers her outside to his brother.

As he shuts the door, ignoring their desperate cries, he leans against the wall and slides down. Tears decide to flow, this hurts more than when he kicked Siza out.

His phone buzzes then rings, the caller ID puts a frown on his face.

"I'm in the middle of something, Gwala, call later." He doesn't hide his frustration.

Gwala speaks regardless, "The police have raided the church and found drugs, money, and illegal diamonds. You have to get here now."

PHANGI

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“Baba you have to help me, I messed up.” It’s the first thing Phangi says when he opens the door for his father.

A frowning Mlamuli enquires, “What have you done?”

Phangi allows him into the house, and shuts the door.

“I almost rap.ed a woman,” he confesses without any form of shame.

It’s shocking, it shows on Mlamuli’s face. Yet, he fixes his tie, clears his throat and keeps his held high. He’s done this before, get his sons out of tricky situations. He’s done it with Siyakhula and he’s done it with Mhlauli.

“Who is she? I want to know everything about this girl. Is she the one who did this to your ear?” –Mlamuli inspects his son’s bandaged ear.

Phangi sighs, sits down on the couch and buries his shameless face in the palm of his hands.

“It’s Sizalobuhle.”

This is a tough one for Mlamuli, it was easy when the plan was to use Siza to get to Khuzimpi. But this is another story.

“Where is she?” He asks.

“She went back to Siyakhula,” Phangi lifts his red eyes to him.

“She told me that she loves him and she is having his baby. Can you believe it? My own brother.”

Sure he can believe it, a human heart is the weakest organ.

“Has she told Siyakhula what you did? It will be easier to shut her up if she hasn’t.” –Mlamuli.

“I don’t know, she left here with a promise to tell him every...”

A knock at the door cuts his reply short, Phangi shows panic.

“Relax, check who it is.” A calm Mlamuli says.

Slowly, Phangi stands to attend to the door. As he opens, a fist greets him on the face. He stumbles and hits his back against the wall.

Mlamuli comes running to his rescue, “Siyakhula!”

Siyakhula is too angry to look at his father, he grabs his brother by the collar, bringing him up to his feet and serves him with another punch.

Phangi ducks and kicks Siyakhula on the stomach.

Things get ugly in a second, the two brothers are rolling on the floor like sumo wrestlers.

“Stop it, both of you.” Mlamuli’s shout is loud, but it’s not that authoritative to stop them. Phangi gets punched on his mouth, blood splatters on the ground, he tries to fight back but Siyakhula proves to be stronger.

Mlamuli wraps his arms around Siyakhula, pulling him away from Phangi, and for the first time in his life, he slaps his son.

“What is wrong with you, boy?”

“Stay out of this Mlamuli,” Siyakhula snarls, storming toward his brother.

Mlamuli stops him with another slap, it seems it’s the only language Siyakhula understands.

Phangi hasn’t gathered the strength to pick himself up from the floor.

Siyakhula’s features scrunch up in distaste, “Do that again and I won’t be held responsible for what I do to you.”

It has come to this, threatening his father.

Mlamuli does not show fear. This is his son, he helped bring him into the world and he can simply take him out.

“You are not going to fight your brother because of a woman.”

“So he told you what he did?” Siyakhula grunts. “What’s your plan Mlamuli? Are you going to make Siza disappear to wipe out your son’s crime?”

“You have a big mouth on you Siyakhula, and you’re so damn stubborn. Can’t you reason with people like a civilized person?”
–Mlamuli.

“A civilized person? Your son rap.ed a woman and you want me to be civil about it?” Siyakhula raises his voice, notes of irritation found in it.

“I didn’t do anything, okay.”

Oh, Phangi is up on his feet, wiping blood oozing from his mouth.

His dispute angers Siyakhula, he would punch him again but Mlamuli is standing between them.

“You are not even man enough to admit what you did.”
Siyakhula points at Phangi.

“What right do you have to be angry? Huh? Siza was mine, we loved each other and you took her away from me.” –Phangi.

“Don’t mention her name you son of a bitch.” Says Siyakhula, offending his father in the process.

“Hey, watch your tongue.”-Mlamuli.

Siyakhula ignores him, right now his fight is with Phangi.

“Tell this boy to stay away from me and Siza, or I will kill him.”

On his way out, he bumps Phangi on the shoulder and shoots him a cold glare. Phangi releases a shaky breath, part of him is relieved that Siyakhula didn't mention the police.

“I hate him,” he tells his father as he rushes out of the room.

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SIZA

We're on the way to the mall, I hate shopping alone and this man won't lend me his phone to make a call. I'm sure Hlelo won't mind meeting up, I miss my friend. She must be worried about me, if only I had my phone.

“Vuyo, let me make a phone call please.” I'm asking for the millionth time.

“I told you I don't have airtime,” men and lies.

“I will send a call back then.” Do I not sound desperate?

He should be going out of his way to make sure I get what I want.

Vuyo stops at a red traffic light, and starts laughing, curiosity has me checking what's so funny.

There's a man crossing the street, he's wearing women's underwear.

"People get crazier every day, he probably slept with a married woman and the husband bewitched him." Vuyo expresses through laughter.

I must be crazy to think I've seen that person from somewhere and the underwear looks familiar.

"Pull over," I tell Vuyo.

"Why?"

"I know that man, please pull over." He does it after a great sigh.

I dash out of the car and run after the man.

"Sisi, wait." Vuyo is behind me.

I scream, "Babomdala!" When Vuyo stands in my way.

And indeed it is my uncle, he starts tearing up when our eyes meet.

“Siza, my baby.”

His face has been battered.

“Babomdala, what happened?”

“Get me out of here

please my child.” He says, covering his front with both hands.

“Come with me,” I lead the way to the car.

“Is this your car?” He should be getting in, not asking questions I can’t answer.

“Get in baba.” He does as told and once inside browses his eyes around the interior.

“Should I drive us home sisi?” Vuyo says, after taking the driver’s seat.

“The mall please,” I still need my clothes.

Besides, whose home am I going to take this man to? Siyakhula hates my family.

“You have a driver now, Siza? What happened when you were gone? We were looking for you but you were busy making a life for yourself.”

I must be imagining the bitterness in his voice.

“He’s not my driver, a friend asked him to drive me to the mall.” What else can I do but lie? I don’t know what his problem is.

Qeda shows me a lopsided mouth, “Mmhh! I see. Are you sure you are not rich and hiding it from me?”

“No, I would tell you if I were rich.”

“What happened to you, Babomdala? Why are you wearing a woman’s underwear?” I see shame covering his face, he averts his gaze as he clears his throat.

Is he crying?

“Your father has done it again baby. He’s done to me what he did to you, he chased me out of his house while I was bathing. He said I betrayed him but he wouldn’t tell me what I did exactly.”

That’s Khuzimpi, chasing everyone away. I can’t believe Phakathwayo is so heartless.

“Where did you get the underwear?” His eyes move from side to side, he’s hiding something from me.

“That’s not important Siza, forget the panty. When I asked for my belongings, Khuzimpi said no. He said I bought my clothes with his money and chased me out naked.”

He drops his head on my shoulder, crying. This is awkward, he's naked.

"Yey, what are you doing?" Vuyo startles me with his yelling.

It's just a hug from my uncle.

"He's my uncle, stop it." I tell him.

Something is not adding up. Why would Phakathwayo come home and randomly decide to throw his brother out of the house?

"But how did you get to the north? Did you walk all the way?" I have so many questions for him.

He shakes his head, "A truck driver gave me a ride, he dropped me off here when I told him I didn't know where I was going."

I have never seen him crying. Phakathwayo has to pay for this.

"I have nothing now Siza, you have to help me. I need a place to stay, I would go back to my place but I need to be here for you."

Uncle Qeda is one person I will never forsake, he's been there for me more than anyone I know.

"Let's buy you some clothes first. Then you can tell me what happened over lunch."

He smiles and kisses me on the cheek. I catch a glimpse of Vuyo rolling his eyes. He won't understand.

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KHUZIMPI-

He walks out the door to find Nomazulu seated on their front porch, his brother is nowhere in sight.

“Phakathwayo!” She jumps to her feet, eyes red and puffy from all the crying she’s been doing.

“What are you still doing here?”

“Can we talk, please. I want to explain my side of the story, what really happened.”

Khuzimpi scoffs, “You want to feed me with more lies. Is that it?”

“No. Look, things didn’t happen the way your brother said. I didn’t approach him, it was the other way round. He lied Mpi, he said he loved me and...”

“Loved you?” He interjects dismissively, looking between her and his wristwatch. He needs to get to church and this woman is wasting his time.

“How long has this been going on?” Khuzimpi questions, and that has Nomazulu dropping her eyes.

“Answer me!”

She’s startled by his outburst, “The night before our wedding.”

His eyes widen, his life is a nightmare.

“Nomazulu?”

She takes his hands, he pulls back as if her touch burns.

“I married a snake.”

“No, Mpi.” She’s whimpering. “He came on to me, I swear to you.”

“Don’t even dare try, you don’t respect yourself Nomazulu. You don’t respect me.”

He’s yelling, forgetting that they have neighbors with thin walls.

Nomazulu is working tirelessly to wipe her tears away, yet they keep coming.

“Phakathwayo please let me explain, Qeda is not who you think he is. He’s not as innocent as he portrays. He wants your life, he

wants everything that you have. Your children, the church. He's jealous of you, you have to believe me."

The look on Khuzimpi's face says he's not buying her sob story.

"Let me guess, he wants my wife too right?" He questions sarcastically.

"Phakathwayo, you have to listen to me. Why would I lie to you about something like this?"

"Give me one good reason why I should believe you. I found you hopping on my brother's dick, like a bitch. Then you come and tell me that he planned all of this? Do I look like an idiot to you, Nomazulu?"

He looks at her for a second, and still can't grasp why he hasn't done anything to her with all this anger suffocating him.

He moves her out of his way, making her stumble backward, and heads toward the gate.

"He planned everything Mpi, the night of Siyakhula's party. He planned it all to stop you from giving the church to Siyakhula and Siza." She yells after him.

Khuzimpi stops, whipping his body back. Eyes bulging and mouth hanging.

“It was all his idea,” she says with tears in her eyes.

Khuzimpi doesn't get a chance to ask questions, they are disturbed by a police siren. In a split second, a police van parks at his gate. Fear grips Nomazulu, she shakily moves back, her eyes producing more tears.

“You called the police on me?”

Khuzimpi looks at her and instructs, “Call my lawyer.”

Just then the officers walk through the gate, “Khuzimpi Gumede?”

One says, he nods.

“Come with us to the police station, we have some questions for you.”

He practices his rights to remain silent and lets the men of the law take him.

SIZA

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“Stay in the car bab’omdala, I’ll get you something to wear first.” He takes my hand, stopping me from leaving.

“Promise you will come back to me.” He mutters, the grip on my wrist is too tight.

“Yes, where else will I go?” I try to pull my hand away but he tightens the hold. “You’re hurting me, bab’omdala.”

Vuyo whips his head back when he hears my cry and leans over to remove uncle Qeda’s hand from my wrist.

“Try that again and I’m chopping that wrinkled hand.” Vuyo says, glaring at him.

Uncle scowls, then the next thing he’s tearing up. He covers his face with his hands and sobs louder. I’m left looking at his shaking shoulders and bearing the ugly cries of an old man.

Vuyo clicks his tongue, “And then? Why is he showering us with bad luck?”

I don’t know what to say to that.

“I’m sorry Siza, I’m just so afraid of being alone. You are all I have now. Your father has never cared about me, he hated me because our father wanted me to pastor the church.”

This is news to me.

“But Phakathwayo said grandfather picked him, he wanted him to take over.” I say.

He wipes his tears as he shakes his head, “That is not how things went down. Khuzimpi manipulated him and it was easy for dad to believe him because I was the prodigal son. The ugly duckling that didn’t have a future. Dad had spoken to me first about taking over the church, and my brother went green with envy. He found out that I was selling weed to school kids and told on me. That’s when dad changed his mind.”

It’s actually hard for me to believe his side of the story, my father had his own flaws. He got a teenage girl pregnant and she died. How is it that his sin was pardoned and he was favored over his elder brother?

I need to speak to Phakathwayo before I let myself be caught in a web of lies.

“I hear you bab’omdala, it’s getting late. Let me run to the shops, I will see you later.”

I step out of the car, of course Vuyo is going to follow me around.

He locks the car as hurries behind me.

“Are you serious? It’s hot, he’s going to suffocate to death in there.”

The windows are not even open.

Vuyo shrugs, “Either he stays in the locked car or waits outside.”

Insensitive bastard.

“At least open a window or two.”

Vuyo rushes back to open the window where uncle Qeda is seated. This man is going to give me a hard time.

The mall is not buzzing, thankfully. I hate crowded places, I let my braids down to hide my face, just in case someone recognizes me from that ungodly video.

“I’m going to use the bathroom first.” I say to Vuyo when he takes a turn with me to the ladies. I’m flabbergasted.

“I’ll wait outside the door, this job is my daily bread. I’m not prepared to lose it.”

I leave him guarding the door. There is a woman washing her hands, she smiles at me when our eyes meet and carries on with what she was doing. I'm here to clean myself up, my mistake was to leave the house without bathing first.

I was too angry with Siyakhula to think of cleaning up.

Once the lady walks out, I wet a paper towel and wipe myself in all the hidden places that smell when not taken care of. I honestly need a bath, a long bath.

This helped though, I walk out feeling a bit clean. I don't have my bag with me, the only thing on me is Siyakhula's bank card.

My first stop is Markham, I pick two pairs of jeans for my uncle and three t-shirts.

There are things I can wear here as well, I get myself track pants, t-shirts and socks—not forgetting a cellphone.

How much does this man have in this card? I can only hope my phone will be paid for, I need one.

Turns out there is enough money to pay for everything. Vuyo catches me as I take my receipt and thank the cashier.

“Boss wants a word.” He gives me his phone.

I dread this talk.

“Hello.” I’m still upset with him.

“Where are you?”

“Rosebank, spending your money.” Where else would I be?

“Which store?” I can’t tell him Markham, he will know I’m buying clothes for a man.

“Mr. Price.” I lie.

“I’m around, wait for me.” He says.

When did he decide to follow us?

“You’ll find me at the FIX,” I say and give Vuyo back his phone.

It would be nice if he stops walking behind me. Who said I need a babysitter?

At the FIX, I find a few things I like and head to the fitting room. I wonder how uncle Qeda is doing, he must be hungry. I promised him lunch after this but with Siyakhula here, I doubt it will happen.

Someone is knocking on the door, can’t they see that it’s vacant?

“There’s someone.” I yell, huffing in annoyance. The knock persists, it better not be Vuyo, or I’m knocking his teeth out. Can I shop in peace, please?

Hiding my half-naked body, I unlock the door to tell him to leave me alone but the person pushes into it and slides in.

I almost lose my breathing pattern when I see Siyakhula instantly looking at me with a strange expression.

I spend a few minutes trying to control my facial expression because I have never been so happy to see him.

“Congratulations, you found me.” I say sarcastically and somehow forget that I’m naked as I put my hands on my hips.

He’s not saying anything but looking at my body, the lust in his eyes makes my breath hitch.

He moves closer, I move back. He repeats till my back is against the mirror. I shouldn’t be turned on by this. And why is it suddenly hot in here?

“Siyakhula?” His mouth is a breath away from mine

I refuse to be the one to kiss him first. He started it, he must finish it.

“Have I told you, you look good naked?” His voice is barely above a whisper. His breath runs down my skin, giving me goosebumps.

I hate that my body is slowly betraying me.

“That’s what every man thinks about a naked woman.” I mumble, my lips brushing against his.

“I don’t know about other women, but my woman looks damn good without clothes on.”

The same body he is praising is slowly betraying me and this man has not touched me yet.

“Are you going to apologize?” I need an apology, he was very insensitive today.

He ignores my question and tries to kiss me, I move my head to the side.

“Apologize for what?” He has no clue, does he?

“For being a jackass, almost killing me and not believing me.”

He grips my waist, kissing me into oblivion. I moan into his mouth, while trying to stop my body from trembling.

Siyakhula is all over my body, catching me off guard with every touch and kiss, while all I can do is hold on to him.

If I give him what he wants, he will never learn.

I grab his shoulders and push him away from me, and that makes him growl in frustration.

“I want to hear the magic word.”

“Okay, I’m sorry Gundi.”

“How sorry are you?”

His eyes darken, “Go down on my knees and eat your p#ssy ‘sorry’.”

He gives my lips a light brush.

“I like what I’m hearing. Tell me, Mr. Mbatha, do you give good head.”

His hands dig into the flesh on my hips, he presses our bodies together.

“I’ll let you be the judge of that, Ms. Gumede.”

His mouth travels down my neck, sucking my skin, I’m left panting and silently asking for more.

Suddenly he stops and sinks down to his knees, he lets his mouth travel up and down my legs. I’m close to melting into a puddle.

He looks up at me and says, “Make sure you don’t scream.”

The closest his mouth gets is in between my thighs, close to my candy.

I'm twitching and squirming, impatiently waiting for him to do what he promised.

Is he purposely making me wait? I might die of anticipation here.

I'm close to begging for it when his tongue runs between my folds, and gently circles my clit.

I moan, desperate and loud.

Why did he stop? I look down to find him laughing, he looks up and grins.

"Not a sound Gundi." He says.

I can't make promises.

His fingers glide to the back of my thigh, until they reach my ass. His big hands sink into my butt cheeks, squeezing while he sucks my clit into his mouth, making me feel like I'm walking on air.

He is basically holding up my entire body with his mouth.

With nothing to keep me steady, I hold on to the back of his head. He is doing things to me I have never experienced, turning me into a mess of a woman.

I'm squirming and moaning, while struggling to school my shaking body.

A satisfied grumble rumbles in his throat when my hips start moving, the sound gives me butterflies in my stomach.

I open my mouth to say something, and words fail me.

My back arches away from the mirror as my eyes roll to the back of my head.

"Gundi," I look down and find him staring back at me. His eyes are burning into the depths of my soul and in this moment, two of his fingers slide into me and immediately find my G-spot.

I lose to him, my knees weaken as he increases the pace, pumping his fingers in and out of me. His tongue doing a good job on my clit.

"Siyakhula..." I cry out incoherently, moving my hips to ride his face and fingers. I'm so close to exploding.

My hand tightening on his shoulder, the heel of my foot digging into his back muscles.

“Khula, I’m coming.” A scream follows as I come on his mouth and fingers. Immense heat floods my whole body, I’m shuddering, thrashing and bucking like I’m having seizures.

He steps away from me looking smug and eyes me like he just finished creating a masterpiece, then does the unthinkable without breaking eye contact. He sucks his wet fingers into his mouth.

“Was that make up sex?” I manage to speak.

“It can be whatever you want, I’m here to grant all your wishes.” He winks.

Those words alone are going to make me come.

Now I know what my cause of death will be as long as I’m with him. Crazy orgasms.

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SIZA

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“Hey! What is going on in there?”

I think we were too loud, someone is banging on the door.

“Put on something Gundi,” Siyakhula grabs one of the dresses I was trying on, rips out the price tag, and hurriedly makes me wear it.

“I haven’t paid for it yet.”

“We’ll worry about that later, help me fix you up before they break down the door.” He ties my braids using one of the strands, pulls the short dress down.

“I think that’s as far as it goes.” My thighs are exposed.

I slip into my shoes, and clear up the mess in the changing room.

“Come out of there now, I called the police.” It really does sound like this person is going to break the door down.

Siyakhula holds my hand and glances down at me.

“Don’t let go of my hand.” He says, opening the door.

A security guard is standing by the door, carrying a stick.
There's a lady behind him, eyeing us disgustingly.

"What was that noise? What were you doing in there?" Asks
the security guard.

We are doomed.

Siyakhula tightens his hand on mine and shouts, "Now!"

He takes off running with me.

"Stop them, vimba! Vimba!" The security guard is trailing us.

We run past the cashiers who are laughing at us. I don't know
why I'm laughing as well, but I am having fun.

During our run inside the mall and the guard chasing us, I hear a
chuckle coming from Siyakhula. I look up and see a big smile on
his face. Lord help me, I am falling deeper in love with this
man.

We get stares, frowns and grins. People are wondering what is
wrong with us.

I'm panting and winded by the time we get to the parking lot,
I'm still giggling like a school girl.

Siyakhula sandwiches me between him and a car and attacks me with a kiss. The moonlight is out and shining down on us, but it's hot to be held in someone's arms.

"That was close." He says against my lips, a smile stretching on his.

"I left my things in there." I say. Excitement flies out the window.

"Vuyo will bring them, I'll text him."

I completely forgot about Vuyo, I know for a fact that he was embarrassed.

"Was he in there when we left?" I ask.

He nods, "Hiding between rails of clothes and behind dark shades."

The thought of it cracks me up, I wish I could've seen him. Siyakhula laughs with me. I have never seen his happy side, he looks good with a smile on his face.

I would hate to break the happy moment, but I have to tell him about my uncle.

"Let's get in the car, Vuyo will follow with the other one." He leans forward to get the door for me.

We were leaning against his car.

“We can’t leave now, my uncle is the car and I bought him some clothes.” I introduce.

“Qeda?”

“Yes, we picked him up on our way to the mall. He was wearing a pair of women’s underwear. He said Phakathwayo threw him out of the house while he was taking a shower.”

“Why?”

“He didn’t tell me, he has nowhere else to go. Can we accommodate him until he’s...

“We can book him into a motel, I don’t like strangers in my personal space.”

“Really? Nadine is at the house as we speak, living with us until god-knows when.” I remind him.

“Nadine is not a stranger, she’s an old friend.”

This traitor.

“My uncle is not a stranger either, he’s my uncle and I want him with us.”

His face suddenly becomes disinterested, he first gives me a sigh before denying me vocally.

“We are not going to go around in circles talking about where your uncle should stay, the house is already full of unwanted people. It’s not a safe-house to keep stray...”

“I dare you to finish that sentence Siyakhula.” I challenge him with a stare he cares zilch about.

“Relax, you don’t even know what I was going to say.” He says.

Damn. It’s so hard to get through to this man and it frustrates everything in me. I want to strangle him sometimes.

“Fine, book him into a motel.” I will visit him when I can, I don’t want him feeling like we have all abandoned him.

I don’t mention my doubts regarding my uncle and father. Siyakhula might have his own theories that might mess with my head. I will tell him once I have gotten to the bottom of everything.

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My uncle is booked into a hotel not far from the mall, I don’t think he minds staying there. He actually seems more at home than I have ever seen him.

When I hug him to say goodbye, he whispers in my ear. It gives me chills I can't shake.

"I hope you are not giving Siyakhula some yum-yum." Is what he says.

It's just the way he said it that made me feel uneasy.

I turn without a word and meet Siyakhula in the car, we don't say anything to each other. I know he is not happy about this. He drives us home in silence.

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I'm happy to not see Nadine anywhere in this house, I still hate that she is somewhere around.

I run us a bath, he joins me and when we are done, we head to bed. Today was a long day for us both.

"Come closer." Siyakhula says, wrapping his arms around me.

"I curl myself around his body, my head on his chest and with a soft breath breathe out words I never thought I would say to him.

"I love you, Khula."

His body tenses, I have said what I said and I have no regrets whatsoever. I have fallen for Siyakhula and I'm going to love him more every day.

"Did you hear what I said?"

"Yes." He says nothing after.

I must be stupid but the physical touch tells me what I need to know. He holds me tighter, and kisses the top of my head.

"Have I done the right thing Khula?" Heaven knows I don't know what I'm getting myself into. "By betting on us?"

He sighs, "I promise that you will never regret it. I'm here with you Siza because you give my life meaning. There is nowhere else I would rather be."

I was waiting for 'I love you' but this will do. I must be crazy to be putting up with him and his dysfunctional family. It's not like mine is any better.

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I wake up the next morning feeling rejuvenated, he's not in bed. I need to teach that man that waking up in bed together is a moment to be shared between couples.

What time is it anyway? I find my phone on the side table, it's past nine am.

And here comes the man I've been looking for, carrying a tray of goodies.

"Good morning Gundi." Someone is happy.

I sit up and accept the warm food.

Scrambled eggs which I am not going to eat, I don't want to give birth to a bald baby.

Everything else I will finish and maybe still want more.

"White people call it breakfast in bed. I don't want to hear you say I'm not romantic." He says.

It's sweet, but he still has a long way to go.

Right now, I love the start of our morning. I love the man he is and the special treatments. That includes the sex, if he keeps this up I'm going to be a happy woman.

"Why are you still in bed? We have an appointment with the doctor." He says, inspecting me like I'm not okay. Is he not the one that brought me breakfast?

"I'm still eating," I say in between chewing and inspecting his attire.

Why is he wearing formal pants and a collared shirt? It's a causal meeting.

"Are you going to work after the appointment?" I don't know if he is still a carpenter or if he works a high profile job now. I must ask these questions.

Confusion latches on his face, "Why?"

"Your clothes."

He runs his eyes down his body, "What's wrong with my clothes?"

I don't blame him, I blame the overalls.

"Wear Jeans and a t-shirt, we are going to see the doctor not the president." I put my empty plate aside and jump off bed to make my way to the wardrobe. Sometimes you must dress people, get them into the latest trend.

When I'm done with this one, he will be begging me for Instagram pictures.

I see a pair of light blue shorts. I grab those and a white t-shirt. He must take off those loafers and wear sneakers instead. I find a pair and put everything on display.

"Try this on."

“No way, my mother bought me those shorts for my birthday last year. I don’t know what she was thinking.”

I like his mother

Advertisement

she’s got taste. Speaking of, “How is she?”

His face completely transitions, I hope I didn’t spoil his mood.

“I haven’t spoken to her, she’s getting better though.” He sighs.

I would say more, but it would be stupid of me to remind him that I’m responsible for his mother being in the hospital.

“We should go, get ready.” He’s avoiding the topic and I am not going to push.

“Yes sugar-daddy,” I spank his ass and maybe I shouldn’t have. He is suddenly upset.

“Don’t ever call me that again,” his eyes are piercing, making me feel uncomfortable.

“What’s wrong with sugar-daddy?” He sponsors my food and clothes now. Has he not been informed?

“I don’t like it,” he says.

Yep, daddy issues.

“Okay, you change into these and I’ll take a shower.” His mother will thank me one day for this.

I leave a kiss on his lips and head to the bathroom.

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I have never known a house so crowded like this one, why are these people here? Can’t it just be us two? I don’t mind his brother, although he looks at me like he doesn’t want me here.

I guess I’m on his bad books because I chose one brother over the other.

Does he know what Phangi did to me? He should know.

“Oh look, Romeo and Juliet are joining us for breakfast.” Nadine is being her bitchy self as usual. How do I wipe out that smug look on her face?

“Not today Satan.” I retort, flashing her a fake smile. She returns by grunting.

I lean into Siyakhula, like he knows, he puts his arm over my shoulders.

“I already had my breakfast in bed,” I’m saying to spite her and make her squeal. This woman is going to leave this house so fast I’m not even kidding.

“Did you hear the news? Pastor Gumede was arrested yesterday.” Nadine announces, ogling at me.

I try to hide the shock that suddenly attacks me, I’m failing.

“Can we go please?” I tell Siyakhula, he takes my hand, leading me out.

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Siyakhula is driving today, Vuyo gets a break. I’m happy that I don’t always have to see Vuyo’s face. Being alone with Siyakhula feels good, I want to bask in this moment but I can’t stop thinking about my father.

“What do you think happened with him?” I start, needing someone to talk to.

“Who?”

“My father, Nadine said he’s in jail.” I take him back minutes ago.

“I don’t know, only he can tell us what happened.” The disinterest in his voice is shattering.

“I want to see him, maybe he will tell me what he did.”

“That’s up to you.” He shrugs.

I think he is being insensitive about this. Why is he showing me that he is not interested in talking about my father?

I keep my mouth shut the rest of the ride to the hospital.

We make it to the doctor on time, only he's the one that's late. Siyakhula is restless, he's been walking around the room, sitting down, and walking around the room. My eyes are tired from watching him.

"You will lose a great amount of weight if you keep this up."
This is me telling him to stop it and sit down.

He stops, hands on his hips and says, "What's taking the doctor so long?"

I would answer if I knew.

The door opens just in time, it's a male doctor. Great, I was hoping for a female.

"Mr. Mbatha." They shake hands. "You must forgive me, we have a shortage of staff today."

Siyakhula is frowning at the man. Doctors have this attitude where they don't care about what people think. This one is no different.

“Mrs. Mbatha, let’s get on the bed and check out the little one.” He says to me and I follow his order, letting him think I’m a married woman.

I’m close to 8 weeks pregnant, I ask the doctor if it’s too soon to tell the gender while he prepares me for an ultrasound.

“Is it not too early into the pregnancy to detect anything doctor?”

He reads my file.

“No, right now we are going to check the heartbeat and see if everything is going smoothly in there.” He says.

I look at Siyakhula, his eyes are on the screen. I know he doesn’t know what he is looking at. I don’t know what I’m looking at.

The doctor is too quiet for my liking.

“Is the baby okay?” I ask, impatiently.

He looks at me, flashing that typical doctor smile.

“Yes, they are all fine.”

“They?” Siyakhula asks just what I was thinking.

“Yes, I am detecting more than one heartbeat. And if my eyes serve me right, there are four of them in there.”

This is a dream, I'm sure of it. I'm still in my bed, wrapped up in Siyakhula's arms and having this nightmare.

"I'm sorry, you said four." The man that impregnated me says. I'm done with him, he's going to pay for this.

"Yes Mr. Mbatha. Your wife is carrying quadruplets."

It's confirmed, my life is over.

"Doctor please check carefully, there must be a mistake." I tell him.

I need to calm down. I really need to calm down.

"I'm the one in a white coat, I wouldn't say it is if it wasn't." - Doctor.

Even crazy people wear white coats, he must be one of them. I can't be carrying four babies.

"You can come two weeks later just to confirm, but nothing would have changed." The doctor says.

Siyakhula is too quiet, the hand holding mine is sweating. I check to see if he is okay, droplets of sweat have covered his face.

"You okay?" I ask.

“Please pinch me, I think I’m stuck in a bad dream.” He offers me his hand, I also need someone to pinch me.

“You’re sweating Siyakhula.”

His breathing quickens, he rubs his face then his chest.

“He’s going to have a heart attack, doctor help him. This man must not leave me with four kids.”

The doctor smiles.

“He’s going to be okay Mrs. Mbatha.”

It doesn’t look like it.

“Was the room spinning when we got here?” That’s Siyakhula, looking around the room.

He sounds confused, plus he looks like he is about to throw up.

“Doctor is he...” I don’t even get to finish, Siyakhula’s eyes roll to the back of his head. He falls to the floor, tumbling like a doll.

This is not happening to me.

“Don’t worry Mrs. Mbatha, he’s not the first man to faint after finding out they are having more than one baby at once.”

NOMAZULU-

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It's been two months since Khuzimpi was arrested, she hasn't gone to visit him nor reach out to his family for help. The church was shut down and is under investigation. For weeks, the news of drug trafficking inside the church was broadcasted on almost all South African news channels. She's been laying low and even went as far as not sending her children to school.

Staying in the house without Khuzimpi is different, nice different. She's free to do whatever she wants, come as she goes.

She's in the kitchen preparing supper when Simengaye walks in, eyes droopy and lips parched.

"Mama, my stomach hurts."

Nomazulu leaves her tasks and attends to her daughter,

"What's wrong?"

She presses her palm on Simengaye's forehead to feel her temperature.

“You’re not burning up.”

“My tummy hurts,” tears trickle down her face.

“Okay, I’ll get some Panado. Sit down.” She brushes her head and takes her phone to check if there are any calls from Qeda. She hasn’t heard from him.

His last seen on WhatsApp is about two months ago, his cellphone and all his belongings are still in his room.

“Mommy hurry.” Simengaye cries, pressing an arm around her stomach.

Nomazulu exhales deeply, opens the top shelf and takes out a bottle of red wine.

She pours herself a drink and gulps it down in one go. As she pours the second glass, she notices that her hands are shaking.

“Get a grip Nomazulu, I’m sure he is fine.” She mumbles to herself, and empties her second glass of wine.

“Mommy it hurts.”

“Shut up Simi, can’t you see I’m trying to think.” She yells at the child.

Simengaye’s eyes are filled with tears. It’s not the first time since their father went away that Nomazulu has snapped, yelled and even spanked them.

Feeling a twitch of guilt, Nomazulu looks over at her. A third glass in her hand.

“Forgive me baby, mommy is sick too.” She takes more than one sip.

Simengaye nods, hiding her tears behind her dilated pupils.

“Is that why you’re drinking that?” The child questions, inquisitively.

“Yes, mommy has to drink this to feel better.”

“Can I have some? I want to feel better too.”

There’s a sudden knock at the door, Nomazulu puts the glass down and runs to open.

She’s expecting Qeda, she has been expecting him for weeks. And like lady-luck is smiling at her, the man in question is standing before her.

“Qeda?” Tears pool down her face, they have been long coming.

“Baby I’m home.” That’s all it takes for him to get a hug.

“Where have you been? I was worried sick.”

“Aren’t you going to invite me in first?” –Qeda.

A smile is on her face, as she makes way for him.

“There is no place like home.” Qeda is all smiles.

He settles down on Khuzimpi’s chair, crosses a leg over the other and breathes in the sweet smell of home.

“Are you going to tell me where you were?”

“I had to keep a distance to prevent people from talking, but I’m back now. For good.” –Qeda.

Nomazulu has never been so happy, but she doesn’t show it.

“Why did you lie to Mpi that day? You told him I approached you and...” She’s been wanting to ask him this.

“Baby, I had to play the good guy. Have you forgotten our mission?”

He stands to face her.

“Making Mpi believe that I am still the good brother he loves was good for us. Otherwise all the years of hard work would’ve gone down the drain. You believe me don’t you?”

He holds her closer and presses his lips on hers.

“I love you Nomazulu, say you believe me.”

He deepens the kiss and glides a hand under her top, she moans when he squeezes her pancake breast.

His member doesn't react to the touch, he can't remember the last time he touched a woman's full breasts.

These ones feel like melted ice in a plastic, they don't do anything to him.

"I believe you," Nomazulu moans louder.

Her body trembles when he pushes his hand inside her underwear, she's wet and he didn't even do anything to her.

His finger finds her clit and she gasps out loud as he starts rubbing it.

"I will give you the world, once the church is mine." He whispers in her ear. Nomazulu grinds her hips on his hand, this man is about to take her to heaven.

"Mama!" They hear a scream.

She jolts out of Qeda's arms and runs into the kitchen to find Ndlelezhle frozen in shock. Simengaye is passed out on the floor, next to her is an empty bottle of wine.

“Damn it this child drank my wine.” Nomazulu snatches her bottle from the floor.

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SIZA-

Over the past two months, I have become increasingly anxious about the quads. Siyakhula has the patience of a saint, while I’m failing to share that trait. You can’t tell he’s the one that fainted after the doctor gave us the news.

I’m aware that we have to work as a team, he’s doing his part and I’m struggling on my side.

I am young and have many things I wanted to do in life before becoming a mother.

It’s safe to say, I won’t be getting that nose piercing and tattoo I always wanted.

Plus, Siyakhula would never allow it.

I have picked up possessive traits on him, he hides them so well. They are starting to show, little by little.

He’s at work most of the time, he finally bought the company he once worked for and named it Carved. But his father wants

him at Donda Connect, the networking company he founded for his children.

Phangizitha and I haven't crossed paths since that fretful day. I was hoping it would stay like that, but Mlamuli has invited all of us to dinner at his house. Siyakhula didn't want to go but Mhlauli has a way to convince him to do things he doesn't want.

My father is still behind bars, the case against him is strong, his lawyer seems to be failing. The church board turned on him, they believe that he is guilty.

Siyakhula believes it too, he dismisses me whenever I bring Phakathwayo up.

Uncle Qeda thinks the same way, I've seen him more than twice in the last month. I have learned to detach myself from him. He is not the same man I called baba. He's strange and speaks strange.

I haven't spoken to Nomazulu, nor have I met my siblings.

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Mhlauli walks into the living room, looking like the devil's prodigal son. He would actually look good in color clothes, not these black jeans and t-shirts he's always wearing.

Our eyes meet, he almost rolls his and turns to walk out.

"Mhlauli wait, I need a favor."

He stops and faces me.

"What is it?"

"I need to visit Phakathwayo without your brother knowing."

This is a risk I'm taking, Mhlauli hates me. But I have no choice, Siyakhula won't let me see my father and the only way I can go is if I have an alibi. His brother being the perfect one.

"Sorry, no can do."

That is reasonable, he is loyal to his brothers, not me a stranger. I need to convince him though.

"Please, something is going on and I need to get to the bottom of it."

Mhlauli scratches his head, and sighs loudly. He is annoyed by me

I can tell. He is loud about it. He hardly ever says a word to me, or acknowledge my presence when I walk into the room.

“I will think about it, excuse me.” He walks out, leaving me feeling like crap.

I hope he does think about it. Khuzimpi is my father, I am not going to abandon him like he abandoned me.

Speaking of fathers, Siyakhula’s father will eat us alive if we’re late for dinner.

Someone hugs me from the back, his arms feel like home.

“Ready to go?” He turns me around, his arms not leaving my waist.

“I’m ready baby-daddy. You look hot.” I wrap my arms around him, and squeeze his ass. My hands remain there, he is getting used to it.

“I have a stylist who goes out of her way to make sure I wear clothes I don’t want to wear.” He says.

I don’t believe him, he loves it when I dress him. Tonight we are matching. He’s wearing blue jeans, white sneakers and a white t-shirt. I went for a white dress, not too short, not too long. I’m more comfortable in braids than weaves, the ones I have on now are new.

“Well these clothes make you look hotter than any man out there, so you Mr. Sugar-lips should kiss the ground I walk on.”

His light laugh gives me tingles in my stomach, “Where do you get these words?”

“You make me confident, Siyakhula.” I’m serious.

Never in my life have I been this confident about my body and personality.

Yes we argue and tell each other nonsense, but he never fails when it comes to words of affirmation. I love him for that.

“I’m going to gag.” Nadine says behind Siyakhula.

She was supposed to be here for a month but by the looks of it, she is not leaving anytime soon.

“Can we go, it’s getting late.” She says and I am shocked. She’s not tagging along, is she?”

I look up at Siyakhula and give him an eyebrow. He needs to put his dog on a leash.

“It’s a family dinner Nadine, you are not invited.” He tells her.

And I have the pleasure of watching disappointment wash over her face.

“But she’s going.” Her eyes point over at me.

“I’m family,” I say.

She throws her head back laughing, “Carrying his seeds does not make you family, unless you have his ring around your finger.”

“Did you watch the 5 O’clock news? A miserable bitch is wanted by the brothel in Hillbrow.” I clap back.

She pushes past Siyakhula, threatening me with her stern gaze.

“Get off your high horse little girl. There is nothing special about you. You think you are the only who’s been in this po...”
Nadine.

“Nadine!” Siyakhula fires, roughly pushing her. She stumbles a few feet back, shock written all over her face.

“Get out of here, now.” He points towards the exit.

Why can’t he show her the way out? This woman is purposely making my life difficult. I refuse to like her, this world is too small for us both.

Nadine clicks her tongue and leaves the room in a fit of rage. Siyakhula takes my hand, “Let’s go.”

We arrive at Mlamuli’s house, it’s smaller than the one we live in. It’s expected because his whole life is back in KZN.

“We are the first ones to arrive.” I whisper to Siyakhula as we find our way to the lounge.

“Which makes me look desperate.” He’s turning this about him and his father. It’s about time they kiss and make up. How long will he sulk? We sit and Mlamuli walks in with two glasses of champagne. I reach out for it, but Siyakhula pulls my hand back.

“She’s pregnant.” He glares at his father.

“Sorry, it’s going to take some time to get used to it.” – Mlamuli.

I look pregnant, it’s easy to see the weight gain and big belly that’s growing every day. I’m losing my skin color as well, by the time I’m due. I will be black as ash.

“One glass won’t hurt the babies.” I say and get murdered a thousand times with just a look.

“I don’t want you drinking while carrying my babies.”

This is not a conversation we should be having in front of his father.

“I will check on the door.” Mlamuli excuses himself.

“I need the bathroom,” I stand, Siyakhula stands with me.

“First door on your right.” He directs.

I shoot him an evil eye before walking. It’s easy to find the bathroom, the door is not closed.

On my way out, I collide against Mlamuli. His hands are on my back, stopping me from falling.

“I’m sorry.” I drop my gaze, he is intimidating.

He creates a safe distance between us and shoves his hands into his pockets. He looks like he walked out of a set of Days Of Our Lives, right next to John Black. Must be nice ageing gracefully.

“What do you do for a living, young lady?” I didn’t know randomness runs in the family.

“Nothing yet.” I shrug.

Is this the right place to be having a conversation? We are outside the toilet for crying out loud.

“Any plans for the future?”

Really?

“I haven’t thought that far yet, Mr Donda.” My mind goes straight to the babies in my womb, instinctively I rub my belly.

“I’m sure a beautiful girl like you must have a plan.” He says.

“My plan so far includes nurturing my babies and making sure they are healthy.”

“After giving birth?”

“I will cross the bridge when I get there.”

“I rather you cross it now,”

“Is there something you want to say to me, Mr. Donda?” I don’t like how he is observing me.

“Stay away from my son.” This I did not see coming.

“I’m afraid I can’t do that.” I retort.

“I knew you would say that,” he takes out his phone and gets busy on it.

My phone beeps with a message. He just sent me R200K using my cellphone number. I am being bought.

“This should be enough to help you throughout the pregnancy and after birth. Swaziland is a beautiful country, you would fit perfectly there.”

I am being tested.

“It’s not enough, I will need more. Four babies is not a walk in the park Mr. Donda.”

His smile is small, but his eyes are gleaming. “I knew you were going to say that so I came prepared.”

He does another transaction, this time R100k.

“R300K Mr. Donda? An influential wealthy man like you can do better. One mill at least.” He must think low of me. What will I do with 300K and four babies?

He sighs, yes I'm a gold digger.

"Okay, I will speak to my banker. You will get the rest of your money by the end of this week." That's more like it. "I expect you out of my son's life by tomorrow. Siyakhula needs to build his relationship with Phangizitha. He can't do that with you around."

This family will never accept me.

I smell Siyakhula's cologne behind me and quickly turn, his eyes are inquisitive. I walk up to him, he puts his hand on the small of my back.

"Baby your father just offered me a job at the company and I accepted." I happily tell my man.

He raises his brows, "Oh! What's the catch?"

"There's no catch, he's happy he's going to be a grandfather."

Confusion claps Mr. Donda across the face. I see a million questions running through his head.

"Thank you, but there is no need. Her pregnancy is risky, maybe after birth." Siyakhula declines on my behalf.

This man.

"It's okay baby, I'll be sitting behind a desk. Nothing will happen to me, the pay is really good." I say.

“We’ll talk about this at home.” Siyakhula says, he’s ruining my plan.

I love the shock on Mlamuli’s face, he is stupid if he thinks I’m going to leave his son. I am not going anywhere.

I smile at Mlamuli, he doesn’t return it.

“Thank you daddy D. You don’t mind me calling you that?” I say to Mr. Donda.

“What does D stand for?” Siyakhula asks.

“Daddy Donda.”

Mr. Donda is not okay with my answer. He clicks his tongue and walks away.

“Did I say something wrong?”

He shrugs.

Oho! At least I have money to spend, I will buy Siyakhula a watch.

SIYAKHULA

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Everyone is present except Phangizitha. In a way, I am glad that he couldn't make it. This whole dinner would've been awkward.

We're gathered in the lounge, waiting for dinner. Mhlauli arrived minutes go. He drags me to the balcony, wanting to have a word.

"Baby mama asked me to help her visit her father." –Mhlauli reveals.

Why would Siza do that when I specifically asked her not to meet up with that man? Her parents are not to be trusted, I will protect her from herself if I have to.

"And you're not going to do that." I tell my brother.

His shoulder shrug is not promising.

"I think you should let her." He says.

"Since when are you a bad thinker?" I absolutely disagree with this, maybe when she's given birth. I don't want Khuzimpi stressing her.

Mhlauli exhales, crosses his arms and leans on the wall.

“I’ve been watching the Gumedes for some time, guess who’s at his brother’s house as we speak? Qedakonke Gumede.”

Mhlauli.

“He went back?” I thought he wouldn’t after he was thrown out like trash.

Mhlauli gives me a nod, then adds a chuckle.

“Why would a brother move back into the house he was chased out of while his brother is behind bars? Unless there is something going on between him and his brother’s wife. Something is up with Nomazulu and that man.”

“What are you trying to say Mhlauli?”

“Ever heard of infidelity bhuti? The pastor’s wife has some dirty secrets. Qeda has been warming his brother’s bed without his knowledge. Something tells me those two are happy Gumede is out of the picture.”

Mhlauli clarifies, giving me something to ponder upon.

“I didn’t think Nomazulu had it in her, until she came at me demanding Siza. That woman is capable of anything, to think she walked and talked like an angel.” I look through the glass wall, Siza is anxiously looking at us. She smiles nervously and waves.

Is she that desperate to save Khuzimpi? The same man that disowned her?

“Do you think Nomazulu could be behind spiking the drinks?” Mhlauli brings me back to him with this question, I glance at his musing face. He’s biting the seam of his bottom lip.

“It’s possible, we didn’t do enough investigation on that woman. The information Bonisile gave us that night was not helpful. We have to dig deeper. Now that you mentioned Qeda moving back into Mpi’s house, I suddenly have a hint that he is also behind all this mess.”

And if that is the case, Qeda played his game pretty well. I applaud him.

Mhlauli replies with a sigh first, “Go see Gumede. Those two fornicators want his daughter six-feet underground. He’s not my favorite man in the world, but I want the truth out. For my nieces and nephews. I don’t want them born into a family where there is war between their father and grandfather. Another thing, you need to sit down with Phangi and Siza. All three of you have to sort out your differences. You can’t quarrel forever.” –Mhlauli.

He is right, but I can’t bring myself to being in the same room as Phangizitha. It’s too soon for me.

I will have to arrange a meeting with Khuzimpi and hear what his story is.

“Let’s go back inside before your father sends a search party.” Mhlauli puts his arm around my shoulder as we walk back into the house.

I’m getting used to his clinginess.

“Dinner is ready.” The cook says just as we arrive.

“Thank you Joyce, we’ll be there.” –Mlamuli.

He stands, clearing his throat in the process.

“Before dinner, I have a surprise for you both. Phangizitha should be here too, this dinner is for all my sons.” He speaks with pride.

I hear Siza sigh beside me, I feel the same way at the mention of Phangizitha’s name.

“Am I getting a private Jet?” Mhlauli laughs, clapping my back.

“I said I have a surprise for all of you,” Mlamuli emphasizes, putting his last born son in misery. “I’ll be back, don’t move.”

He strides out of the room. Mhlauli is like a child, he gets bored so easily. He paces around the lounge, touching everything he

can get his hands on. He is eager to find out what the surprise is.

“What do you think the surprise is?” Siza questions.

“Maybe he’s going to kill us all.” My answer earns me a punch on the shoulder.

“Not funny, don’t talk about death like that.” She has become defensive.

“What’s wrong? Do you have a score to settle with death?”

“Siyakhula stop, you are not funny I told you. I can’t imagine any of us dying, I don’t like to think about those things. I don’t want to think what will happen to me if you ever... you know.”

She refuses to say the word die. I had no idea she felt strongly about it.

“I’m sorry Gundi, I’ll stop.” I hold her closer before she accuses me of being insensitive. Mine is a full-time job.

“No way!” I hear Mhlauli exclaim and take my eyes off Siza to inspect.

Mlamuli has brought MaMbatha, she’s in a wheelchair, covered with a blanket from the waist down.

“Mah?” I can’t believe I’m looking at her right now.

Tears stream down her face, her smile is there but not there.
It's as if her left side is not functioning.

She extends one arm, I fall on my knees in front of her and drop
my head on her lap.

I last saw her last month, she couldn't move or speak.

"Mah! How are you?" I cup her face, she nods and stretches her
smile further.

This means she still can't speak.

"I thought bringing her to her sons would help with her
healing." Mlamuli.

I have no complaints.

MaMbatha's eyes rise above my head, she's looking at Mhlauli.
She tears up, her lower lip trembles as she tries to get a word
out.

I go back to Siza, making space for Mhlauli. They have been
apart for so many years.

"Mah!" There's emotion in Mhlauli's voice.

He kneels in front of our mother and buries his face on lap,
MaMbatha rubs his back. She can only make little movements.

"I love you mah, I'm glad you're okay and here with us tonight."
-Mhlauli.

Their moment takes longer, they are in each other's arms, silent. In this moment, my mind is filled with thoughts. Has MaMbatha forgiven Mlamuli? I would be happy for her if she has. I'm not ready to tread that path yet.

"I told your mother that Phangizitha is on a business trip he couldn't get out of." Mlamuli gives us a heads-up.

I shake his hand, "Thank you."

I'm thanking him for bringing my mother to us.

I pull Siza forward, to introduce her to my mother.

"Son, not now. Think of your brother." Mlamuli whispers to me.

Must it always be about Phangizitha? I take a deep breath to calm myself down. There is no problem if Siza greets

we will do the introduction when my mother has recovered.

"It's nice to meet you mah," Siza sounds nervous. I brush her back to assure her that I'm still here.

"That's enough for today, MaMbatha needs to rest." That's Mlamuli, pulling the wheelchair back. He leaves the room before we could say goodbye to my mother.

That means she won't be joining us for dinner.

MaMbatha has become dependent on a nurse, she needs to be fed, bathed and taken to the toilet. The doctor said there is hope, so we are waiting for that day.

We head to the dining room for dinner. I have so much to be grateful for.

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SIZA

Dinner at the Dondas was okay for me. I felt out of place and I couldn't tell Siyakhula about it. It's his father, I blame him for everything.

The highlight of the night was seeing Siyakhula's mother, I loved seeing his face transform with happiness. I didn't voice it out though, I have been giving him an attitude since I heard him chew next to me.

He has never chewed that loud before. Why start now?

When I told him about it, his little brother said I was hearing things.

Siyakhula didn't stand up for me, it's okay. I'm the crazy one because I'm carrying his babies.

We didn't talk to each other on the way home, we are still not talking. It's me, I'm the problem, the silence creator. I have a bigger problem now. I'm horny and I want sex from him.

It's still early in the pregnancy for my hormones to be acting out, but they are.

"I'm going to take a bath." He says, shutting the door to our bedroom.

"Siyakhula I'm horny, I need you." I thought he was going to pick that up.

"I'm not available right now Siza." Why is he removing his clothes in front of me while telling me this?

I remove mine, thinking we're about to get dirty. He's completely naked, staring at me and slowly stroking his dick.

"Lie down Gundi." He says, giving me the look he gives me when he's lusting over me.

I lie on my back, and open my thighs, showing him how wet I am. This is the part where he fits in between my thighs and satisfy my needs.

Gradually he walks up to me, eyes heavy and lustful. His hand is wrapped around his hard erection. In response, my clit twitches, and throbs.

“Close your eyes, Gundi.” My body shivers at his rumbling voice.

I suck in a breath, and close my eyes. I'm waiting in anticipation when I feel a blanket covering my naked body. I open my eyes, ready to complain.

“Why are you covering me? I thought we're having se...”

“I meant close your eyes and sleep, it's late. And since when do you sleep with your thighs wide open?”

He kisses my cheek.

“Good night.” He says and goes to the bathroom.

I rush after him, I'll seduce him in the shower. It's not my fault that I'm carrying four of him.

I twist the latch, the door is locked.

“Siyakhula.” I knock.

“What?”

“Am I good in bed?”

“Well, you've never heard me complaining.”

“Out of ten, how good am I?”

“Half.”

I know he is lying. I have heard him moan for me, this man in there enjoys me.

“Baby I'm serious.” I knock once, then hear the shower running.

This fool thinks I need him. I take my phone and google ‘ways for lonely girls to get an orgasm.

Oh this looks interesting. Pillow humping. The way this white girl is grinding on that pillow makes me wetter than that shower running in the bathroom.

Her moans are loud and seductive, and turning me on.

I place the phone on the bed, take the pillow and straddle it. At first, it feels weird. Then there's a buildup that is pushing me to continue. I need to put a face to this pillow.

I close my eyes and imagine that I'm riding Siyakhula. His arms are all over me and he is whispering sweet nothings in my ear.

“Ah baby, yes, yes.” I rock my hips back and forth, and hug the pillow tightly with my thighs.

I feel the orgasm coming. The feeling is lasting longer than the ones he gives me. This is the best feeling in the world, I'm floating without actually floating.

“Mmhhh Khula, I like you better as a pillow.” This is how army wives survive lonely nights.

I'm getting a cramp on my left hip, my whole weight is there so I change positions and move to the right a bit.

“This feels better than your dic.k baby.” I dig my nails on the pillow, humping faster.

Why have I not tried this before?

Shit I'm coming. I hump faster, my fingers grab the bedsheets as an orgasm hits me like a tidal wave.

“Siyakhula.” I scream his name, my body convulsing. I'm panting, while waiting for the orgasm to die down.

Wait!

Why am I not hearing the shower anymore?

Shit! Is this what white people mean when they say 'I'm going to take a quick shower'?

He's standing by the door, a white towel wrapped around him and rage noticeable on his face.

"Baby, it's not what you think." But it is what he thinks. Yes dics are replaceable.

He looks at the pillow murderously. Now I'm certain that he wants to kill this pillow. I place my new orgasm giver on my lap, hiding my nakedness.

"How long have you been standing there?"

He turns his murderous gaze to me.

"Long enough to know you prefer a pillow over me." His ego is bruised.

He strides toward me and I scoot back. Is he going to hit me? He grabs the pillow and heads to the window?

"Siyakhula wait, my juices are all over that pillow." I have to wash it.

And that's my new fvck buddy.

He ignores me and throws it out the window. I can't protest when he takes the remaining pillows and leaves the room.

THE GUMEDES

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Qeda took on the father figure roll and gave Simengaye a bath. His suggestion was that they shouldn't take her to the hospital or Nomazulu would be arrested for child negligence.

The child has not woken up yet, they are comforted by the fact that she has a pulse.

It's almost midnight, four hours after she collapsed. Qeda is curled up behind the child, spooning her. He's sang too many lullabies to last him a lifetime.

Nomazulu is somewhere in the house, trying to find a meaning to life at the bottom of a wine bottle. She's had one too many and is currently not aware of her surroundings.

Ndlelezhle walks in on her sprawled on the couch with an empty bottle laying on her stomach.

"Goodnight mama, I'm going to sleep now." She kisses her mother on her forehead. Nomazulu can barely recognize her surroundings. She waves the child off.

Ndlelezhle leaves to her room, she stops at the door when she finds Qeda still curled up in bed with a passed out Simengaye.

“Come in nana, do you want to sleep?” He says.

She gives him a slight nod and slowly ambles to her bed, next to her sister’s. Her curious eyes land on Simengaye.

“Is she going to be okay?” She asks.

She is at the age where she knows that if a person is really sick, they should go to the hospital. Right now, she is confused. Her sister has not opened her eyes, but the elders have not taken her to the hospital.

“She will be fine, she drank too much wine and it didn’t agree with her. She won’t die though.” Qeda laughs as if it’s funny.

“Daddy would take me to the hospital when I’m sick. Can’t we take Simi there too? I don’t want her to die.” She’s fiddling with her fingers. It’s not that she is shy, she’s just not comfortable seeing Qeda cuddling her sister like that.

“Wine doesn’t kill nana, your sister is in safe hands.” Finally, the man gets out of bed. He covers Simengaye with a blanket and kisses her on the lips.

You should get in bed too, I’ll tuck you in.” Qeda suggests.

Ndlelezhle jumps into bed, she's looks away when Qeda covers her. He is looking into her eyes and it's making her uncomfortable.

"Good night nana, give baba a kissy-kiss." He pouts his wrinkled lips, Ndlelezhle looks away.

"What's wrong?" Qeda asks.

"I'm not comfortable, Daddy said I shouldn't do things I'm not comfortable with."

"Hasn't your daddy ever kissed you goodnight?" He asks.

"He kisses my hand, that's all." She pulls the blanket up to her neck after seeing him eyeing her small chest.

"Okay baby, I will kiss you on your head." He holds her cheeks with his palms, Ndlelezhle's eyes clench closed. She squirms, trying to move her head away from his incoming lips. He gives her a big fat, loud kiss.

"Got you." Qeda laughs. "See, that wasn't so bad. Good night nana, watch over your sister for me." He exits the room, leaving the light on.

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SIZA

Our fights may seem trivial but they are as real as any couple's fights. I'm not in my best behavior lately and last night's pillow marathon was meant to end before he finished his shower. But I got carried away like anybody does when they are high in orgasm.

One thing I love about him is that no matter how much we argue or are angry with each other, he knows his way to our bedroom. He came to bed and cuddled me to sleep.

I'm the first to wake up this morning, I set my alarm for 5am. It's my first day at work at Donda connect. I have no idea if I will be interviewed, I will ask Siyakhula once I'm done showering and dressing up.

The purpose of this is for me to show Mlamuli that I am not to be played with it, not only that but I have a vision and can work like any person.

Siyakhula's face is buried on the pillow when I walk back into the bedroom. I can't believe he slept through my ugly singing in the shower.

I choose a knee-length, light-blue dress, a grey cardigan and black closed-toed heels.

I'm done and this man is still snoring.

"Siyakhula?" I tap his shoulder. He grumbles inaudibly and turns to face the other side.

"Haybo, vuka ndoda." I tap him again.

He turns his face back around, eyes snapping open and a frown on his face.

"Ndoda?" He asks and I greet him with a smile.

"I meant wake up baby."

His face turns into a smile, he hides it on the pillow grumbling once again. Is he okay? Since when does he sleep this much?

Slowly, he pushes his body up until he is seated Indian style. He hugs the pillow, and looks at me.

"Uyaphi?"

"It's my first day at work, I thought you knew."

"Work? Did I miss a day or something?"

"No silly, last night your father offered me a job. Remember?"

He rubs his face, another grumble rumbling in his throat. You would think he is the one carrying four rascals with how tired he looks.

"Oh, you're starting today?" He asks.

It's Monday, I don't see why not.

"Yes, now get up and drive me to work."

"Are you sure about this Gundi?"

"I am." No lie. I want to challenge myself, maybe also show my father that I am capable of holding a job.

I haven't told Siyakhula about Mlamuli's proposal, and I won't mention it to him. I will take it to the grave with me, if I have to. I have already ruined his relationship with Phangizitha, I won't do the same with his father.

"Where is your CV?" Siyakhula asks.

"Saved on my emails, it's not updated though. I was nineteen when I drafted it."

"I don't think that will be a problem. Do you have any work experience?"

"Is this an interview Mr. Mbatha?" I wouldn't mind if it is.

"I'm making sure my Gundi is prepared, I don't want you embarrassed when you get there. Another thing, HR shouldn't know we are fucking and that four of me lives inside you. Nepotism is a form of discrimination. Some people won't like you when they find out who you are, especially since you don't

have any work experience.” He’s really taking this thing seriously.

“My lips are sealed, I’m doing this for peace not because I care what people think. Besides, Donda connect is a family business and I’m family right?”

He stands, kisses me lightly on the lips.

“Yes, you are family.”

He goes to the bathroom, not realizing what he just said to me. He is accepting Mlamuli as his father

Advertisement

not directly. But he is slowly coming to light.

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I’m waiting for him in the kitchen, and also looking for something to eat. These babies are lazy this morning, usually they are all giddy and troubling me. I don’t have an appetite or cravings. I grab a banana instead. I feel bloated and have the mother of all heartburns.

Siyakhula walks in wearing formal clothing.

“Can we leave now?”

“Aren’t you going to eat first?” He’s looking at my banana like it’s poisonous.

“Not with this heartburn threatening to kill me. I will let you know when I’m hungry then you’ll buy me something, sugar daddy.”

I’m getting used to his tongue clicks, they make me laugh.

“Let’s go Sizalobuhle.” He leads the way.

He drives us to Sandhurst. I’m impressed with the interior of this place. Mlamuli is a wealthy son of a b!tch. And this man holding my hand, how did he hide his family riches from us? We lived with him for so many years and knew nothing about this. My father would have a heart attack if he were to walk in here.

“Is there space in your bag for my phone?” Siyakhula asks.

He must be teasing me, of course my bag is huge.

“Put it your pocket.”

“They are too tight, it won’t fit.”

“Why are you wearing tight pants, anyway?” Maybe I made a mistake buying these pants for him. But every man in the corporate world has them, it’s the new trend.

“Some woman I love thought I would look good in them, it’s not like I have a choice.”

Did he say love? I smile, it’s too wide. I would kiss him if this place was empty.

“Stop smiling and take my phone,” he pushes it inside my handbag.

“Wait for me here, I will have a word with the lady at reception.” I tell him.

“I have an office, I can wait there.”

An office he never uses.

“Siyakhula!” I just remembered that his brother works here as well.

“Mmh?”

“Are you okay with me working in the same company as your brother?” He pinches the bridge of his nose.

“I’m not, but I’m not going to restrict you from doing what you want. We’re a couple, I’m not your superior.”

I’m starting to like him a little more.

“Listen to you scoring points with me.” I close the distance between us. Nepotism can go jump.

“I’m serious Gundi, I don’t want to be that guy that kidnapped you. I don’t want to be a bully because I’m physically stronger, it’s not right. And somebody once told me that I have anger issues, I’m trying to be a better man for her and our babies.” He rubs my belly, while lovingly looking down at me.

I am impressed.

“Okay baby daddy, let me go. Wait for me here.” I step back.

He nods, adjusts his pants and he takes a seat.

For a second I’m drooling at how powerful he looks in those tight fitting pants, a button-up shirt and loafers.

“Stop having sex with me in your head, I might report you for sexual harassment.” He says, a smile twitching on the corner of his mouth.

I laugh and leave to meet the girl behind the desk.

She smiles as I approach, “Good morning.”

“Morning, my name is Sizalobuhle Gumede. Mr. Donda is expecting me.”

Her smile widens, “Mr. Mbatha briefed me this morning. Please follow me.”

Wait! I look back at Siyakhula, he winks and gives me a thumbs up. I will kiss him later for being the man he is becoming.

We walk into a boardroom I suppose.

“Take a sit, the panel of assessors will be with you shortly.” She tells me and leaves.

I’m so nervous. Damn! I forgot to print my CV. The door opens before I stand, it’s Phangi. He is shocked to see me.

“Siza, what are you doing here?” His eyes are wide and shifty.

“I’m here for an interview.”

He breathes in relief.

“You’re the new girl?”

“That’s if I pass my interview.” I say, he nods his head and presses his lips together. Something is on his mind.

I’m not going to ask.

“Why did you choose him over me? Is he a better lover?”

There it is.

“It’s not a competition Phangi, I guess my heart was not fully with you. But I loved you, I still do. As much as I hate you for what you did, you will always have a special place in my heart.”

It takes a lot for me to admit the words, this is how I would've broken things off with him. In a light polite way, he is a good man, this is something I will never be convinced otherwise.

"Thank you, I needed to hear that." He rubs his face, he's hiding his tears.

"And your brother?" Bringing Siyakhula up might change his mood, I have to though.

"What about him?"

"He's your brother Phangi, you two have to talk at some point. Please don't let me be the reason for your quarrel, your mother is back. It will break her if her children are not on speaking terms."

He scowls, I don't know if I'm pissing him off or he's thinking out loud.

"I was with her this morning," he says.

I can tell he loves her with how his eyes glow. In all our years together, Phangi never told me about a certain MaMbatha being his mother. I knew Makhuzwayo. It's not my place to question him, we are no longer together.

"So will you reach out to Siyakhula?"

He's uncomfortable.

“He should reach out first, excuse me.” He strides out. That went well.

There’s a phone buzzing in my bag, I recognize this number. Could Nomazulu be the one calling Siyakhula? I take the call.

“Uncle Khula, please come and get me, I don’t want to be here anymore.”

“Zinhle? It’s Siza, what’s wrong baby?”

“Sisi, is that you? So you’re alive?” She’s crying.

“Ndlelezinhle, what is it?”

“You’re alive sisi? Then why are we suffering? Why are you not here with us?” Her sobs escalate.

I’m so confused and panicky. What is going on?

“Baby, tell me what happened. I’ll come to you right now.”

“Simi is sick but mama won’t take her to the hospital.”

“What’s wrong with her?”

“I don’t know,” her cries are loud. “Please come get us, I don’t like uncle Qeda anymore. Uncle Qeda and mama were having sex last night and this morning. I saw them. Doesn’t she love daddy anymore?”

Lord! What is this child saying to me?

“Zinhle are you sure?”

“Yes, I saw them in daddy’s bedroom. He saw me and I ran and hide in my room. Later he came and said he won’t punish me if I give him a blowjob. He said God loves kids who give their uncles blowjobs.”

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SIZA

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I run out of the boardroom, my head spinning.

“Ma’am, where are you going?” It’s the receptionist.

“There’s a family emergency, can I please reschedule?”

“I don’t see why not.” She says.

“Thank you.”

I rush to Siyakhula, he stands when he sees me. He can tell that something is wrong.

“What happened?”

“We have to go to my house now,” I’m panting and terrified to death.

“Why?”

“I’ll explain in the car, hurry please.”

I’m out the door, walking ahead of him. He hurries after me and takes my hand, slowing me down in the process.

“Calm down, you’ll fall.” I’m offended, he makes it sound like I’m a truck carrying heavy load.

I don’t have time to act on my offence, I will deal with him later.

He gets the door for me and runs to the driver’s side.

“Are you going to tell me what happened?” He asks, as he starts the car.

“Zinhle called on your phone, she saw my uncle and stepmother having sex, and he asked my sister to give him a blowjob.” Uncle Qeda has finished me, he has killed me.

“I trusted him, Siyakhula, all my life he was kind and gentle. He showed nothing but love to us. How could he be so evil?”

He’s speeding now, and not saying anything. I look at him for answers, only to find anger hovering around him. I’m left with nothing else to say, my head is with Ndlelezinhle and Simengaye.

We arrive in what feels like a lifetime of traveling.

The small gate is unlocked, I push it open and rush in.

“Siza slow down. Let me handle this.” Siyakhula says behind me.

“I’ll handle him, how dare he tempt me.”

“Gundi you’re pregnant, don’t forget that.”

Yes I’m pregnant not handicap, I can handle that old man.

I knock on the door and when no one opens in less than two seconds, I bang it with my fist.

“Relax, I’m coming.” That’s him shouting behind the door. Siyakhula and I exchange glances, I can tell he’s just as upset. He’s just not loud about it like I am.

The door opens, showing me the wolf in sheep’s clothing.

“Siza baby?” He stutters, looking between me and Siyakhula with his widened eyes.

My hand collides with his cheek. He covers it immediately, rubbing where I slapped him.

“You son of a b!tch.” I raise my hand to slap him again but he stops me.

“Why did you hit me, Siza? Is it because I left the motel without...”

I grab his neck before he finishes talking, his voice disgusts me. He holds my wrists, pushing my hands away from his neck.

“I’m going to kill you Qedakonke, I’m going to kill you.” I wring his long neck, someone is behind me pulling me back by my shoulders.

“Gundi let him go.” It’s Siyakhula.

Nomazulu comes running from nowhere, she looks like she’s seen a ghost.

“Siza what are you doing?” She screams in horror.

Siyakhula finally pulls me away from Qeda, and punches him. The punch alone sends Qeda sliding on the floor, I want him to punch him again. But the fool has fainted.

“Oh my God, Qeda.” Nomazulu runs to his rescue.

“Why did you do that? Are you insane?” She screams at Siyakhula, her hands pressed on Qeda’s chest. She’s giving him CPR.

“Let him be, he deserves it.” I tell her.

“What are you talking about?”

“Zinhle called me, she saw you two having sex. Qeda went to her room after that and asked her for a blowjob.”

“Never!” Nomazulu loudly dismisses me. “Qeda would never do that. That child is lying.”

“Why would she lie about something like this?”

“I don’t know, maybe she gets it from you. Remember how you lied about Siyakhula rap!ng you?”

This bitch.

“I’m taking my siblings and leaving with them.”

I head to their room calling out their names. The door opens and Ndlelezhle runs into my arms, crying.

“It’s okay baby

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I came to take you away.”

“Where is your sister?” Siyakhula asks, Ndlelezhle points in the room.

Simengaye is sleeping. These girls are supposed to be in school right now.

“She hasn’t woken up since she drank Mama’s wine last night.”

“What?”

Siyakhula dashes into the room and presses two fingers on her pulse point.

“Her pulse is weak.” He says. “We have to take her to the hospital.”

I hold Zinhle's cheek, "Baby pack a few things, Simi's too. You're coming with us."

She hurries to the wardrobe.

"Is she going to be okay?" I ask Siyakhula.

"I'm sure she will."

"We have to call the police, this is child abuse."

I am beside myself with shock, Nomazulu has shown nothing but love for these girls. What has suddenly changed? I thought she loved them more than anything.

"We'll report it once we get to the hospital." Siyakhula scoops Simengaye in his arms.

Ndlelezhle is done, I take one of the bags and her hand as we leave.

In the lounge, we find Nomazulu helping Qeda to a couch.

"Where are you taking my babies?"

"Out of here, and you will never see them again." I reply.

She stands, takes Ndlelezhle's hand from mine.

“They are my kids and they are not leaving this house.” She says and for a while I see a smirk on Qeda’s face, it vanishes too quickly.

“You are cheating on my father and letting his brother molest his kids. What sane person would do that?”

“You don’t know what you’re talking about Sizalobuhle, you don’t even have proof to back you up.” Nomazulu retorts.

“Don’t make this difficult Nomazulu, let us go with the kids.” Siyakhula steps in.

“Go where with my daughters? Do you want to be arrested again Siyakhula? I know the police won’t hesitate to lock you up when I tell them that this man came into my house and took my girl children, saying he’s leaving with them. I don’t even know if you’re going to traffic them or take them as your mistresses.”

What the hell is she talking about?

“Nomazulu, we’re trying to help the girls. This man is abusing them.” I tell her.

“No he’s not, I would know if that was the case. You think I don’t know what’s happening in my house? I’m not stupid Siza.”

“Please, you were having sex in the presence of a child. Who do you think the police will believe? I have Zinhle’s confession too.”

I seem to have hit somewhere.

She gulps, looks at Qeda then back at me. I know nerves even when they are looking at me in the face, this woman is nervous as hell.

“Which Zinhle are you talking about? My Zinhle? My baby would never turn against her mother, I’m the only family she has left with. Tell her Zizi.” She shakes the child’s hand.

Ndlelezinhle winces, tears running down her face. She’s scared of her own mother.

“Come to baba, nana. You know I would never hurt you.” That’s Qeda, pulling Zinhle onto his lap.

He wraps his arms around her waist, making my blood boil. Zinhle looks uncomfortable, she’s visibly shaking and silently sobbing. I drop the bags, pull Zinhle back and grab this man by the collar of his t-shirt.

“You sick bastard, touch her again and I will kill you.”

“You are wrong about me Siza, I am not like that. Nana must have misunderstood me.” I can hear a smile in his voice. It’s not showing on his face. This bastard is having a blast.

“Shut up!” I yell in his face.

“Let him go, Sizalobuhle.” Nomazulu forcefully releases my hands from Qeda and stands in between us.

“Get out of my house both of you.”

“A blowjob aunty, he asked your baby to give him a blowjob. Why are you not affected by this?” I’m crying, which is something I did not plan on doing. Now I look weak in front of them.

“I’m not affected because it’s not true.” She’s yelling at me.

The only thing affecting her are the lies told about Qeda.

“But mama it’s true.” Zinhle finally speaks but gets slapped for her honesty. She falls on the ground crying.

“I will kill you if you ever repeat those words, now go to your room.” She points towards the staircase. Zinhle jumps to her feet.

“I hate you, I wish you were in jail and not daddy.” She screams and runs to her room.

“What the hell is wrong with you?” Siyakhula snaps at her.

“Can’t you see what’s happening here? Your children are terrified of this man, Nomazulu.”

“Give me my child Siyakhula and get the fvck out.”

“No, we’re not leaving without her.” He says.

“I’ll call the police now and report you for child molestation, I’m her mother. Guess who they will believe?” Nomazulu.

“And the alcohol in her system? How will you explain that when her toxicology report comes back? I’m not leaving this child behind, she is coming with us.” He sputters.

“You’re all wrong Siyakhula, Zinhle is lying and you choose to believe a child over me. I would never stoop that low. They are my brother’s children, I love them like my own.” The nerve Qeda has to even raise his voice.

“I’m not interested in what you have to say, Qeda. The law will deal with you.” Siyakhula.

“Okay that’s enough, get the fuck out. Ndlelezinhle is not coming with you and I’m coming for Simengaye. I’m her biological mother. The law favours me.” Nomazulu says, looking at me with disgust.

“Let’s go Siza.”

What is Siyakhula saying to me? We can’t leave Ndlelezinhle.

“I’m not leaving my sister.”

“We’ll come back for her, I promise. Right now we need to take Simengaye to the hospital.”

I understand what he is saying but I also don’t understand. Qeda will take advantage of my sister.

I look over at Qeda, he’s still seated and staring like a lost sheep. This man wears his sheep’s clothing like a pro.

“If anything happens to Zinhle, I will kill you Qedakonke. I blame myself for thinking you were a good man. I won’t rest until you pay.”

“Good luck baby.” He mutters, and winks at me.

BONISILE

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I'm home, thanks to my uncle who told my mother everything that went down at the white man's house. He didn't have to do that, it was not his business to tell.

The woman that gave birth to me has been giving me nothing but silence over the past months. Even when I got a new job at Jet, she still won't talk to me. I have tried everything to make it up to her, but no luck.

"Bonisile, there is a man looking for you outside." My mother says, walking into my room.

I'm getting ready for work and running late, it's my second month there and I don't want to mess it up.

"I don't know men mah, maybe he is lost." I don't look at her because every time our eyes meet I see disappointment in hers.

"Wena? The queen of men's conference?" Why was I not allowed to choose my own mother? This is what God has given me.

“Go see who it is before the neighbors start talking.” She says and walks out.

I finish up, take my things and leave without saying goodbye. I will explain when I come back, that’s if she cares to listen.

I should have known that it’s Mhlauli Donda. This man has been pestering me since he let me go after I couldn’t give them concrete evidence against Nomazulu. That witch, may she burn in hell.

I walk past him leaning against his car.

“I’m here for you, you know.” He says after me. I stop and turn to him, the smile on his face is too bright.

“You are lucky my father is not home. What do you want?”

“To take you out for breakfast.” He says.

He’s a looker, I won’t lie. Looks nothing like Siyakhula, he’s too skinny and those jeans are not doing it for me.

“I’m going to work and I’m late.”

“Hop in then, I will drop you.”

I might as well, my mother already thinks I’m the queen of men’s conference.

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SIZA-

Simengaye has been admitted. She's going to be fine. They managed to drain the alcohol out of her system. A police report was made, and they were called. They haven't arrived yet.

We're in the waiting room, Siyakhula is making some calls. I know it's not the police with how he is snapping at the person. I don't know what's going to happen from here, how we will get Ndlelezhle out of that house without Nomazulu making us look like the bad guys.

"Let me know how it goes." He ends the call and joins me on the bench.

"Mhlauli is going to get Zinhle out of there."

That's a bad plan, Nomazulu didn't let us leave with her, what makes him think not will allow a stranger take her daughter.

"Good luck to him, Nomazulu will raise hell before she lets that happen."

"Nomazulu hasn't met Mhlauli yet, trust me when I say he is walking out of that house with Zinhle." He has so much faith in his brother.

He rubs the back of his neck. Why does he look nervous?

“What is it?”

“Your father is on his way to the hospital.” He says, not looking at me.

“I don’t understand. My father is in jail.”

His leg starts shaking, I need him to look at me.

“Siyakhula.” I tilt his chin, making him look at me. “I’m listening.”

“I framed your father, I was angry and wanted revenge. The drugs and money laundering was my idea.”

I don’t know how to feel about this or what to say to him. We have done him wrong but to actually retaliate like this is unfair. My sisters didn’t do anything to him, they are innocent children who need their father’s protection. Simengaye wouldn’t be in the hospital if Phakathwayo was not arrested.

“I guess it’s true that the justice system favors those with money.” This is my reply.

“You should know, I was put away when I had nothing and no defense behind me.” He says.

“Are you seriously going back to the past Siyakhula?”

“I’m not, I’m just saying we’ve both made mistakes and now we’re paying for it.”

That’s bullshit, the children are paying for it. He should have considered them before taking the decision to frame my father.

“The matter of fact is that you love power Siyakhula and you use it to abuse people in your life.”

“How can I love something so corrupting, Siza?”

Why is he asking me? He’s the one with the power and controlling tendencies.

“I don’t know. Clearly you think an eye for an eye is the way to seek justice. If that is the case, then what are the laws for?” I stand.

I can’t sit next to him anymore, I’m highly upset. His stupid decision making has affected my siblings.

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NOMAZULU-

“You stupid girl, do you know what you have done?” A belt lands on Ndlelezhinle backs

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she screams and runs to hide behind the couch. Nomazulu follows her, and continues to thrash the child.

“I feed you and buy you everything you want, but you betray me. I’m going to kill you.”

Ndlelezhle is stuck, curled up on the floor as her mother belts her.

“That’s enough, let the child go. I’m sure she’s sorry.” That’s Qeda.

He takes the belt from her and this gives Ndlelezhle a chance to run to her room.

“I need a glass of wine.” Nomazulu strides to the kitchen. There is always a bottle available for rainy days like this one.

“Noma come on, you need to calm down. How are you going to lead the church if you keep drinking like a fish.” Qeda is on her back, annoying her.

“I don’t care about the church right now. That child has humiliated me, I’m going to punish her.” She washes down her bitter words with a glass of wine.

“Forget that, you need to get a restraining order against Mpi. He is going to take your kids away from you when he gets back.

The only way to prevent that is to get a restraining order and file for divorce.” –Qeda.

Divorce is something she never thought about, she gives Qeda a long look. He sees doubt in her eyes and knows he has to work hard to convince her.

“It’s the only way we can be together and a family, I can’t be with you if you’re still married to my brother.”

“I don’t know Qeda, divorce is a big step.”

“Don’t you love me anymore?” He holds her in his arms and she melts.

“You know I love you.” She says.

Qeda presses a wet kiss on her neck, “Then do it for me, for us. Get a restraining order against Mpi and Siza. Don’t let them take the kids away, they want to destroy our family.”

He kisses her lips and hugs her, he knows his way around words when it comes to this woman.

MHLAULI-

He’s never been controlled by a woman like Bonisile does, and it’s not even on purpose. He finds himself lost in thoughts of her and what could be between them. Maybe it’s too soon to

tell that he is smitten, but something is happening in his heart. Something that's never happened before.

When he woke up this morning, his plans did not including visiting her. He found himself parked outside her house.

Now they are in the car together, he's taking her to work. It's crazy in his head, how he is suddenly willing to do so much for this woman he knows nothing about.

He arrives at East Rand Mall and is lucky to find space in the parking lot.

"Thank you." She opens the door, he closes it and remains in the position he is in. So close that he can smell the shield roll-on she's got on.

"Can I take you to lunch today?"

"I'll be working." She is full of excuses.

She presses a hand on his chest and pushes him back, he tops her hand with his, and locks his eyes with hers.

"Please, I promise to behave." He says.

He wouldn't be pushing if Bonisile didn't want to meet-up, it's all in her eyes. She is enjoying the attention.

"Fine, can I go to work now?" She says, unbuckling the seatbelt.

Mhlauli is feeling like a million bucks right now, his smile is bright and heart dancing.

He watches as she steps out of the car, until she is out of sight. He must be crazy to be running after a girl that wanted his brother. But there is no harm in trying, it's not like there was ever anything between them.

Now for the task he was allocated, he pops in a CD. Lucky Dube comes on, he increases the volume and drives off singing along to One Love.

It doesn't take him long to arrive at the Gumedes. He parks the car outside and enters whistling like this is his father's house. His car keys spinning on his forefinger. There's a bounce to his walk, a happy song in his head.

He knocks and waits while whistling to the same tune that's stuck in his head.

The door is opened by a woman he has seen before, Nomazulu Gumede. Her eyebrows pucker up at the sight of him, he is not here for her but Qeda. He is the man he wants to see. Mhlauli smiles widely.

“Hi, I'm here to see Blowjob.”

SIZA

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“Can we not fight, please?” With that said, he leans forward and presses his lips to mine as though something drew him in.

Opening my eyes to see my lover in front of me so near while our faces are touching is a special angle reserved for me only.

“Have I told you lately how much I love you?” His kiss grows rapid, and desperate and his hands fumble around my body.

“I’m hearing it for the first time, sir Khula.”

“Now you know.”

I break out of his arms as his phone starts ringing. He takes it out, checks the caller ID then rejects the call. He attempts to pull me back into his arms, leaning down to kiss me again.

“Why did you reject Nadine’s call?”

He is taken aback, and can’t find words.

“I saw the caller ID, what does she want.”

“I don’t know.” He gives me an unbothered shrug.

His phone rings again.

“Take it.”

“I don’t want to take it.” His rage suddenly comes to life. His handsome face resembling roaring thunder.

“Are you hiding something from me, Siyakhula?”

“Really? What would I be hiding from you?” A lot, there must be a reason he’s not taking Nadine’s call in front of me.

“Are you sleeping with Nadine?” The thought makes me gag.

“Are you accusing me of cheating?”

“Nadine is still living with us two months later. You haven’t told me why she is still around. I’m tired of seeing her face.”

“We spoke about this Siza, Nadine will leave once she’s found a place to stay.”

He walks away, as if I’m annoying him. I follow him to the corridor, there are people here but I don’t care.

“Where was she before she found out about your wealth? Can’t you see she wants you Siyakhula?” How can he be so blind? It’s easy to see that Nadine wants him.

“Nadine is my past, okay. I would never do anything with her, I told you before, that you don’t need to worry about me

cheating. I would never do anything to hurt you.” He says calmly.

“Okay, then tell me the truth. What’s really going on between you two? Why is she still living with us when she is capable of getting a job and fending for herself?”

“Maybe she’s sorting out some stuff.” He’s taking her side, and I hate it.

Why is he selectively blind and stupid?

“Nadine was there for me in the past, she helped me with a lot. Are you happy now? Don’t bring this up again.”

“You suck at making decisions, Siyakhula. And stupid decisions birth dire consequences. Do you know the trouble that girl is going to bring us?”

“You think I suck at making decisions?”

“Yes. Exhibit A. We are here today because of you.” I wave my hand around the hospital.

“You think it’s my fault that Simengaye is lying in a hospital bed?” He asks.

“Absolutely. You had Phakathwayo framed for drug trafficking and a whole load of other crap, you didn’t stop to think about his children.”

“I’m not the one who chose a fucked up woman to mother my kids, Khuzimpi did. You’re pointing a finger at the wrong person Siza.”

I snort, completely shocked by his response.

“Unbelievable. The only responsibility you have taken is of these babies. Otherwise, you never take responsibility for anything Khula because the world is your oyster right, you can do whatever you want.”

“And you’re perfect?”

What kind of a question is that? I’m way better than him.

“My father forced me to do what I did, it wasn’t willingly. What about you? You snap a finger and expect everyone to run around like headless chickens. At least I don’t use money to control people’s lives.” He nears me, making me stumble back.

“Where is all this coming from? What has gotten into you Sizalobuhle?”

I answer him with a tongue click and go back into the waiting room. He walks back in and sits next to me. He says nothing. I’m not going to initiate an apology.

Twenty minutes later, Phakathwayo walks in. There is still tension between Siyakhula and I. I run into my father’s arms forgetting how he chased me out of his house.

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MHLAULI

“What are you doing here?” Nomazulu is repulsed by the sight of him. She remembers Mhlauli from the day she went on a mission with his big brother.

“Who is it Noma?” Qeda joins Nomazulu. He makes a sour face when he sees Mhlauli.

Mhlauli dramatically claps his hands, “Perfect, we’re all here.”

Qeda is trying so hard to appear confident and more like a macho-man.

“Who are you?”

“Hi Mkhulu.” Mhlauli waves, showing Qeda all his adult teeth.

“Mkhulu se gaat. Who are you and what are you doing here?”

Mhlauli’s grin grows, “Nc. Nc. Nc. I come in peace Mkhulu, don’t provoke me.”

“This is Siyakhula’s brother, a dog with no teeth.” Nomazulu tells her lover.

They are taken aback when Mhlauli pushes himself into the house while cracking in laughter.

“I like her, she’s funny. You don’t mind me coming in, do you? Thanks.”

“What are doing in my house?”-Nomazulu.

“Who are you? What are you doing in my house?” He mimics Nomazulu’s voice. “Can’t we just be one happy family, it would make things easier for everyone.”

“Cut the crap little boy. Why are you here?” Qeda snaps.

“What’s the way forward regarding the hit on Siza? Do we still want her dead?” Says Mhlauli, casually trailing close to Qeda and caging him against the wall.

“Wh... what?” Qeda’s eyes run to Nomazulu who is staring back in shock.

“Here Mkhulu,” he points at his eyes. “Keep your eyes on me, I’m the one asking the questions.”

“I don’t know what you are talking about.” Qeda stutters.

Mhlauli presses his hands on the wall, eliminating any chances of Qeda escaping.

“I’m getting bored, really. I know you want Siza out of the way so you can take over the church.” He whispers, eyes searching the old man’s eyes.

Qeda blinks a few times, failing to hold Mhlauli’s gaze. He has no weapon with him, yet there is something terrifying about him that has Qeda and Nomazulu shaking in their boots.

“Tha... That's not true, I love Siza. She’s my niece.”

“That means shit. If I had a dog and it wanted my bone, I would kill it. And in your case, you want the church

Advertisement

Siza's legacy. You'd rather kill her than let that happen.” – Mhlauli.

Qeda wipes the pearls of sweat forming on his forehead, his breathing is slowly quickening. He drops his head, trying to calm his racing heart.

“Ple... please move. You are standing too close.” He complains.

Mhlauli tilts his chin up making him look at him, “I said keep your eyes on me. What? You don’t want them anymore? I can help you remove them.”

Qeda swiftly lifts his eyes and widens them.

“Such a good baby girl, you’d make a superb bitch.” Mhlauli taps his cheek, a smile stretching his lips. “Remember the guy you sent to inject Siza with a lethal substance? Baby boy sang like a bird right after I tortured him, turns out he was out of tune so I killed him. You should have heard him scream like a little girl.” His laugh is that of a hyena.

Qeda lets out a shaky breath.

“I don’t know who you are talking about. I’m a man of principles, people would testify for me. Nothing you say will ever change that.”-Qeda.

Mhlauli backtracks, he nods his head as he looks around the house.

“What about the church youth you sexually molested? If they come forward, you are going to jail Mkhulu. I mean a yellow bone like you would look so fucking sexy in a mini skirt and with a fist up his ass.” Mhauri pops his tongue out, revealing a tongue ring. He grins as he runs the tip of his tongue over his lower lip.

Qeda starts to make a panicky sound, terror is in his widening eyes.

"I... I did no such thing." Qeda denies the allegations against him. He looks at Nomazulu. "I don't know what he's talking about."

"I've got the boys and girls' confessions on tape, if I start barking the police will be over your butthole before you can say our father in heaven."

"Qeda what is he talking about?" –Nomazulu.

"I don't know okay. He's lying. What do you want from us?"
Qeda.

"Seeing you're the one who runs this house and madam here listens to everything you say. Would you tell her for me that I'm here for the kid upstairs and I'm not leaving without her."
Mhlauli says.

"Over my dead body." Nomazulu snaps.

"That can be arranged." An insensitive shrug from Mhlauli.

"Where do you want to take Ndlelezhle? Kidnapping is a crime." Qeda.

"I'm taking her to her father of course and I think we're done here. I'm going to go to that room, take the girl and walk out of here peacefully, and you will do nothing to stop me. Is that clear?"

"No, you're not taking my baby." Nomazulu blocks his way.

“Mkhulu, speak to your bitch. I don't want problems.”

“Nomazulu, step aside.” Qeda pulls her back.

“He wants to take my baby.” She cries.

“We'll get them back, I promise.”

Mhlauli cracks in laughter upon hearing Qeda's declaration.

“Mkhulu, be a baby girl and take me to her room.”

Qeda has become a slave to shame, his cheeks are beet red as he looks at Nomazulu. He drops his eyes, and says, “Follow me.”

On their way to the bedroom, Mhlauli video calls Siyakhula.

“Is Khuzimpi with you? Put him on, his daughter might want to see his face first.” Mhlauli says stopping Qeda from entering the girl's room.

He finds Ndlelezinhle sitting on her bed, her face springs to life as she looks up at him.

“Hello, baby. My name is Mhlauli, what's yours?”

“Zinhle.”

“That's a beautiful name,” He kneels in front of the bed and shows her his phone. “Someone wants to speak to you.”

Zinhle's face lights up seeing her father smiling at her.

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PHANGI-

Seeing Siza this morning was unexpected, she looked more beautiful than ever. Must be the pregnancy glow. He wanted to tell her that, but words wouldn't find him.

It's almost lunch hour, he's sneaked out of the office to visit his mother. The nurse opens for him and tells him MaMbatha is outside in the garden. He finds his way and smiles when he sees her, the smile is not returned. MaMbatha seems to be not in her best mood today.

"How are you ma?" He kisses her cheek and gives her a brief hug.

"You won't believe who I saw today."

I mean who else can he share his day with other his mother. MaMbatha's eyes sparkle, she is eager to hear all about it.

"Siza." Phangi breathes like her name tastes delicious rolling down his tongue. "She looked so beautiful mah, you should've seen her."

If she could talk, she would agree with him. She met Siza the other night and indeed she is a beautiful woman.

Phangi takes a chair and sits next to his mother.

“You know I almost died when she left me? It hurt Mah and no one wanted to understand me, they made me the bad guy when she cheated on me with my brother. Then when I had her with me, she told me she loved him and was having his baby. Now that nearly killed me. Siyakhula turned her against me, he poisoned her mind and made her believe that she loves him and not me.”

He thinks back to this morning, seeing his brother in the reception area. He avoided him, something he’s been doing since the kidnapping.

“But I’m going to get her back,” he takes out a small jewelry box from his pocket and pops it open.

“I bought this ring for her. Siza loves expensive things. She saw Siyakhula’s house and lost her mind, it was all new to her. But I am more rich than Siyakhula Mah, I’m the heir of Donda connect. I can give her the life she loves. Siyakhula has nothing on me. I’m sorry, but your first son is ugly. He is so dark and his skin is greasy. You can tell that he still uses Vaseline. My Siza has taste.”

A lone tear falls down MaMbatha’s cheek, he wipes it away.

“Don’t cry Mah, I will be happy again once Siza is with me.”

He cups her face, “Are you sure Siyakhula is your son? I would believe you if you say you found him in the dustbin.”

MaMbatha closes both her eyes, more tears trailing down her face.

SIZA-

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My father will be staying the night at the hospital with Simengaye. She is going to be discharged tomorrow. Ndlelezhle is coming home with us, she is shaken but okay.

Not much has been said between Phakathwayo and me, I thought I had so much to say to him. But now that he is here, my mind is blank.

It could be that he is angry and it's showing. He wants Qeda's head, I couldn't agree more.

"Thank you for getting me out of jail." He is thanking the same man that put him in jail.

Siyakhula blinks my way, he's expecting me to keep quiet about it.

"I did it for the girls, they need you." Siyakhula replies, nonchalantly.

Does he have to be so cold though?

Phakathwayo drops eye contact, he looks at Simengaye.

"Did he touch my baby?" He clenches a fist.

“The nurses didn’t see anything unusual.” I say.

We don’t know what Qeda did to her though, I don’t even want to entertain the thought.

“What is the deal with you two? I thought you loved each other.”

This is what I have been meaning to ask him.

He looks down at Ndlelezhle, her arms are wrapped around his middle.

“Baby, take my phone and go play games over there.” I hand her my phone.

“I’m not a child, I know when adults want to talk.” She takes the phone still. “I will watch Simi, you guys can go out.”

Smarty pants. We exit the room, Siyakhula has his arm around me. He hasn’t said anything to my father about this thing that’s happening between us.

“You are pregnant?” Phakathwayo asks after shutting the door behind him, he’s looking at my baby bump.

“We are, it’s quads.” I say excitedly.

I don’t know what’s that thing that just flashed in his eyes. Is he forcing a smile?

“It’s what I wanted for you, Gundi.”

I missed him calling me Gundi.

“But with a ring on your finger, as a married woman.”

That’s life, things never go the way we want.

“I’m not going to leave her, she is my everything. I will never leave her or let her down, I hope she won’t leave me either.”

Siyakhula.

That’s sweet, I suddenly have the urge to tell him how much I love him.

“Leaving you will be like leaving myself, which is impossible.” I lean into him as he looks down at me. He kisses me with a smile on his face.

I grew up in Phakathwayo’s time, he can’t pull my ear or fine Siyakhula for kissing me. He doesn’t know how that works anyway.

“I hope you are going to do right by my daughter.” He says to Siyakhula.

“You mean marry her?” He’s nodding his head as he says this.

“Yes, my grandchildren will not be born out of wedlock.”

Yoh Phakathwayo. Marriage was the last thing on my mind. Besides, what is wrong with being born out of wedlock?

“It’s too soon to get married baba,” I interrupt.

“It’s too early for you to be a mother, but here you are.”

Phakathwayo and his comebacks.

I don’t want to talk about my future with Siyakhula in a place like this. I feel his hand tighten on my waist, and glance up at him. He too is not comfortable talking about this with my father.

“What are you going to do about the church?” Siyakhula changes the topic.

“Call a meeting and tell the members that I was framed.” As if they will believe him. Those hypocrites will probably point fingers.

“What about Nomazulu and Qeda? They belong behind bars.” I add.

“They were both reported, the police are probably on their way there.” Siyakhula answers.

“I’m going to see my lawyer tomorrow. I’m filing for divorce and sole custody of my children.” Phakathwayo is hurting, he’s trying so hard to hide it. I don’t like that he is going through pain. There must be a way to make him feel better.

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NOMAZULU

She remembers the day like it was yesterday, how their relationship started.

Khuzimpi was always busy with the church and hardly had time for his fiancée. They were celibate, waiting for their wedding night before engaging in any sexual activities.

Nomazulu was not used to it, she was starved and lonely. The only male that gave her attention was Qeda.

He was always available when she needed him, they grew close with each passing day. One night when Khuzimpi was out of town, she found herself in the same sheets with Qeda.

They didn't put a label to their thing, until the day of her wedding when Qeda asked her not to marry his brother.

Wanting a soft life, Nomazulu couldn't walk away from Khuzimpi. So she chose both brothers.

The plan to take over the church was introduced to her that very day.

“We can have it all

imagine how powerful we would be together.” Qeda had convinced her.

Years later they are here, their plan not going the way they expected.

“How could you let that man take my child?”

Qeda is seated on the couch while Nomazulu is standing above him, yelling.

“Yeyi, mfazi. You’re making noise man. I’m trying to think.”

“Think about what Qeda? Your brain is empty, you are a failure. How can you be afraid of a little boy?”

“A little boy? Did you see a little boy wena? Because I saw the devil, that boy was going to kill us and bury us in the garden.”

That’s what was playing in his head the entire time Mhlauli was here.

Nomazulu throws her head back laughing.

“You are a coward, I told you he is a dog with no teeth. That boy was not carrying a gun but you were shaking like a leaf. I’m such a fool to have fallen for a man like you, I can’t believe I slept with you.”

“Oh please, you know you love my dic.k. My brother wasn’t satisfying you in bed, that’s why you came to me. Oh Gumede, deeper Gumede. Sies man.”

Nomazulu blinks in shock.

“Your strokes are weak Qedakonke Gumede, that’s why I’m always on top. You get tired easily and come in a second. Your brother can keep me going for long, he’s young, thick and long. The only reason I’m with you is because I fell in love with you, not him. The biggest mistake of my life.”

“Watch your words woman.” He points a finger at her, sizing her up.

Nomazulu huffs, crossing her arms over her chest.

“Or what? Are you a woman beater now Qeda? You’re going to beat me? Go ahead, ng’shaye and prove to me that you are weak.” She’s screaming in his face, spraying saliva on it as well. This only fuels Qeda’s anger, he slaps her so hard she falls knee first on the ground.

“Qeda? You hit me?” She can’t believe this is happening to her.

Qeda is fuming, his eyes red-rimmed and predatory.

“Who do you think you’re talking to like that wena?” His first thought is to punch some respect into her.

He steps closer. Nomazulu frantically shakes her head, she's crawling backwards trying to escape him.

"Qeda I'm sorry." Her eyes water.

Qeda pulls her up and throws her back down with a punch. She falls like a bag mealie meal. He thinks one punch is not enough so he sits on her stomach and punches her over and over. He stands and kicks her on the stomach.

"Sizani, help. He's killing me." Her screams are loud and desperate.

But Qeda is not done yet, her words made him feel weak. He needs to feel that power he felt when he took his brother's wife from him. He drags Nomazulu to the kitchen kicking and screaming. There's an iron on the counter, he plugs it in and paces up and down while watching her trying to get up.

"Your problem is that you think I'm Khuzimpi, that I will let you get away with talking to me like shit."

He kicks her on the face when she's on all fours, blood splatters on the kitchen floor.

"Qeda... I'm sorry." She stumbles on her words, blood has painted her teeth crimson red.

Qeda tests the temperature of the iron, he unplugs it and presses it on Nomazulu's cheek. The sound of burning flesh fills

the room. A scream of horror escapes her mouth. She's squirming on the ground like a dying cockroach, her screams are that of a donkey giving birth.

"Who is weak now, sfebe?" He grabs her braids to pull her face and spits on the scar he just gave her. "This is what I think of you."

"Police open up." The shout comes from outside the door.

Qeda's heart stops, he looks at Nomazulu and cusses. She has fainted from too much pain.

"Shit."

"Phoyisa, vula." (Police open.)

The shout comes with loud banging.

Qeda is frantic, his eyes darting everywhere, looking for an escape. He sees a knife, takes it and cuts himself on both his arms. He turns the kitchen upside-down, throwing plates and spoons on the floor to make it look like they were robbed. He runs to the sitting room and also makes it look like a robbery had taken place.

Qeda runs back to the kitchen, Nomazulu is still out of it.

He grits his teeth as he plunges the knife on his thigh and a loud scream leaves his mouth.

The door is kicked open, Qeda quickly crawls to Nomazulu calling out to her.

“Skwiza, skwiza. Can you hear me? Please be alive Skwiza.”
(Sister in-law)

He starts crying when the police officers run into the grisly kitchen.

KHUZIMPI

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It was on the news that there was an attack at the Gumede household in Boksburg. Both victims were rushed to the hospital.

Qeda's hospital room is busy, he won't have space to breathe when he wakes up. There is a police officer guarding his door.

"When is he going to wake up?" Khuzimpi asks the nurse attending to him.

"Soon, his injuries are not bad compared to the lady he was found with."

Khuzimpi has seen Nomazulu, her face is bandaged. He wants to have pity on her but it's so hard with how his heart broke over what she did to him.

The nurse exits the room, and Qeda opens one eye at the sound of the door shutting.

"Is she gone?" Qeda whispers.

Khuzimpi's eyebrows snap, he thought this man was in deep sleep.

His big brother looks at the door, then at him.

“Thank God, I thought she wasn’t going to leave. Listen Mpi, you have to get me out of here. I heard the officers say they will arrest me, I didn’t do anything wrong. We were watching TV, then two white men broke into the house. I could tell that they are poor, they had tan skin and unkempt hair. They beat my sister in-law up and burnt her with an iron. I fought one of them but he ran away. When I tried to fight the other one, he grabbed a knife and stabbed me.”

“That is a lie and you know it. Your fingerprints are all over the crime scene and the weapons you used on Nomazulu and yourself.”

“That’s because I was defending us, they left the iron on her face. I had to touch it to remove it. The knife was on my thigh, obviously I was going to touch it.”

Khuzimpi shakes his head, chortling in disbelief.

“Why did you do it, Qeda? Why did you destroy my family?”

“What kind of question is that Mpi? You know I would never do that.”

“You slept with my wife.”

“I told you she seduced me, she was on top of me when you walked in. Is that not proof enough that she...”

“Enough!” Khuzimpi sternly interjects. “You are going to jail for all the crimes you committed. Sexual harassment, child molestation and attempted murder.”

He clicks his tongue and turns to head out.

“You can’t let them take me to jail Mpi, you owe me.” He says so viciously that Khuzimpi can’t help but look behind him.

“I owe you?” He says, walking back to where he was.

“Yes, you ruined my life. From the time you were born I became a second option. Everything became about you, I had to sacrifice everything that was supposed to be mine so you can have it.”

“What are you talking about Qeda?”

“Our parents loved you more, you were their golden boy. When you would cry for my things, I had to give them to you. My food, my toys and clothes. I was told you were just a kid. I was a kid too, but that didn’t matter to them.” Qeda vents. “You took my parents from me.”

“Is that the reason you had an affair with my wife?”

“Yes, I wanted you to know how it feels to have your things taken from you. Your church, your kids and wife.”

“You are sick, Qeda, and I am going to make sure that you are locked up for a very long time.”

Qeda's attempt to sit up fails, his hand is cuffed to the bed. Panicking, he struggles against the cuffs.

"What is this? Why am I cuffed like a prisoner?"

"This is the path you chose for yourself Qedakonke. Every wrong you have done to me and my children will come back to you seven times seven."

Tears and fear paint Qeda's face, "I didn't do anything wrong. I'm innocent Mpi."

Khuzimpi ignores his screams and walks out of the hospital room.

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SIZA

I'm back at Donda connect and have passed my interview. Phangizitha was one of the interviewers and part of me thinks he made things easy for me. I was asked about my strength and weaknesses and why I think I will be an asset to the company.

Donda Connect occupies the highest four floors of this building. It's a very modern building, every architect's dream. DC owns the building, it was built fourteen years ago, that's three years

after they launched in Gauteng. In the same year it was named the best start-up company because of the online app the company built.

I did my research last night. Most employees here are IT specialist. My position is data capturing

it is better than nothing. At least I will be sitting in front of a laptop.

“Miss Gumede.” I turn to see a young lady approaching me. “I would like to formally introduce myself. My name is Katlego, I am Mr. Donda’s executive secretary. Your office is ready.”

She leads me to a cozy looking room.

“I have an office?” I was not aware of this. I thought we would all be bundled up in one room.

“Yes, Mr. Donda said to make sure you are given an office. He told me to let you settle in and familiarize yourself with the place. I can give you a tour around the office later.”

This is strange. Are data capturers treated this special around here?

I smile at Katlego, “Thank you. I would love that.”

I go ahead to check the office assigned to me as soon as Katlego takes her leave. This place is spacious. I look around, the color palette is mostly subtle. A white couch and chairs, very light grey walls.

“You like what you see?” I turn around to see Phangi leaning by the door, his arms crossed on his chest. So he is the Mr. Donda Katlego was talking about.

“This room does not look like it belongs to a data capturer.”

“No it doesn’t. It belongs to you.” I feel a wave of confusion. What is he saying?

“I know I’m not the only one doing data capturing around here. Do others have offices with couches and a desk?”

“Of course not. You are not everyone Siza. You are family.” He enters the room hesitantly and sits on the couch. “Have you seen my welcome gift?”

“Employees get welcome gifts?”

“No just you.” His direct answers are really making me uncomfortable.

I look over at the desk, in the middle is a box wrapped with a red bow. I take a closer look, get the card and read the message out loud. “Siza! So you can capture every moment.”

I look at him, he tilts his head and lifts his eyebrows gesturing I take the gift.

I unwarmp it. It's the latest iPhone, way too expensive. Why would he go and buy such an expensive phone?

"This is not a welcome gift, Phangi. I'm afraid I can't take it."

"Why?" He asks as if mocking me.

He stands and walks to me, too close I have to step back to create some distance.

"It is a gift from an old friend..."

"Mr. Donda." I'm saved by the voice at the door. We both look at Katlego. Phangi fixes his tie and steps backwards, looking rather annoyed by Katlego's interference.

"What it is Katlego?" I see him gritting his teeth as he says this.

I like Katlego. I hope she will always interrupt uncomfortable moments like this.

"Mr. Donda senior is asking for you."

"Tell him I will be there." Phangi says like he will snap anytime. He looks at me with a puckered brow.

"But sir, he said now becau..."

“Let’s go Katlego.” He is suddenly eager to get out of the room.

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SIYAKHULA

I arrive home in a speed of light. Nadine called saying something happened. She sounded frantic over the phone. I cannot imagine what could have happened.

She comes running out of the house, tears streaking down her face. My feet are reluctant as I exit the car.

“What happened?”

“Please drive me to Coronation Hospital, I will explain later.” She wipes her tears and walks past me to get into the car.

Nadine dragged me from work wanting a driver while Vuyo is around. I can’t deal with this. I enter the car to give her an earful and instantly change my mind when she starts bawling.

“What is going on Nadine?”

“Why are you not driving? Drive please.” She snaps.

“I was busy with work, you could have asked Vuyo to take you.”

“Vuyo is not around. Please drive Siyakhula, please.” She’s uncontrollably crying. I won’t get anything out of her when she is like this. So I start the damn car.

Five minutes into the drive, her sobs die down. She still looks upset and shaken.

“Why does she get to keep your baby and I couldn’t.”

I almost lose control of the steering wheel.

“What did you say?”

“Remember what you said to me years ago when I told you I was pregnant? You told me to get rid of it.”

The car stops at a traffic light, this gives me a chance to look over at her. Her eyes are full of resentment and anger.

She is resentful over something that happened when we were young and stupid. Nadine and I did a lot of stupid things back then. Things that would jeopardize my relationship with Siza if they were to come out.

“Why are you bringing this up?” Why now?

“Because I want to know why you told me to abort our baby, but Siza gets to keep hers.” She cries out.

“Don’t be stupid Nadine. We were both reckless and broke. How were we going to raise a child?”

We were criminals and living life on the edge. Bringing a baby into it was going to be selfish of us, and I was not ready to be a father.

“Well I hated you for it, my brother did too.”

“I know that’s why he tried to kill me.”

Her brother came to me the next day with his cousins. They beat me to a pulp, had Nadine not been there, they would have killed me. I was in a coma for a month.

I didn’t tell anyone about it, not even my mother. Nadine was there for me, against her brother’s will. She stayed.

Two weeks later, we were back to the life of crime. I guess the coma made me rusty. Our first job after I was released from the hospital and the police had us in their custody. That was the last time I ever saw Nadine.

When Mlamuli pulled some strings and got me out, I didn’t go looking for Nadine. I wanted to, but I also wanted a fresh start

and I knew it would be impossible with her in my life, so I stayed away.

We arrive at the hospital. Nadine runs out of the car. Curious, I exit and follow her. She runs into the arms of someone familiar, her brother Ozzy. She's hysterically crying, clenching on to him.

"My baby, my baby." Nadine keeps repeating.

"Olive is going to be okay sis. Stop crying now." He brushes her back.

Ozzy cuts his eyes at me and the attack that happened years ago comes flashing between my lashes. I was terrified that night thinking I was going to die. But today, I can confidently say I am not afraid of him.

Ozzy lets go of Nadine and glares at me.

"I see you finally found Olive's father."

BONISILE

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Bathing is a giant's job, having to wash yourself, the bathtub and then wash your underwear. Why are we not getting paid for this? This is another proof that life is unfair.

I'm running late for work as usual, I am working the 2pm shift today. I run out of the bathroom with a towel wrapped around my body. I lathered my skin in the bathroom, all I have to do when I get to my room is get dressed.

Why is my door open?

"Mah?" Her head is dipped inside my wardrobe, organizing my clothes. At least that is what I hope she is doing.

She briefly looks at me and I know what is going to come out of her mouth.

"Did you scrub your armpits?"

This woman.

"Yes Mah." I am not happy that she is invading my privacy.

I want to ask what the deal is but I am afraid I will not like the answer.

I grab my work uniform, she snatches it from me.

“Wear this.” She places one of my church dresses on the bed.

Is there a church service today?

“I can’t go to church with you, I have to be at work in less than twenty minutes.”

My mother can be a control freak. How does my father put up with her?

“We are not going to church. We are going to the Gumedes.”

She throws me a pair of black underwear, “This one won’t show through the dress.” She adds.

When did we get to the part where she chooses underwear for me? I am not ten anymore. Forget the underwear. I am stuck on the part where she said we are going to the Gumedes.

“Mah you are not making sense. Why are we going there?”

“To ask for a job. The pastor’s wife is not around, his kids have no one to take care of them.”

No I did not hear right.

“I have a job. I can’t baby sit.” I don’t like kids. They play with snort and make unnecessary noise.

“You will quit your job and work for pastor Gumede.”

I am shocked by this woman. Is she serious right now? I did say she is controlling.

“I am not quitting my job to go and work as a maid, Mah.”

“What is so special about packing clothes at Jet? At least at the Gumedes you will learn how to be a housewife.”

That is a stupid thing to say, honestly.

“But Mah...”

“I am your mother, Bonisile. I took you to school, and raised you. I know what’s best for you.”

This ‘mother knows best’ phrase is lame. I hope whoever came up with it falls and dies.

“You will do as I say or forget that I ever gave birth to you.” She declares and leaves the room.

Where do I apply for a new mother? I am ready to leave this one or sell her to whoever is willing to buy.

I call my colleague and ask her to cover for me. I will have to come up with a lie, maybe get a doctor’s note. Today I have to please my mother, otherwise I will never hear the end of it. I wear the dress she picked out and find her waiting for me outside.

My traitor uncle is the one driving us to the Gumedes. I have never prayed this much like I am right now. Lord, let pastor Gumedede decline my mother's request.

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SIYAKHULA-

I pull Nadine aside, my hand tightly gripping her arm. She squeals in pain which means nothing to me. I want answers.

How could she do this to me?

"Leave my sister alone." Ozzy slams his hand on my shoulder, and roughly pushes me. I push him back.

"Stay out of it Ozzy."

"You must be crazy if you think I will let you manipulate my sister again." He gets into my space, bumping his shoulder on mine.

"Ozzy mahn!" That's Nadine yelping while pushing him back and stands as a barrier between us.

"Why is he touching you Dine?" Ozzy grunts.

He hates me and the feeling is mutual.

“Ozzy control yourself please. I don’t want you to hurt him again.”

As if I would let that happen again.

“Why are you protecting him? He left you Dine, have you forgotten that? He left and never looked back.”

“I know, just give us a minute please. I owe him an explanation.”

“You owe him nothing.”

“Boeta just stop and let us talk.” (brother.)

“Fine, I’ll stand there. Don’t think for a second I will take my eyes off you.” He makes a gun sign with his fingers and points it at me. “One wrong move and I will kill you saani.”

He takes about 5 steps away and pushes his back against the wall. My glare is on Ozzy when Nadine seeks my attention by shaking my arm. I glance down at her and before I can say anything she cradles my face with her palms, I shove her off only for her to tear up.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t abort the baby, I couldn’t do it.”

Panic swallows every inch of me. I can’t get rid of it no matter how hard I try to breathe.

“Fuck!” Consumed by anger, my fist collides against the wall. It causes Nadine to scream. Her brother like the idiot he is jolts to us. He roughly pushes me while throwing cuss words around.

“Go back to hole you crawled out from saani.” He continues, slamming a hand on my chest.

The anger I am feeling is not to be tested. This man is pissing me off.

“Get out of my face Ozzy. I’m not that little boy you fucked up years ago

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I will slit your fucking throat without even blinking.” He eats the ground just from one push from me. Nadine helps him up. He wants a fight once he is back on his feet.

Nadine begs him to give us space and like a good puppy he listens, and goes back to his corner.

“Siyakhula please, I’m sorry okay.” -Nadine.

A lousy apology will not cut it. I spent most of my life regretting the decisions I made in the past. Nadine being one of them.

“What exactly are you sorry for Nadine? Keeping the child from me or not aborting it like we agreed.”

“We didn’t agree on anything. You made the decision on your own and did not give me a platform to speak.”

“What are you talking about? You took the money Nadine and...”

“Because you were insisting. You wanted me to kill our baby.”

I don’t understand. She didn’t protest that day, I remember how fast she took the money. There were no tears in her eyes, nor regrets. How are things different now?

“Siyakhula.” Her hand on my shoulder is giving comfort. I don’t want it. I want her out of my life. I shove it off.

“I want a DNA test.”

“Fine, we can do it now. Olive is yours, go in there and see for yourself. He is the splitting image of you. Dark skin, a sharp nose and...”

I peek through the small window, a little boy is laying peacefully on the bed. His skin is as dark as mine, I’m afraid to take a second look. My heart is continuously hitching and I can’t seem to make it stop. Tears burn behind my eyes, urging me to break down but I refuse to be weakened.

Nadine has ruined me.

“He’s nine years old, he knows about you. That you are his father. I never hid anything from him. Olive has a hole in his heart. He needs a transplant. I don’t have medical aid, or the money for surgery.”

Her voice feels like a weapon in my ear. It snatches my attention from the boy.

“Why did you have to come back? I am with Siza, she is going to be the mother of my children.” Siza! Her heart won’t be able to take this. She will leave me when she finds out. I can’t afford to lose her.

“I just told you that your son is sick and all you care about is that girl. I am also the mother of your child, Siyakhula. I don’t care about Siza, I have every right over you as much as she does. Siza will have to know about our son and accept him. Olive is not going anywhere.”

The way her voice breaks and eyebrows pucker tells me she is claiming her territory.

“You will not breathe a word to Siza about this. You hear me.”

Her silence and folded arms make room for more anger. I grip her arms, she flinches and squirms.

“Dammit Nadine. Do not test me.”

“Jou ma se poes!” Ozzy comes at me with a punch. I didn’t see it coming. “What did I say about touching my sister?”

I dodge the second punch. Nadine is pushing him away before I can punch him back.

“Let me go Dine. Let me kill this poes face.” He pushes past Nadine and tries to punch me. I block it only to elbow his jaw.

His third attempt to punch me is successful. It hurts but I take it like a man. People are watching, the sick don’t seem sick anymore. They are having a blast watching us fight between a woman who is screaming for us to stop.

Nadine manages to finally push through us and pulls her brother away from me.

“Ozzy stop, he’s my husband. You’re hurting him.”

My world comes crumbling down. My knees give up their use that I almost fall. But the wall behind me becomes my anchor and holds me steady.

“Siyakhula...” Her trembling hand touches my cheek. My blood boils at the feel of her skin. I am disgusted by her, and myself. My gaze is on Nadine, she drops hers like it hurts to look into my eyes.

“Remember Zain’s party, we were all drunk and we played truth or dare?”

I remember that day. Zain is one of her first cousins, it was his birthday. We all got too wasted and kids do stupid things when drunk.

“Zain dared you to make me, Mrs. Mbatha.” She continues to take me down memory lane like I was never there.

“We went to home affairs and got married. But we regretted it the second we were sober and filed for divorce. You asked your uncle to draw up the divorce papers, I signed my signature. We got divorced Nadine.”

She keeps her eyes on the ground.

“I didn’t sign mine.” She says.

I think I am losing my mind.

“I loved you Siyakhula. It felt amazing being Mrs. Mbatha.”

Nadine quickly explains. Her tears mean nothing to me.

“You said... dammit it! You said you signed the papers and the divorce was finalized. You lied to me?”

She is silent and I want to punch the living daylight out of her, maybe kill her and bury her like my past.

“Is that why you had your uncle draw up the paperwork? Your plan was to keep us married?”

Her uncle is a lawyer. I can sue them both. Nadine buries her face in her hands and cries hysterically.

“Do you know what you have done Nadine?” I lose control and grab her arms, she clenches her eyes flinching at the pain I’m inflicting on her. “Do you have any idea what you have done?”

My voice echoes in the corridor.

Again, her brother is on my fucking face annoying the hell out of me. “Piss off jou hond!” (You dog)

He barks in my face.

“Fuck!” I growl pushing past Nadine and Ozzy. Nadine’s cries follow me down the corridor.

“Siyakhula please come back.”

BONISILE

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Pastor Gumede is shocked to see us. You can easily tell we caught him by surprise with how he is staring. I am embarrassed on behalf of my mother.

“Greetings pastor.”

The smile on her face is too much, she needs to tone it down a bit. The pastor is frowning in return. I want this day to end.

“MaShezi?” Yep he wasn’t expecting us.

“We didn’t see you at the prayer meeting last night.”

We? I better not be included in that “we”, I was not there.

“What prayer meeting? The church is closed.” The pastor’s confusion grows.

“We were given permission to open, pastor Gwala sent messages to the Living Waters church group.” My mother says.

She is forcing things, I swear.

“I’m not in the group MaShezi.”

“That’s odd, you are the pastor. You should be part of the group.” Heaven knows why I am butting in when I don’t want to be here.

Pastor shrugs, “Oh.”

That is the sound of disappointment right there.

Church politics will send all of us to hell. How do they not tell this poor man that his church is up and running again?

“I will speak to pastor Gwala later. To what do I owe this visit?”

Good question pastor. I also want to know why we are here.

I turn my gaze to my mother, waiting for an answer and knowing her, she always has one.

“Bonisile proposed that we check up on you.” Haa! Wrong answer.

“It was your idea to come here mah.” I protest.

She nudges me without looking my way.

Pastor forces a smile, “Thank you both. We are doing okay.”

It doesn’t look like he is doing okay. His beard is growing like manured grass, he has bags around his eyes and if I ever paid any attention to his weight, I would think he has lost a lot of it.

“How is your wife? We heard what happened? We are praying for her. You must be devastated.”

My mother sounds insensitive right now. I don't know if she feels what I am feeling, pastor Gumede wants to be left alone. He hasn't invited us in, which clearly means that he wants to be left alone.

"Would you like to come in?" He calls me out on my thoughts. I wanted to be right so bad.

MaShezi holds me by the hand and drags me to the living room. As soon as we sit, she fishes into her big handbag, and takes a Tupperware lunch box containing scones. She puts the box on my lap.

"What's this?"

"Your father." She teases. "They are scones, you will give them to the pastor and offer to make him tea or a coffee."

"Haa why?"

"Just do as I say."

The pastor steals my chance to complain when he walks into the room.

"Sorry about that, I was checking on the girls. They are a handful." He says and that puts a big smile on my mother's face.

“How are they?” She asks.

“Coping I guess. They are not used to not having their mother around, it’s draining having to explain why their mother is not here.”

Yawn!

“Kids will always be attached to their mothers no matter how bad she is. Little ones have the most forgiving hearts.” – mother.

Why am I here? These two are having a blast, chatting up a storm.

“We are glad you are okay pastor. We will be on our way now.” I stand.

There is no reason for us to be here. The pastor seems to think so too, he looks eager for us to leave. We both look at my mother who is still seated. I want to pull her by the ear and drag her out of here.

The pastor looks at me. How do I apologize on behalf of an old woman who thinks she runs the world?

“Bonisile baked you some scones, where is the kitchen? She makes a mean cup of coffee, her father is obsessed. He would

highly recommend.” MaShezi, hell is waiting for you old woman.

Pastor glances down at me, “Thank you Boni. The kitchen is that side.”

He’s pointing to his left.

I’m Boni now because I baked scones? They are store bought by the way, I don’t remember MaShezi baking last night or this morning.

I’m a good child that’s why I’m in the kitchen, plugging the kettle in and searching for cups and spoons and sugar and teabags and... Lord I am not going to be a maid.

The tea is ready, I dish up for pastor Gumede and my mother. My appetite is still trying to find its way back to me.

I find them deep in conversation when I walk in with a tray containing the works of my hands.

“Boni, the pastor agreed to give you a job. You’re starting today, and you will be staying here.”

She speaks as if she has hit the jackpot. Yippy for her, what a bummer for me. My life is not mine to live.

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SIZA-

The day is spent being introduced to different people. Katlego is every bit the definition of fun with no filter. She is bubbly and talks a lot.

Phangizitha came to my office twice which is not good because I feel otherwise when I see him. He said he was checking up on the new employee.

I'm about to clock out for the day, it's almost 4:30pm.

I don't have to guess who the person knocking on my door is. He is the only one that visits me.

"Want to call it a day?" I look up to see Phangizitha hanging by the door.

"Is this going to be an everyday thing?" I ask, somewhat annoyed.

He acts confused by my question.

"Will you always check on me? Unless of course this is about work." I ask while clearing my desk.

“I didn’t know I needed a reason to come to your office.” Why does he sound confused? I don’t want unnecessary stress and that is what he is currently giving me.

“I’m an employee in this company and you are my boss. People talk Phangi, during lunch I heard whispers about me getting special treatment because I’m sleeping with the boss.” I can point those girls out with my eyes closed. But because I am in no mood for drama, I will let it slide.

“And I assure you that by boss, either they mean you or your father.” Siyakhula is not well known around here because he keeps his distance.

The smile on Phangi’s face tells me he is not affected by what I just told him.

“Can I take you out to dinner, just to celebrate your first day?” He adds the last part to cover up his real intentions.

I hold my stare, slowly getting irritated because by the looks of it, he doesn’t get it when I tell him I am not interested in him anymore.

“No you cannot take me to dinner. I belong to another man now, I cannot entertain you. I would appreciate it if you would stop with these advances. You are making me uncomfortable, Phangizitha.”

He crinkles his eyebrows, then seems to be getting lost in thought.

The door swings open, Siyakhula walks in. With how he rushes to me and hugs me without looking at Phangizitha means he knows about me being favored around here.

I'm in his arms in a jiffy, a tight embrace, which I find strange. He is never this needy, I accept the insatiable kiss even with Phangi standing there. I wouldn't want him thinking there is trouble in paradise.

"Hi." Siyakhula mumbles against my lips
a strong, firm hand gradually rubbing my back.

My clit responds before I do. I did not intend to melt into a puddle while at work.

"Hi." I shy away from Siyakhula's intense gaze and hope Phangi walks out of here peacefully.

Siyakhula's arm tightens around my waist, he is claiming me for some reason. He finally turns his gaze to Phangi.

"Donda."

"Mbatha."

I have seen it all but this. Will these two ever get along?

“I heard you gave my Gundi an office?” It’s not really a question, Siyakhula is only practicing his rights. For what? I have no clue.

“Yes, she...”

Siyakhula interjects, “Thank you for considering us. But you don’t have to, Gundi is okay working in the same space with other workers.”

So God really made men first? This is proof he was in a rush. Why is this one taking my office from me?

“I didn’t hear Siza complaining. Why do you have a problem with it?” Phangi is starting something he won’t be able to finish. I can feel Siyakhula’s body tense, he wants to react violently to the question.

“I have a problem with you doing favors for my girlfriend. She doesn’t need them.” –Siyakhula.

“Siza has no problem with keeping the office. Am I right Siza?” – Phangi.

What kind of looks are they giving me? I don’t intend on letting this office go.

“I will keep the office. It’s just an empty space and I am making use of it. Please Siyakhula, don’t reign on my parade.” Okay. My

mouth and brain make the best team and together they make my life miserable.

I feel Siyakhula withdraw from me, although he is still holding me.

“You have your answer now, big brother.” Phangi boasts.

I don’t like the tone he uses with Siyakhula.

“I am keeping the office. But not the phone, you don’t have to buy me things.” I’m good at bursting bubbles.

Phangi blinks and sighs a shaky breath.

“I would like a moment with my girlfriend.” Siyakhula says.

Hee! I’m a girlfriend, carrying four babies. My life is a joke.

I see a protest coming from Phangizitha, “Siza and I were not done here...”

Siyakhula doesn’t let him finish talking, he holds me in his arms and steals a very long kiss. It’s becoming too heated and chases Phangizitha out of the office. This one pulls away at the sound of the door shutting.

“He got you a phone?” He asks, running his thumb over my wet mouth.

“As a welcome gift. I am not keeping it. You heard me tell him.”
I am explaining more than I should because I do not want to hear any complaints.

He sighs, something is on his mind. I have observed a lot of change on him since we got together.

The old Siyakhula did not talk unless talked to. He kept to himself 99 percent of the time. I see that Siyakhula whenever we are around other people. He retrieves and builds an invisible wall around him, a wall only I can access.

“What?”

At my question, he stands firm and confident. I try not to show how turned on I am by his posture.

“How do you feel about me?”

I thought he was going to ask something serious. Not sure where he is taking me with this question, I bring mine forward.

“What do you mean?”

“Your true feelings, I want to know if I am in your heart.” He states, voice low yet possessive.

“I’m carrying your babies.”

“That is not an answer.”

“I love you.” If he doubts that then I don’t know what love is.

“I love you too,” he sighs as if satisfied with my answer. But there is something in his mind. He’s letting me see that he is bothered, a rare thing he ever does.

“Quit your job.”

I would be lying if I said I didn’t see this coming.

“I just started.” Is he okay in the head? The Dondas must be dancing in it and trampling on his small brain.

He shrugs, “Doesn’t matter, I will take care of us.”

“Is this about Phangi? You said you were okay with...”

“I change my mind and why are you shortening his name like that? I don’t want him near you. If we are going to be together, you have to cut Phangizitha out of your life. Completely.” He says.

“I can stop talking to him, that won’t be a problem, but I am not quitting my job.”

“Fine then, let’s make rules.” He sits on my chair and pulls me to his lap. Do I want to hear what these rules are?

“Rule number one: No breaking up no matter what. No breaking up means you can’t get tired of me.”

I don't see myself getting tired of him. I am addicted to this man okay. It's crazy I know.

"I can do that." I trust he will never do anything to make me leave him. "What's rule number two?" I ask.

His hand is on my inner thighs, drawing circles that are making me wet.

"Rule number two: Don't ever forget how much we love each other." -Him.

That's easy.

He stands me up, clears the table with one shove of his hand and lays me down on it. My dress is not long enough to cover my thighs.

He grips my wrists with one hand, pins my arms above my head on the table. I'm breathlessly staring up at him, aroused and squirmish.

"Rule number three: Never stop kissing me." He says, biting my lower lip.

I yelp in pain, but also moan in pleasure. He uses the tip of his tongue to nibble my lips, his free hand travels down to my sides. My back arches under his soft touch.

“Rule four: Our sex life should always be spontaneous.” -Him.

I can feel his hard length poking my thigh. My hips buck up towards his erection, desperate for more friction.

He pushes my hips back on the table, with a force that has me wet as a running tap.

His face is hovering above mine, his lips slightly brushing against my lips.

His breath is seductive and luring me to the bed of lust.

I am too horny to think straight, I’m afraid I won’t remember these rules after today.

Siyakhula drags his hand up my thighs, he pushes it inside my wet panties, like a thief in the night. He taps my clit twice and I squeal like a mouse, if he keeps this up, I will orgasm on the spot.

“Rule number five: We forgive each other, no matter what the other did.”-Siyakhula.

My reply gets caught in between his lips and tongue that's moving in my mouth with so much hunger.

In the same moment, he slowly pushes two fingers inside my wet walls and starts thrusting with a mission to find my G-spot. Sex in the office is one of my wildest fantasies.

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SIZA

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“So wet.”

Siyakhula is rubbing my clit while unbuckling his belt. I gulp like a thirsty cow when his pants fall to his knees and his coc-k springs out of his tight briefs. His length is impressively hard and thick. I salivate at the veins spread round it.

“You ready for me?”

I laugh, shockingly like a whore. The horniness has gotten into my head.

“What kind of a question is that?” I ask, he shrugs with a smile on his face, tapping his length on my clit. This is worse than when he was using his finger. The feeling travels all through my body, making me whimper desperately.

Siyakhula positions my legs on his shoulders, opening me up so he can fit through.

“Is this comfortable?” He checks, my answer is a nod.

His mushroom head breeches me, I'm unable to control my moans while he groans.

I can taste my arousal as he gradually pushes in, the walls of my channel closing around him.

"More." I whimper.

"Are you sure?" He asks, breathless from how tight I am around his length.

"Yes." I assure him.

He gently pulls back before thrusting back in. His thrusts are below the surface, he thinks I will fall off the table if he goes any faster.

"You feel good, Gundi." He groans, leaning forward and thrusting deeper into me. He brushes against my bundle of nerves, almost driving me to senselessness.

"Khula!" I cry out. "Harder please."

He grips my hips, and pushes into me harder, slamming his hips against my ass. I should have played music before we started, no doubt our bodies slamming against each other can be heard outside these walls.

Siyakhula drops my legs from his shoulders, he wraps his arms around my back and lifts me up. He moves us to the couch and sits me in his lap.

His arms are gently moving on my back as he whispers, "Ride me, Gundi."

This new position makes me feel stuffed like a Christmas turkey, only I'm stuffed with his coc.k. I can hardly breathe with how deep he is buried inside me.

He holds my hips to help me as I start moving them around and humping on him.

"Too... deep." I gasp for air, tightly holding on to his shoulders.

"Perfect." He thrusts upwards into me and that finishes every strength I had. I melt against his body, giving up the control I had to ride him. He takes over by continuously thrusting upwards, I am vulnerable for him, giving him permission to do whatever he wants to me and every part of me is loving it.

Sweat has bundled up on his forehead, his dark skin glistening with it.

"Need to cum." I bury my face on his sweaty neck.

"Hold on a sec, Gundi." I cling on to him, and mirror his thrust. I'm pouncing up and down his dic-k, he loves groping my ass when I'm in this position.

“There we go, you’re my good girl.” He praises and I blush heatedly.

He increases his pace, pumping into me. The stimulation is unbearably delicious that I fall over the edge of pleasure.

“Cumming.” I grit my teeth to muffle my scream while arching my back just as something shoots through my body, making me shudder and cling on to Siyakhula. He continues to viciously fuvk me until I’m crying from too much pleasure.

I know he is about to reach his orgasm when his fingers dig into my hipbone. His expression is twisted with the pleasure he is getting from me, this makes me fall in love with him all over again.

A deep rumble comes from his chest, he slams his length into me for the last time before releasing inside of me. My vision blurs, warmth covers my body.

He is panting on the skin of my neck and placing open-mouthed kisses.

“You are the only one for me, Gundi. Promise you will never leave me.”

I cup his face, “I promise.”

He nods and covers my lips with his, the kiss is brief, giving us a chance to catch our breaths.

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“Sizalobuhle.” Phangi’s voice echoes outside the door. I snap out of the lustful phase I am in and try to slip away from Siyakhula, but he has me locked in his arms.

“Let’s stay like this for a while longer.” He says.

“I say we go home and continue where we left off.” I kiss his lips and slowly stand, pulling myself off his length.

The knock on the door has me hurrying, Siyakhula is not bothered. He is taking his time.

“Would you hurry?”

What is wrong with him?

When we are dressed and ready to go out, he holds my hand. Phangi is still knocking. Siyakhula opens the door, I’m met with red eyes.

“What’s wrong?” I ask Phangi, is he crying?

He looks around the office, and his brows crinkle.

“Are those your panties on the table?” Phangi asks.

Why is he even here? I am so embarrassed.

“I’ll get them,” Siyakhula stops me from going to the table.

Awkward seconds pass as we watch him strolling to get my lace underwear. I can hear Phangi’s breathing and I know he is seething.

It feels like it’s happening in slow motion as Siyakhula takes the lace piece from the table

I’m looking at his side profile and the idiot is smiling at my panties. He puts them against his nose and Lord have mercy; he is sniffing my panties.

“Siyakhula!” I snap to get him to stop. He looks my way and winks with a smile on his face.

“You will get your written warning first thing in the morning.” Phangi says and dashes out.

“Were we that loud?” I ask Siyakhula just as he puts my underwear in the pocket of his pants.

“Does it matter? We are behind closed doors and we didn’t do it during working hours.” His answer does not make me feel better.

“I am getting a written warning, Khula.”

“He’s bluffing, he doesn’t have the balls to give you one.” He takes my hand, I yank it back.

I hate that Siyakhula doesn’t care about my job.

“Let me hold your hand, I know your knees are still weak from that crazy orgasm.” He chuckles and I let him hold my hand even though I partially hate him right now.

Phangi is standing at reception talking to Katlego, his face is burning with rage. He glares at Siyakhula then loudly clicks his tongue. Siyakhula continues walking, without turning to glance at his brother.

We are headed home, I am tired. I’m going straight to bed when I get home.

Siyakhula is driving with one hand, the other is on my thigh. He should enjoy it while it lasts, I am not having sex with him again when we get home.

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I notice that Nadine is not around. The cook has prepared supper, I choose to eat in my room after a long bath. My feet are throbbing, my big toes can’t breathe.

Siyakhula walks in minutes after I'm done eating, he looks distant.

"What is it?" I ask.

He sits on the bed and puts my legs on his lap. I show him a smile of gratitude as he starts massaging my feet.

"This feels good," I mumble, leaning back against the bedrest and enjoying the massage.

"It is?" He smiles back.

"I will put a ring on it if you keep this up." I tease, and he laughs. It's too shallow that it leaves me worried.

"Say we were not together, would you date a man with a child?" His question is random.

"No." My answer is blunt. It's how I feel, I wouldn't want to become a stepmother at my age.

"What if you love him?"

"I will learn to fall out of love with him. I don't want to raise another woman's child."

"What if he didn't know he had a child and found out during the relationship. Would you leave him?"

I open my eyes to find him staring at me.

"What's with all these questions?" I ask.

“I’m just asking, would you ever have considered being with me if I had a child with another woman.”

I never considered him when he was a carpenter. What makes him think I would accept another woman’s child?

“Do you have a child outside?” I sit up, my chest is heaving.

There is a moment of silence while Siyakhula’s eyes are searching mine and I am impatiently waiting for an answer.

“Siyakhula, what did you do?!” I snap, grabbing his wrist.

“Nothing. I was just asking that’s all.” He finally answers.

“Are you sure?” I press.

He looks me straight in the eye and says, “Positive.”

I lie back down, relieved that my babies will not have to compete for their father’s love and attention.

“I am not a bad person baby, I just wouldn’t want my babies to compete with some little brat for your love.” I reveal.

He says nothing. I close my eyes, letting his magical hands put me to sleep.

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I slept like a baby last night, maybe that's why I woke up late. Siyakhula is in bed, his arm is folded around my waist. I shuffle to free myself, he pulls me closer to him as if our bodies were not already touching.

"I'm running late for work." I grumble.

Why didn't he wake me up, I am going to be late.

He presses his lips on the skin of my neck, his body is warm. I want to stay here forever but life has to go on.

"Let's stay in bed today."

I am tempted, especially with how seductive his voice is.

"I have work." It's my second day for crying out loud and Phangi threatened to give me a warning.

"You'll go tomorrow." His eyes flash with lust, his hands are all over my body. He knows how to make me weak and it is working.

"Are you always wet for me, Gundi?"

When did he get to my clit? And why is he suddenly too clingy?

"You make me wet whenever you touch me." I accept his lips but keep the kiss brief. "What is this behavior? Did you do something wrong?"

I love him but I will not tolerate cheating.

“No, I miss you when you’re gone.” He is squeezing my flappy sides and nibbling on my nipple. Controlling my hormones is not easy.

“But you’re also gone during the day.” I moan instead of talking like a sane person.

“I know, but it’s not the same.” He gets in between my thighs. “Let me taste you again.” His length is playing on the rim of my throbbing entrance. He is sliding inside me before I can protest. It’s another crazy sex marathon that leaves us panting and chasing our breaths.

Siyakhula joins me in the shower and helps me pick something to wear. His outfit is informal today.

It’s just us two in the dining room. I didn’t see Nadine last night. I hope the earth finally heard my cry and swallowed her.

“Vuyo will drive you to work.”

Tell me something I don’t know.

“He will also follow you around during work, I told him to keep a safe distance. You won’t notice that he is there.”

I highly doubt that is possible. Vuyo is like a fly, you hear him even when you are not looking for him.

“Why?” I am trying not to sound upset but deep down I am livid.

“To keep you safe.”

“Safe from what Siyakhula? My uncle was arrested, Nomazulu is in the hospital and I highly doubt she has a leg to stand on with my uncle locked up.”

“My family has enemies. I need to keep you and our babies safe.”

He is lying to me, he does not trust me. I am tired of this setup of being followed all the damn time. This man finds me alone with Phangi and suddenly feels the need to keep an eye on me. I am not good at reading people but Siyakhula is terrified that I may leave him for his brother.

This I know for a fact.

It's the only reasonable explanation for his possessiveness.

I am too upset to bid him goodbye when I leave for work, he still presses a kiss on my forehead and tells me he misses me already.

Fool!

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When we arrive at DC, I tell Vuyo to drive around and come back later. He blatantly refuses, this idiot is like a dog; loyal to his master.

Phangi is not at work today, much to my relief. I spend most of my time in the office. Time seems to fly, I receive calls from Siyakhula throughout the day.

He doesn't miss me, but checking up on me.

4:30pm comes when I least expect it. I find Vuyo waiting for me. He is taking a different route today.

Curiosity visits me when I realize we are not going home.

"Where are we going?"

He ignores me like I didn't say anything.

"Vuyo, where are you taking me?" I start to panic. I won't survive another kidnapping.

"Boss is waiting for you." He says.

At this moment, I am not sure who Boss is. Siyakhula or someone else.

NADINE

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Watching Siyakhula walk away stirred every emotion inside her, mostly the bad ones. She knows with no doubt that Olive is his son and she will not let him neglect his child like he neglected her.

Her number does not go through when she calls him, hence the call she made to Mlamuli yesterday. She told him everything about Olive and her marriage to Siyakhula. Mlamuli couldn't make it yesterday because of work. He promised to come today and Nadine has been anxiously waiting for him.

She's in Olive's room, preparing his things before they head home. He is feeling a bit better and the doctor discharged him. There is nothing they can do for him until he finds a donor and money to pay for surgery.

"Where are you going to go?" Ozzy has not left their side.

"I have a husband. If his father doesn't believe that Olive is his grandchild, then I will have no choice but to take Olly to his father's house." She answers, brushing her son's head.

“Is pa back from the war?” Olive enthusiastically asks, his thick coloured accent filling the room.

He thinks his dad is a soldier that is fighting for the country, that’s why he hasn’t seen him since he was born.

Nadine forces a smile, “Yes Olly. Pa is back, and you are going to meet him soon.”

“Awesome.” He says, taking his attention back to the toy car in his hand.

Ozzy asks for a word and pulls Nadine outside the room.

“I think you two should come and stay with me. I have enough room to accommodate you and Olly. You don’t have to beg that fool...”

“My son’s father is a wealthy businessman, I won’t let Siyakhula’s heir grow up in Eldos.” Nadine cuts him off. “You know how bad I want to get out of that place Ozzy. My son and I deserve better.”

“You and your son are not alone, I will make sure you get what belongs to you.” A voice says behind her.

Nadine turns to Mlamuli, he is staring with a puckered brow which makes it hard for her to read his expression.

“Mr. Donda.” She greets.

Mlamuli replies by nodding his head, “I would like to see him.”

He is talking about his grandchild.

Nadine feels Ozzy’s gaze on her, she clears her throat and leads Mlamuli into Olive’s room. The little boy has fallen asleep.

Mlamuli’s takes one look at him and a small smile stretches his lips.

“My grandson.” His words are a confirmation to Nadine that he believes her. “He looks just like Siyakhula when he was this age.”

He adds.

Nadine moves to the other side of the bed.

“Siyakhula does not believe me. He hasn’t called or taken my calls since I told him.” What a snitch.

“Don’t worry about my son. He will come around.”- Mlamuli.

Nadine’s heart fills with indescribable joy. She is finally seeing the light at the end of the tunnel.

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SIZA

I am not happy with Vuyo, I want to punch him when he opens the door for me. Siyakhula is standing outside a restaurant, looking dashing in a button-up shirt and jeans.

“Sisi...”

“Zip it!” I warn Vuyo, firmly. What is he smiling about?

I leave him standing there and head over to Siyakhula, he greets me with a kiss and a hug.

“I thought Vuyo was abducting me, don’t pull such stunts on me. I am pregnant.”

“I’m sorry.” His fingers trace over the edges of my jaw. “Are you okay?”

I release a sigh and hold back the urge to kiss him, his lips are too inviting.

“I am. Why are we here and why are you dressed like that?”

“It’s our date night, let’s go in.”

We have date nights? I didn’t know about this.

Inside the restaurant, we are ushered to the VIP lounge. I'm impressed by the setting, it's nice. The surprise dinner is actually nice, I like this Siyakhula.

"Why didn't you tell me about this? I would have gone home to change."

He smiles warmly, "It wouldn't have been a surprise."

He is right.

The night goes well, I am invested in it wholeheartedly. He tells me stories about when he was a kid, it makes me happy that he is opening up about his childhood. I share my own and a few laughs with him.

When all is said and done, and it's time to head home.

Siyakhula digs into his pocket and takes out an envelope. Like a drug dealer, he slides it across the table.

I take note of his Adam's apple bobbing inside his throat. He appears to be nervous. If this was not in an envelope, I would think he is proposing marriage.

"What is it?" I'm curious but mostly anxious.

"Open it."

I do as told, and in a second I am holding two plane tickets to Iceland. One of the coldest countries in the world.

“Are we going on a bae-cation?” I love the finest things in life, but I am not vacationing in Iceland.

“Look at the tickets,” he says.

I read the information, “One way tickets?”

“Our bags are packed and in the car. The plane leaves tonight at 10pm.”

I am not following.

He must see the confusion on my face because he elucidates, “Let’s move to Europe. We will start a new life together.”

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QEDA-

A few days in jail and he feels he is going to explode with fear. Who knew the world could be so small? That his movements would be limited and steps counted. Jail is hell itself, he has experienced it for two days and is certain that death is better than this.

He’s on the bed, facing the ceiling and lost in deep thought when a hand cups his manhood. Qeda jolts up in fright and

meets the eyes of the man who has made his life hell in this place.

“Ma... MaSeven?” Fear has him stumbling on the man’s name.

“Queen Q!” MaSeven blows him a kiss

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everything in Qeda’s body shudders. Like a scared little girl, he moves back on the bed until the wall stops his movements.

MaSeven has done the unthinkable to him, things a man should never go through. Qeda has been stripped of his dignity and manhood.

The first night he was here, the prison guard dropped off a tall, buff man with scars on his menacing face and eyes resembling a serial killer’s.

Qeda could tell from the look on his eyes that he wasn’t there to make friends.

The man introduced himself as MaSeven before forcing Qeda on his belly, pinning him down and stripping him naked from the waist down. Qeda’s first thought was panic, the next he was screaming as MaSeven slammed into his tight hole.

That night lives rent free in Qeda's head, it gives him nightmares. From that day, he became another man's bitch.

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"I thought you were in solitary confinement." Qeda starts slowly.

MaSeven smirks, "What, did you miss me? I got you something." He tosses this something at him. Qeda ducks as if it's a weapon.

He looks at the clothes, it's easy to tell that this buff man cut a prison uniform and turned it into a mini skirt and a crop top.

"Now strip and wear that."-MaSeven orders.

"No." Barks Qeda.

He confidently stands, but a punch lands on his face sending him back on the bed.

"This is my turf sfebe, and you are my bitch. Now strip and wear this mini skirt."

There is hesitation in Qeda's eyes, he knows he has no choice but to do as told.

"Okay, I will wear it. Don't hurt me please."- Qeda.

He changes into the mini skirt and crop top. It's the most uncomfortable thing he has ever worn, apart from Nomazulu's underwear.

"I brought you shoes as well." The menacing man points at the four inch heels at the foot of the bed.

Shame has Qeda dropping his head, he doesn't protest but wears the heels.

MaSeven sits on the bed and admires him, "I want you to walk like Naomi Campbell."

Qeda is confused, although he has heard the phrase before. He has never walked in heels.

"I said walk like Naomi Campbell. Model for me maan, are you stupid?" MaSeven barks.

Qeda starts to move, three steps in, he trips and falls. He quickly gets up, knowing he will be beaten if he stays on the ground.

"Useless. Now sing like Beyonce."

This time, the other prisoners are watching in anticipation, and laughing with the intent to mock Qeda.

"Sing sfebe!" MaSeven barks.

Qeda knows who Beyonce is, he made it his business to know what the youth is into since he likes them young.

“To the left, to the left. Everything you own in the box...”

“Voetsek! Uyabhimba mhlath’ wakho.” (You are off tune.)

MaSeven interrupts him.

“Sing another one.” He orders.

“All the single ladies, all the single ladies...”

“Shut up! Are you single wena?”

Qeda shamefully shakes his head, “No.”

“Good, sing another one. I love Beyonce.” MaSeven smiles.

“If I were a boy...”

MaSeven stands and punches Qeda on the mouth.

“So you want to be a boy? Do I look like I fuvk boys? You’re my bitch, you hear me?”

Another nod from Qeda, tears fill up behind his pupils. He hides his face by dropping his head and starts sniffing. MaSeven hears him and smiles victoriously.

“Cula sfebe sam, sing for papa. Beyonce! Azishe!”

Qeda takes a deep breath, "I'm a-a diva, I'm a-a diva."

Maseven dramatically jumps to his feet, whistling as if cheering Qeda on.

"That's what I'm talking about. Dance like a diva ngwana daddy." He spanks Qeda's flat ass before kneeling behind him to get a closer look at his ass. "Twerk-a sfebe, twerk."

Qeda has never twerked before but what man doesn't know how to dance to umlando? He makes an ugly crying face, and bends over.

"Na-na-na diva is a female version of hustler." He continues to sing while twerking on MaSeven's face.

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SIZA

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I know I am not dreaming because I have pinched myself more than once and I'm still here, at this stupid restaurant, waiting for Siyakhula to tell me why he wants us to relocate.

"South Africa is not safe anymore, I want our babies to grow up in a better country."

His lies make me want to crawl out of my skin. How can he lie to me while looking into my eyes? It angers me that he thinks so little of me.

"I thought I meant something to you." I push my chair back to stand, he grabs my hand.

"Don't go please." His grip solidifies on my wrist.

"Then tell me the truth. Why do you want us to relocate?"

"I told you Siza..."

I have had enough. I'm leaving, I take my bag and rush out of the restaurant.

I can feel him striding behind me, his hand closes around the small of my back. The eatery is packed, I don't want to cause a

scene by pushing him away. Deep down I want to scream 'don't touch me.'

He gets the car door for me, I see he is trying to play romantic. I refuse to bend and be charmed by these little things he does.

"Take us home Vuyo." Siyakhula instructs as soon as he shuts his door. At least he knows that is where I want to go.

I keep to myself half of the ride home. The tension between us is thicker than my chances of ever moving to Europe. For Siyakhula to actually assume that I would agree to something so absurd is crazy. He doesn't know me if he thinks I would pack up and leave to start afresh at a foreign country.

"What are you thinking about?" Siyakhula brings me back to life.

"Huh?"

"You haven't said anything since we left the restaurant."

Really, what makes him think we are on speaking terms?

"I have nothing to say." I don't want to start a fight. "When are we getting there? I'm getting bored."

I am not bored but highly annoyed. At a distance, you can't tell that Siyakhula is bad at making decisions. He looks mature and very respectable. Wait till he opens his mouth to speak.

I'm disappointed.

"Do you have something in mind we can do to pass time?" He asks softly, his hand sliding to my thigh and I just know what is on his mind.

This man uses sex to fix things.

"Please I don't want to traumatize Vuyo." Why am I entertaining him?

Siyakhula's smile is mischievous, his hand is ticklish on the insides of my thighs. He shifts closer, his lips press on the edge of my ear.

"I can put you in a good mood." He whispers.

"Behave yourself." I warn him, shutting my thighs by crossing one over the other. His eyes are squinted, his breathing is gradually quickening.

"You sure you don't want to sit on my lap? I will make it worth your while." This is how the devil must have tempted Jesus. This flirt of a man is still touching me.

“Stop touching me, please.” I push his hand off and keep my eyes out the window.

“Siza...” He touches me again and that makes me snap.

“Are you using seduction to apologize?”

“What? No Gundi...”

“Don’t Gundi me, okay? All those times we had sex was you trying to soften me up, so I would agree to relocate. You used me, Siyakhula.”

“No, that does not even make sense Siza. We’re a couple, of course we are bound to have sex whenever we feel like.”

I am not buying it. I feel like such an idiot, thinking he couldn’t resist me.

“I’m sorry. I thought you wouldn’t mind moving with me, if I knew you were going to act like this, I wasn’t going to propose it.”

Hell no! He has no right to be upset when he is the one in the wrong. This manipulative bastard.

“You didn’t just propose it, you made plans for us without including me. I thought we were a team.”

“We are,” he says, pressing his hand on mine.

“Then tell me the truth, tell me why you want us to move to Europe.”

His stare bores into me and I don't know why I am crumbling from it.

“I don't want to lose you.”

“Why would you lose me, Khula? I am here, I promised that I will never leave.”

He puts his hand on my shoulder, I stare at it—confused.

“There is something I need to tell you, promise you will let me finish talking.”

He is triggering my fears.

The car suddenly comes to a screeching stop, Siyakhula extends his hand to prevent my head from hitting the seat in front of me.

“Are you okay?” I answer with a sigh. “What the hell Vuyo? Since when are you the worst driver in the world?”

Siyakhula's chiding halts when he spots a car parked in front of ours.

“Sorry boss, Mr. Donda came out of nowhere. Are you guys okay?” Vuyo looks over his shoulder to check.

I am not there

I am worried about Mr. Donda senior. Why would he stop us in the middle of the road?

He appears on Vuyo's side of the window and dips his head in.

"Son, can I have a word with you?"

"Is this necessary? You could have called?" Siyakhula spits.

"So dramatic?" I mumble to myself.

Mlamuli bores me to death.

He hasn't looked at me. I never see him at work either, something tells me that he tries so hard to avoid bumping into me.

"It's important Siyakhula, are you going to make me beg?"

Wow! Someone is grumpy.

"Can't it wait? Siza and I are headed home. I can't leave her alone." The voice Siyakhula uses sends a shiver down my spine, but not a good one. He still has beef with his father.

For the first time since he showed his face, Mlamuli eyes me. His eyes are an angry flame that can never be extinguished.

“It’s about your mother, you have to come with me.”

Hau! Then why didn’t he say in the first place?

“Is she okay?”- Siyakhula.

“She wants to see you, alone.”- Mlamuli.

MaMbatha can speak now?

“Vuyo will drive us there, you can go.” Siyakhula dismisses his father.

A brief sneer appears on Mlamuli’s lips.

“You sure know how to press my buttons Siyakhula. I know you don’t consider me your father, but at least I’m trying. Would it kill you to try as well?” Mlamuli keeps his eyes on Siyakhula without blinking. I’m the cause of all this.

I have to convince Siyakhula to leave with him before I’m accused of breaking the Donda family apart.

“Go with your father, we will talk when you get home.”

He must follow his father before Mlamuli starts crying.

The man I love cups my face and kisses my cheek.

“Wait for me, don’t go to sleep just yet. We will talk.” He kisses my lips, promises to come home early, and leaves with Mlamuli. I’m worried about MaMbatha. Why does she want to meet him alone? Could it be about us?

“Let’s go home Vuyo.”

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SIYAKHULA

Mlamuli watches Vuyo driving away before turning his attention to me.

“Let’s go, it’s getting late.” I wait for him to unlock the car.

Instead he exhales, his sour face lasting a second.

“I lied about MaMbatha, I wanted to talk to you alone.” He announces.

“Why?”

“When were you going to tell me about your wife and son?” His words hold a little condemnation.

I shake my head at the realization that Nadine ran to my father. She didn’t stop to think that I am overwhelmed by this sudden discovery. In a split second, that woman has flipped my life upside down.

“Nadine told you?”

“Yes. She also told me that you are ignoring her. I expected better from you. How could you turn your back on your family?”

Look who’s talking!

“What family? You expect me to easily accept that I am someone’s father and husband? My life changed in the blink of an eye, it feels like I have been hit by a truck. I don’t even know what is going on, Mlamuli.”

“I understand how you feel son...”

“No you don’t. I was never prepared for any of this, and you cannot crucify me for overreacting. You sure as hell cannot force me to accept Nadine and that boy.”

I wouldn’t expect him to understand. Things always come easy for Mlamuli Donda. He wouldn’t fathom what I am going through.

“Nadine was wrong, I agree. But son, this is the reality. You have a wife and a child. You need to take responsibility for them.”

That’s rich coming from a man that abandoned us.

“I want nothing to do with Nadine. She betrayed me.”

We could argue about this the whole night.

“What about your son? He knows about you, don’t punish him for his other’s mistakes.”

Is that what he thinks I’m doing?

I don’t know how to feel about Olive. Nadine is the one to blame here, she kept the boy from me for nine years. I want to laugh at the audacity she has of wanting me to open my arms and accept everything like I was in on her plans from the beginning.

“Stay out of my business Mlamuli.”

“Your business is mine too. I am your father.”

“Now you acknowledge that you are my father? Where have you been all my life when I needed you?”

“I know what I did was wrong. My past choices came back to haunt me more than I can count. Believe me, I paid my dues for letting you and your mother go, I regret it every day. Yes I messed up. Don’t repeat my mistakes son. Do not let this be a generational thing. Take responsibility and accept your wife and kid. They need you.”

Everything I have said to this man went through one ear and escaped through the other.

“Nadine is not my wife, stop calling her that. My life is with Siza, we are going to be a family.”

“What good will come out of your relationship with your brother’s ex? You are not on speaking terms with your brother because of that girl. She is ruining you and your family.”

“Why are you here Mlamuli?” I am getting frustrated by his insistence.

“To tell you to man up and bring your family home.”

“If you are going to support Nadine, don’t count me in. Why don’t you take Nadine as your wife since you are so fond of her?”

I will never accept Nadine as my wife.

“Are you going to speak to your father like that?” Mlamuli asks.

I can hear how offended and hurt he is.

“I am tired, you and Nadine are not letting me breathe. Where is she anyway? I want to speak to her.”

She will hear it from me. Nadine had no right to run to Mlamuli and tell him my business.

“I had a driver take her and Olive to your house, it’s where they belong.”

He says and for a while my heart stops beating. Siza is headed there. Nadine is the worst person to break the news to Siza, she will boast and twists things. I can't let that happen.

I dial Vuyo, he answers immediately.

"Vuyo, don't take Siza to the house." I sound panicky.

"We arrived a while ago, Siza is in the house as we speak. What happened boss?"

Dammit Mlamuli!

SIYAKHULA-

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Mlamuli has no choice but to drive me home, this is all his doing anyway.

“Get Nadine out of the house now.” I instruct Vuyo over the phone.

“How boss? I am sure she won’t listen to me.”

“I know, but do it. Siza and Nadine cannot be in the same room.” Irritation bubbles through my veins at the thought. How did I lose control of the situation? All I needed was courage to tell Siza the truth, but I chickened out like a true Donda. I am indeed my father’s son.

“Boss, Nadine is in her room. She hasn’t met Siza yet.” Vuyo puts my worries to rest.

“There are extra keys in the kitchen, first drawer when you walk in. One of them should lock Nadine’s room, don’t make any mistakes Vuyo.” It’s the only way I can keep them apart.

“Got it boss.”

He puts me on hold.

“I don’t understand why you are choosing a woman over your brother.” Mlamuli says.

That’s his problem. He doesn’t understand anything, that’s why we do not have a relationship.

“I told you to stay out of my business.” I don’t want to hear anything coming from his mouth.

“Siyakhula please. I am your father, nothing will ever change that. My role is to protect you and your brothers.”

“You’re clearly doing a crappy job at it, Mlamuli. I was okay without you, I will continue to be okay.” I tell him.

“We need each other. Think of your mother, her dream is to see her family together.”

Has he forgotten that he chose another woman over my mother? What family is he talking about?

“I’m always thinking of my mother, unlike you. I made a mistake letting you back into my life. If anything happens to Siza and the babies, make sure you leave before I get my hands on you.”

I don’t wait for his protest before I’m asking Vuyo if he is winning.

“Hello?” There is no sound coming from the other line. We go disconnected. It must be network.

I’m unsettled and trying Siza’s phone, it’s also not going through. All I can do is wait to get home while hoping Vuyo managed to lock Nadine in the room.

As we arrive, I send Mlamuli away. I don’t need him adding petrol to the fire.

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My phone beeps as I enter the house, thinking it is a message from Siza, I open the text.

One day I am going to take her away from you and there is nothing you will do about it.

The number is not saved on my phone, nor do I recognise it. I dial it, wanting to find out who this is person.

'The number you have dialled is not available.'

Worry clings on to me, but I don't have time to dwell on it. My eyes have landed on Nadine. She is seated on the couch with her legs crossed, immediately, my mood changes.

"What the fu..." I stop, seeing a little boy on the other couch.

Vuyo failed to do a simple task. I look around the house, searching for Siza.

Where is Siza?

"Aren't you going to say hi to your son?" Nadine stands and reaches out to take the boy's hand. "Say hi to pa baby."

"Hi pa." The little boy waves and runs into my arms.

I am forced to hug him back and pretend to be happy to see him. He lets go and smiles up at me.

"Are we going to be a family now?" He asks.

The innocence in his eyes melts my heart a little. Although tempted to tell him the truth, I hold it in. I kneel in front of him and hold his shoulders.

"Olive?" He nods. "Go and watch TV for a while. I have something important to do, talk to you later, okay?"

"Okay pa." He runs to the couch.

I am not comfortable with him calling me pa.

“I don’t know what you are up to Nadine, but it’s not going to work. I won’t let you destroy my relationship with Siza.” I whisper for her to hear.

“I am going to deal with you later.” I finish.

“Olive is your son, Khula.”

I block her voice and call for Siza. Why is she not coming to me? Where is she?”

“Siza!” I run to our room and find her seated on the bed.

I expect her to scream and throw things at me, but her poise is different today. She seems calm.

I sit on the side of the bed and take her hand, she yanks it from me.

“Siza, look at me please.”

“Where is your wife?” As the words fall out of her mouth, pain tears through my heart. She doesn’t deserve any of this.

“Gundi... let me explain.” I say.

I fucked up and lied to her. I should’ve trusted that Siza would appreciate my honesty. As an alternative, I let my fear get the best of me and lied straight to her face.

“I want the truth Siyakhula. Do not leave anything behind.”

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SIZA-

I am in so much pain. It's not just my pain that has me lurching. Siyakhula's lies are slicing through me like razor.

The only reason I am still here is because I want to hear his side of the story.

Nadine can be impulsive, I have lived with her long enough to know that she wants Siyakhula and would do anything to get him back.

I must be crazy to want to give him a second chance after he lied to me.

I love him so much.

I can still see the arrogance on Nadine's face when she told me that she is married to Siyakhula and they have a child together. I wanted to pull her by her hair and drag her out of the house. If her son was not around, I probably would have killed her.

Not only did I have to consider that little boy, but my babies too. So I left for my room without saying another word to her.

Siyakhula shifts closer, looking at me with apologetic eyes. I wipe away the tears assembling in my eyes.

“If you lie to me again, I will leave with my kids, and you will never find us.” I say.

His face flashes, causing him to look at the floor.

“Nadine and I did a lot of stupid things when we were young.” He starts and I already hate that he associated himself with that woman. The ‘we’ he uses stirs a deep feeling of jealousy within me.

“You know about the tattoos.” He says, linking his eyes with mine.

One day, I will drug him and cut off that piece of meat from his skin. What was going through his small brain when he tattooed Nadine’s name on his butt?

“I was unemployed, and couldn’t get a job. So Nadine introduced me to an easy way of making money.”

I’m not liking where this is going. I hope he wasn’t involved with drugs.

Siyakhula breathes, like going down memory lane hurts him.

“We robbed banks, got involved in fraud...”

“Stop, I don’t want to hear the gritty parts.” I can’t imagine him a criminal. “Tell me about the marriage.”

“Gundi listen to me,” I am listening. “It was a mistake. We were drunk

Advertisement

and made stupid mistakes.”

Men are masters at perfecting the look of pity, so much so that you start to feel sorry for them. I school myself not to fall for it. This man does not deserve my mercy.

“I’m listening, continue.” I assure him.

“First I want you to know that I love you, I will always love you.”

“I know.” I assure him once more.

“I wish I could change the past. Take back everything I said and did back then. If I could change it all, I would. Gundi, you are the only one I want to be with in that way. I want to be your husband and give you as many babies as your womb can carry.”

Now he’s taking it too far. I will not be mother of all nations.

I wipe away the tears blurring my sight.

I love that he is talking and slowly opening up. I am not a pro in this communication thing, apparently it works. Siakhula goes to explain how they got married and why they have a child together.

“I swear on the quads, I didn’t know any of this until yesterday.” A sense of guilt is in his eyes, yet he manages to give me a soft stare.

“Why was divorce not your first option?” I ask because any normal person would have considered that first.

He shrugs, “I panicked. All I could think about was you leaving me. I can stand it all Siza, what I can’t stand is losing you.”

The feeling is mutual but this is no time to be telling him sweet nothings. I am upset.

“You don’t have to fly to another country for you to be free from Nadine, just have the marriage annulled.”

“An annulment?”

Why does he look confused? It is simply as that.

“Yes, and she can’t protest the annulment. If you provide necessary proof as to why you want the marriage annulled,

there is nothing she can do to stop it. Even if it is against her wishes.” I tell him and he still looks confused.

This proves to me that he had no clue what to do.

“But where will I get proof that she lied about us being divorced and that the marriage was a mistake?”

He has a knot on his forehead as he falls into deep thought.

“Where will I get evidence? Nadine will never agree that I signed the papers.”

“Then find one of the witnesses that was present when you got married. If you prove that you were under the influence of alcohol and you were not thinking straight, then your marriage to Nadine will be null and void. It will be as if you were never married. You will start again with a clean slate, your marital status will be single not divorced.”

“How do you know all of this?” He asks.

“I’m on season 18 of Law & Order.”

I grab my phone from the pillow, scroll down and hand it to him.

“What is this?” His eyes follow my movement as I shift on the bed until I’m comfortable.

“You laid your rules the other day. These are mine.” I say.

“A sex schedule?” He gives me a look like I am turning his world upside down.

“Siza, I apologized. What do you want me to say? I am sorry I married Nadine and had a child with her.”

He doesn't get it. I need to breathe before I start losing my mind.

“It's funny you're apologizing for something that, yes, I am not happy about. But it's not what I am most hurt over.”

His eyebrows pucker, not understanding where I am taking this.

“I believe you Siyakhula and I want to forgive you, I really do. But how do I do it when you lied to my face about why you wanted us to relocate. You lied to me about Nadine.”

“I didn't lie... I just delayed telling you the truth.” He is lying again.

“You lied Siyakhula, you only told me about the stupid tattoo. Then you wanted to run away from your problems and drag me along with you.” I explode with anger.

He shakes his head, and takes my hands. I push away from him.

“You didn't tell me that you are married.”

“I signed the papers Siza, she’s the one that...”

“Okay fine, you signed the stupid papers. For nine years you thought you were a divorcee, but did you bother to stop and tell me? You showed me that you don’t have faith in us—in our love.”

“But I do Gundi. I was stupid to let fear make decisions for me. I was scared of losing you. Please, tell me you believe that.”

I believe him, but I won’t tell him.

“I made notes.” I say, with the intent to clear the confusion on his face as I point at the phone he’s holding.

The frown on his face keeps growing as he reads what I noted down.

“We can only get intimate once a month? Mondays at 8pm and no cuddling after intimacy?” He reads out loud and I want to laugh because he is slowly losing his breathing pattern.

“Yes, I am too upset to have you touching me,” I say.

Siyakhula sighs and continues to read, “No sex for two months? What am I going to be doing for two months?”

“Becoming a better version of yourself.” I tell him.

He should be grateful I am giving him a chance to change and become a better person.

“But you are pregnant. What about your hormones? You need us, Siza.”

I’m guessing ‘us’ is him and that thing between his legs. It’s not a lie that I need them but...

“Don’t you just love white people? They made se-x toys for rainy days like this.”

His face falls in shock, “You can’t be serious, Sizalobuhle. That’s the same as cheating.”

“It’s not, it’s called self-service.”

If men can do it, why can’t we?

“I am going to my father’s house for a few days...I don’t want Nadine here while I’m gone.” I introduce and he interrupts me.

“I apologized Siza.”

“I’m not leaving you, I just need some time to think. You hurt me, Siyakhula.”

“I am sorry.”

I shrug, it doesn’t matter anymore.

What is done is done.

He holds me in his arms, “What about your sex cravings? You become grumpy when you don’t get any.”

Must he say it like that? I didn’t ask him to plant four seeds in my womb.

“Sorted. I sent Vuyo to the adult shop to get me a few things.” I say.

When Google is your best friend, nothing can ever go wrong.

“Why would you send Vuyo? What if he thinks I can’t satisfy you sexually?”

Really? That’s all he’s worried about?

This man knows how to get into my thick skin. I walk out of the bedroom to get a break from him.

“Gundi wait, let’s talk about this.” He is behind me.

The next thing I know, we hear a buzzing sound. Mhlauli appears down the passage, carrying a plastic bag. In his other hand, he’s playing with a vibrator the size of a ripe banana.

That better not be mine.

“Vuyo asked me to bring these.” He explains, looking between me and Siyakhula.

I am going to kill Vuyo.

“Bhuti.” When Mhlauli looks at Siyakhula and smiles like an idiot, I know something is coming. “Is everything okay down there?”

Siyakhula clicks his tongue and walks back to the bedroom.

SIZA

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My father warmly welcomed me back home. Staying with my family made me realise that I actually missed them.

The girls are doing amazing, Ndlelezhle has become a little reserved while Simengaye is wild as a cat.

Nomazulu discharged herself from the hospital, no one knows of her whereabouts. Phakathwayo has not bothered to look for her, the only step he took was to file for divorce and claim full custody of his children.

Nomazulu needs to come out of her hiding place, sign the divorce papers and leave us alone.

Today is the last day of the week, meaning there is no work tomorrow.

As usual, I walk into my office to find a cup of coffee and a post-it note on my desk. I have had enough of this, it's been two weeks and Phangizitha keeps insisting on buying me coffee and leaving romantic notes.

I grab the post-its gathered over the past weeks and head out of the office to find him. I keep them as evidence of harassment if things ever get out of control.

The door to his office is open, he is behind the desk, typing away on the laptop.

“What are these?” My voice barely contains anger.

He leans back on the office chair and crosses his arms on his chest, not saying anything.

“What part of I am not interested don’t you get? This is borderline insanity.”

“They are just notes. If you have a problem with them, don’t read them.”

“How can I not read them when they are staring right at me on the coffee cup you leave on my desk, which by the way I told you a million times to stop buying.”

Just then, Katlego walks in, “Good morning.” She says, handing him a pile of files.

Phangi starts paging and signing.

“Katlego is the one who brought those coffees.”

This man is irritating me, “I am not stupid Phangi. You are still the one who told her to buy.”

“If you don’t like my love notes, throw them away.” He says, nonchalantly.

No! I am keeping them as evidence.

“Oh, so you admit that they are love notes?” I ask, feeling aggravated.

He shrugs like it’s no big deal.

“I have had enough Mr. Donda. If this continues, I will have to speak to HR.” I don’t care that he is the boss.

“Throw them away Siza, simple.” This arrogant bastard.

“I will and no more coffee in the morning, I can get my own.” I don’t even drink it, I am pregnant.

I storm out of his office to prepare for the day.

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BONISILE-

Working for the Gumedes has been okay, over the past two weeks I was taught how to be patient by pastor Gumede's daughters. The younger ones, they are beautifully sweet. Sizalobuhle is a whole different story, she came back two weeks ago and has been ordering me around like a maid.

Okay, I am a maid, if it were not for the good pay, I would pack my things and go back home.

Siza is having Siyakhula's babies. I was hurt when I first found out, although Siyakhula never looked my way.

My school girl crush is gradually dying. Mhlauli keeps me company with late night texts and phone calls, he has made it clear what he wants from me.

I have nothing to give him, he is the brother of Siyakhula. Truth be told, I don't have feelings for him, somehow I see him as a friend and cannot look past that.

I want to focus on my job, my goal is to save money and move out of my father's house. Pastor Gumede is good to me, I judged him too early. He hasn't gone back to church, for a reason known only by him.

Not only do I watch the kids, but I also cook around here. I don't mind, it feels like my second home. Better than my home because of their warmth in this house.

I'm in my room, waiting for 7pm. We eat supper at seven, I don't share a table with the Gumedes since Siza's moved back in. Another thing is that Siyakhula eats here every night. So to avoid putting myself in an uncomfortable position, I eat in my room.

I hear footsteps coming from the corridor before the pastor shows face, my door is open.

"Is everything okay?" He asks, leaning against the doorpost while folding his arms.

"Yes." Everything is okay on my side, I can't say the same about him. "You look troubled."

He walks in and sits on the floor across from me, his back on the wall.

"My brother's trial is approaching." He introduces and I know he came here to offload.

It's nothing new, and I am getting used to talking to him like a friend. It all started about a week ago, he looked troubled and I

offered an ear. It has become a habit, my bedroom is an office, I am his therapist and he's my patient.

All I do is listen and advice where I can. He says he prefers me over a stranger who gets paid to listen to his problems.

"Will you attend?" I ask.

"I don't know," he finishes with a sigh.

He doesn't speak much and I am used to it.

"Maybe you should, it might give you closure." I say.

His gaze falls on me, "Will you come with me?"

I instantly hesitate to give him an answer. I have my own issues with Qeda.

Pastor Gumede knows, I told him that his brother once cornered me in the storeroom at church and touched me inappropriately. I believe he was going to ra-pe me had someone not walked in.

"I'm sorry, I'm asking too much from you." He brings me out of my thoughts.

"I will come with you, hearing the Judge convict him will probably be therapeutic." My voice shakes and we simultaneously exhale.

A silent moment grows between us as we stare at each other, it happens a lot. This is the part where we say everything without uttering a word.

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SIZA

The day is finally over.

I am using my father's car

Advertisement

trusting me with it means there is growth in our relationship. He is a different person, I like the new version of him.

What worries me is that he refuses to go back to church and preach.

The members want him back, but he says he is not ready. The church still belongs to him, the incriminating charges against him were dropped, and the church is slowly going back to the way it was.

I don't see myself going back there. Maybe one day. I have nothing against God, I'm the problem.

I drive in and park next to Siyakhula's car, he visits me every day and leaves very late at night.

My father hasn't complained but I see he is not happy when he looks at Siyakhula. It's disrespectful to him that my boyfriend comes over, even though he wasn't born during Mandela's time.

He deserves a little respect.

Siyakhula smiles and stands when he sees me walk through the door, I return his contagious smile.

"You are here again?" I kiss him on the cheek only for him to frown.

Who said kisses on the cheek are only reserved for women?

"I will visit every day until you come back home with me." He takes my hand and sits me down with him.

He is still on probation, we haven't been intimate since I left and I am not about to give in easily.

"How was court?" Today they signed the annulment papers.

Nadine fought him, she protested but there was nothing she could do after her brother Ozzy came forward and provided

evidence that Siyakhula and Nadine were drunk the day they got married.

Their cousin had a video of the day they got married.

Nadine was fuming, she felt betrayed. Ozzy's explanation was that he wanted his sister free from Siyakhula.

"I am officially a free man." Siyakhula leans on the backrest of the couch, pulling me with him. His arms feel like home, I will always love it here.

"What about Olive?" I ask.

I have met him twice, he is a shy little kid. He's mostly comfortable around Siyakhula and Mhlauli.

This man right here is trying to be a father, I don't know how it's working out in his head. However, from what I have observed, he is doing a good job.

"We are going to share custody, of course I have to pay maintenance. Nadine wants R20 000 every month, school fees is not included."

"What? Does she think you are Bill Gates?" That little opportunist.

“I don’t mind, Olive is worth it. If I could, I would take him to stay with me.”

He means us.

My feelings towards the kid are changing, he is slowly winning my heart. It could be that he spends most of his time here with Simi and Zinhle.

They are obsessed with him, they are not used to having a boy around.

“You want us to adopt him?”

The fact that I am asking this proves that I am stupid. We have four babies on the way, I can’t be a mother of five at my age.

“We can’t adopt him even if we paid Nadine.” Siyakhula is right

Olive is Nadine’s only way of making money, there is no way she will ever let him go.

I press my chin on his chest, and look up at him.

“I’m sorry I ever called him a brat, sometimes I speak without thinking. Also, I wouldn’t mind mothering Olive. He is a sweet child.”

He smiles, "When it comes to you, I don't hold grudges." He kisses my lips.

"When are you coming home? I miss you." His hand is going under my dress.

It is so funny that he thinks his house is my home.

"I am home, at my father's house. If you want me with you, you have to pay my father what is due to him."

I am not waiting for a wedding proposal. But if it comes, I won't reject it. I love him and the man he is slowly becoming.

"I have to fix my surname before thinking of marriage." He says.

How will he fix his surname when he and his father refuse to bury the hatchet? I won't mention Phangi, he lives in his own world.

There is no hope at the Dondas.

"Uncle Khula! Uncle Khula!"

Simengaye comes running into the sitting room, my heart sinks. The child is hysterically crying and tightly hugging her doll.

It must be some kind of comfort mechanism.

“What is it?” Siyakhula loves to panic. He gets on the floor to cup her wet cheeks.

“Thoni is not breathing, please help her.”

Thoni must be her friend. I glance at Siyakhula, worry is etched on his face.

“She stopped talking, uncle Khula. What if she is dead? Please help her.” I can barely hear her with how she is crying.

“Should I call an ambulance?” I dial and place the phone against my ear. Everything is happening so fast.

Phakathwayo walks in with a loud, “Don’t call them.”

Simi looks up at me with desperation in her eyes and tears up.

Say no more. I'm on the phone, waiting to be connected to someone who will help me. Phakathwayo tries to stop Siyakhula who is running to Simi’s room to go and check on Thoni.

“Simi stop crying, you'll get an unnecessary headache.” Wow. This is one insensitive pastor.

“I can't believe you daddy. You're Thoni's grandfather but you don't care about her.” Thoni's what?

“10111... what's your emergency?”

Oh finally.

“Please send an ambulance, Thoni is not breathing.”

My father looks at me and mouths that I drop the call.

The lady on the line is asking me so many questions, she wants me to feel Thoni's pulse point and check if she really has stopped breathing.

“Please hold.” I say and turn to the Phakathwayo.

“She wants us to do CPR on her. Is Thoni in your room baby?”

Just as I ask Simengaye, Siyakhula dashes back into the lounge.

“There is no one there.”

My father appears defeated, he sighs, sits and wears a smile.

Simengaye puts her doll on the floor. “Uncle Khula, please give her CPR, I don't know how to.”

Wait a minute.

“Please don't tell me that's Thoni.” I say to my father, pointing at the ugly, hairless doll on the floor. He nods in defeat and tells me to drop the call.

“It's one of her talking dolls, the battery probably died.” My father clears things.

Simengaye is crying on Siyakhula's chest.

“Uncle Khula.” This child is crazy.

Siyakhula looks at me for help, “Don’t look at me. We are having four of those in a few months.” I remind him.

Who knows? His kids will ask for the most bizarre things.

“Supper is ready.” Phakathwayo says and leaves the room.

“Siyakhula, be a good grandfather and give Thoni CPR.” I tell him.

This child won’t stop crying like somebody died.

“It’s a doll, Siza. Don’t be ridiculous.” The look he gives me screams ‘are you crazy?’

“Fine, I won’t come home then. I hope the bed is warm enough for you at night.” I just want Simengaye to stop with her tantrums.

Siyakhula hesitates, he looks like someone is holding a gun to his head as he kneels next to Simengaye. He pumps Thoni’s chest three times, presses two fingers on the doll's nose and starts breathing into its pouted mouth.

“Is she going to be okay?” Simengaye asks, impatiently tapping his shoulder.

Do I really want to be a mother?

SIZA

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None of my father's children were planned. Simengaye is proof that Phakathwayo had children by default. That child is a special case.

Thoni didn't make it. Simengaye refuses to buy new batteries, saying the doll won't be the same anymore.

The funeral is tomorrow, as crazy as this may sound. Simengaye is not taking Thoni's 'death' well, and not everyone in the family wants to give her the benefit of the doubt. Ndlelezhle for instance, she is not happy about her sister's wild imagination.

The adults have no choice but to entertain Simengaye, the child wants to give Thoni a dignified send off.

It's late, Siyakhula is sleeping over. I am allowing him to sleep over because I feel sorry for him.

Phakathwayo went to bed early, so he has no clue that there is a half-naked man in my bed.

The half-naked man is clingy tonight, he says he misses me that's why. I have my own assumptions, he wants to sleep with me.

I'm in his arms, responding to his hungry kisses when the door opens. Siyakhula falls off the bed to hide from whoever walked in without knocking.

A small figure looms on my door.

"Sisi, there are voices in my room. Can I sleep with you?" I clear my throat and Siyakhula comes out of hiding. He knows Simengaye is not going to leave this room.

"Sure baby." I make space for her and get a glare from Siyakhula.

What does he want me to do? The child is scared.

Simengaye climbs into bed and cuddles me, she falls asleep faster than a pregnant woman.

"Really?" This man is still standing with palms cupping his sack.

"I can't send her away." I defend my kindness.

"So where am I going to sleep?" He asks.

"The floor, there's an extra blanket and pillow in the wardrobe."

“I didn’t come here to sleep on the floor. Why am I even here? I should leave.”

How easily he has forgotten that he came here to shag.

He doesn’t spare me a glance, as he’s throwing his pants back on.

“Okay, I will see you tomorrow.” I lie down and close my eyes.

I am not going to beg a grown man to stay, he knows the exit if he wants to leave. I hear an exhausted sigh coming from him, then the creaking sound of the wardrobe opening. Seconds later, I take a peek. He’s sleeping on the floor, a blanket covering just his long legs.

I love it when he taps out and lets me win.

The tossing and turning I have been doing for the past two hours has left me dog-tired. I can’t sleep, something is not right.

I don’t know what but something terrible is coming. I can’t place my finger on it. My sister is sound asleep, must be nice to have zero problems.

“Khula.” I shake his shoulder, he quickly opens his eyes and for a moment looks like he is lost and has no idea where he is.

“Siza?” He is slowly coming back to planet earth.

“I can’t sleep, my heart is racing.” I say and that has him sitting up, worry tainting his eyes.

“Is it the babies?”

“No, they are fine. I want you to hold me.” I don’t know what this overwhelming feeling is, I want it to go away and somehow I am sure that sleeping in his arms will make me feel better.

He takes Simengaye and lays her where he was sleeping, then joins me in bed. I put my head on his chest and my arm over his middle. His arms are around me in a protective manner.

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He is not in bed when I wake up, neither is Simengaye on the floor. I stir out of bed and check the time. The idiot that is me overslept.

The sun is showing off its heat, it’s way past 8am.

I opt for a shower since it’s faster, it takes me thirty minutes to finish up everything.

I'm about to leave for my usual morning walk and I still haven't heard from Siyakhula. I send him a text asking where he is. Five minutes come and go, there's no response from him.

I am getting upset and lately I cry when I am upset.

You know what, I'm not going to go for that stupid walk anymore. Instead, I will stuff my face with food until I can't eat anymore.

Where is Bonisile? The kitchen is empty, there are no pots on the stove and no food in the dining room. That woman is still sleeping. Why is my father keeping her around? I told him that she is lazy.

I can make porridge for the girls but that would mean lessening Bonisile's workload. I am not going to do that.

She's my least favourite person in the world.

I knock outside her bedroom door and push it open when I don't get a response.

I think I walked in the wrong bedroom and quickly walk out after apologizing to my father for not knocking.

No way!

This is Bonisile's room and the man descending from her bed is my father. To confirm I am not losing my mind, I open the door only for life to laugh in my face.

My father shared a bed with Bonisile?

"Phakathwayo? What the hell is going on?" No! This is not happening to me.

"It's not what you think." Bonisile says, sitting up.

Her voice is horrendously disgusting.

"I am not talking to you wena. Is this why you're here? You came to seduce my father?"

"Sizalobuhle!" Phakathwayo must not even dare rebuke me.

"You are a married man Phakathwayo. A pastor, what you are doing is disgusting."

"Nothing happened, we were talking and lost track of time..."

"You were talking while sharing a bed?" I ask, appalled by the thought of them sleeping together.

"You are not a child anymore Sizalobuhle, if you refuse to listen then there is no reason to continue with this conversation."

Fathers can be devils from hell.

"I can't believe you baba, are you not ashamed?"

“I have nothing to be ashamed of because nothing happened.” He is so adamant on that. “If that is all, excuse us. I want to talk to Bonisile. Alone.” The emphasis on the final word makes my skin crawl.

Bonisile is silently sitting on the bed like a bride ready to be deflowered. I am going to get her fired.

“Now Sizalobuhle.” My father snaps.

I conquer the urge to click my tongue and slam the door instead.

“Sizalobuhle!” My father shouts, I push the door open thinking he has changed his mind.

“Close the door properly, I paid for it not you.” This is what he called me for? I hate him.

Gently, I shut the stupid door. I have mentally killed my father, and fried Bonisile’s face with acid. They can’t do this to me, it’s not right.

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Minutes later, Siyakhula finds me in the kitchen trying to touch this and that. He’s carrying plastic bags from Pick n' Pay, Pick n' Pay clothing, and a black none branded plastic bag.

“I thought you left without saying goodbye.” I say as he kisses my cheek.

“I was asked to get a coffin for Thoni and a black dress for Simi.” I almost laugh at how traumatized he sounds but Phakathwayo and Bonisile ruined my mood.

“Did you get it?” I don’t think there are custom made caskets fit for dolls.

“Believe it or not, you would find the strangest things out there. I found one at a pet shop.” He says.

He will never be the same after this.

“Are we really going to be burying a doll today?” Simengaye has changed, I can’t imagine what is going through her mind.

Why would she insist that Thoni is gone when she can replace the batteries?

“I won’t be here,” Siyakhula replies.

I know he has no plans today

this is him trying to dodge the funeral.

“You are not leaving me alone. It’s you who failed to resuscitate Thoni, you have to attend her funeral.”

He stops unpacking the groceries and raises his eyes.

“You are punishing me, aren’t you?”

Why would he think that?

“I don’t know what you are talking about.” I say.

“You are not over the Nadine issue...”

“Yoh Siyakhula, don’t spoil my mood please.” Phakathwayo and Bonisile have accomplished that very well.

I want to tell Siyakhula what I walked in on but his closeness with my father will have him putting me in my place, telling me to mind my business.

I prepare breakfast for the two of us, no one has come to the kitchen yet. It’s over past 9am when we sit down to eat, he offers to wash the dishes with me and clean around the kitchen.

I can’t stop thinking about my father and that Jezebel, they can’t still be talking.

“I have something for you.” Siyakhula says, suddenly.

He digs into the pocket of his pants and comes out with two pieces of paper. He holds them out with a serious look on his face.

“Choose one.” He says.

I don’t ask questions, but pick the one on the left.

I flip it over, 'weekend getaway' is written on it.

"What's this?" I am curious.

"We are going on a weekend getaway. Are you free today, right now?" He is asking with a nervous smile spread on his lips.

A smile finds my face and I nod with excitement. This is a nice surprise.

He is digging in his pocket again, he holds up two more pieces of paper.

"Pick another one."

I go for the one on the right. 'Will you marry me' is written on this one. My eyes widen and my mouth gaps.

"Siyakhula?"

His eyes are full of love, the sweat forming on his forehead means he is a bundle of nerves. Just as I am about to ask if he is serious, he whips a ring box out of his pocket, and rapidly changes his position from standing against the kitchen counter to kneeling on the floor with the box in his hand.

My eyes will fall out if they keep widening. I'm trying to hide my shock with my hand over my mouth.

“Gundi, my heart has chosen you. It continues to choose you with every breath I take. I love you and can ever love only you. Let’s grow old together, marry me Siza?”

There is something so sweet in this proposal. Time stands still, I hold my breath.

Everything is happening so fast, the pregnancy, our relationship and now the marriage proposal.

I love him, although it’s too soon, I don’t see myself with anyone but him.

It’s his ring I want around my finger and his arms I want to be locked in every night.

My head bobs as I inaudibly agree, “Yes.”

The word eventually leaves my mouth.

Siyakhula smiles, and slips the ring on my finger. He stands to kiss me and envelope me in his arms.

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The funeral has begun, it’s midday. We were told to wear black because it’s a real funeral. Four of her friends from school are here, they seem to have loved Thoni. One of them is helping Simengaye mourn, the level of crying they are doing is absurd.

I would make money if this hits TikTok.

Phakathwayo is the pastor leading the funeral. We are all gathered in the backyard, standing around a small grave dug out by Siyakhula. He really went out for my sister. After the funeral, we will have to evaluate her because this is not it.

Siyakhula is next to me, holding me an umbrella under the scorching heat.

Ndlelezhle looks like she wants to be buried with Thoni, she plainly expressed that this is stupid and we should not be entertaining her younger sister.

“Dearly beloved, we are gathered here to lay to rest Thoni...”

“Gumede.” Simengaye whispers.

This is the part where Phakathwayo prays for a timeline machine, so he travels back to the past and wears a condom.

“We are gathered here to lay to rest Thoni Gumede.”

Siyakhula squeezes my hand, and leans down to murmur something so unholy during a funeral.

“If we go to your room now, we’ll be done before the funeral is over.” Shame on him to be horny during a funeral.

I don't answer his statement. My focus is on the time, when will this circus end. It's hot, and I am tired and hungry.

The four friends help each other put the coffin in the hole, they cover it with soil and put a cross made of sticks on top of the small hill.

I wonder if it's too late to sign up for adoption.

Once buried, we head back inside. I think I will go back with Siyakhula today, I cannot deal with so much drama here.

Siyakhula is sitting on the couch next to me, we haven't told anyone that we are engaged.

My father is somewhere in the house, his bed partner in the kitchen. The girls, excluding Zinhle are squashed on the opposite couch, looking all depressed.

How dramatic!

"Kiss me." I say to my lover and his eyes bulge.

He is probably worried about my father.

"You might be kissing me for the last time today." I lean up and steal a kiss.

“Why would you say that to me? Don’t ever repeat those words.” He firmly says.

I was kidding really. Why does he have to let fear take over his heart?

I will never leave him.

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Bonisile is serving lunch when my little sister drops a question at the dining room table.

“Daddy, can I wear this dress to mama’s funeral?” She brushes the black dress Siyakhula got her this morning.

“Why would you say that? Your mother is not dead.” Phakathwayo chides her.

“But I want her to die, she is a bad person. Bad people deserve to die.” Haibo!

I knew something was wrong when she thought burying a doll is normal.

“Simengaye, who told you that?” I ask.

“The voice in my head.” The child is hearing voices?

“I told you she’s a freak.” Zinhle complains, she has been complaining since she was forced to wear black and attend the funeral.

“Ndlelezhle!” That’s Phakathwayo snapping.

Zinhle doesn’t care, “She is, you all see it but refuse to accept it.”

“Simi is your sister.” –Phakathwayo.

“I wish she wasn’t, she embarrasses me in front of my friends at school. She’s always talking to herself and smiling with no one. People laugh at her, and call her freak.” Ndlelezhle screams before storming out of the dining room.

What is happening?

“Can I daddy? Can I wear this dress to mama’s funeral?” -Simi continues to ask, not caring a damn about her sister’s outburst.

Thoni is bringing us bad luck. Where did they buy that demonic doll? I hope she wasn’t Chucky’s cousin.

MHLAULI

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Flight, fight or freeze, play in his head whenever Bonisile comes to mind. She has made it clear to him that she wants nothing but a buddy-buddy situation.

If he could keep his distance, she would appreciate it.

He's contemplating it, I mean why not? Chasing after a girl is not his strongest point.

He wants to close this chapter forever if he is going to move forward.

That's why he is here, outside the Gumede residence waiting for her. She said she won't be long, yet he has lost fifteen minutes of his life.

He checks the time on his wrist watch for the umpteenth time, he is starting to wonder if she is worth the wait.

Having had enough, he dials her number. She answers after making him wait again, it's exhausting really. Does she carry gold between her legs?

“I’m getting old waiting for you, should I abort mission or you haven’t tortured me enough?” He asks.

“I’m sorry, Khuzimpi is keeping me busy. You can leave, we will talk over the phone.”

Khuzimpi? What the fuck? When did she start calling him by name?

“Is that an excuse or he really is keeping you busy?” He’s a tad surprised by his question.

This is the same as skirt-chasing, something he is not used to.

“I’m working Mhlauli, you’re disturbing me.”

He gets it, she doesn’t want to come out and meet him.

“Next time, don’t let me drive all the way for nothing, my car doesn’t run on Khuzimpi’s cooking oil. Petrol is fucking expensive.” He’s annoyed.

He is a foreigner to rejection and this girl has just introduced him to it.

“Mhlauli I’m sorry, I didn’t...”

“It’s okay, I got the message loud and clear. I won’t bother you again, you can go back to kissing Gumede’s ass.” He cuts the call.

His initial plan was to talk politely, sometimes he shocks himself and does the unthinkable.

What's done is done, there is no turning back. He starts the car and drives off.

His phone rings, it's his brother Phangi. He answers and puts him on loud speaker.

"Where are you?" Asks Phangi.

"Miss me already?" He teases and Phangi clicks his tongue.

"Shut up or else I'll give my house to someone else." Phangi says, laughing as if he cracked a joke.

"You are giving me your house?"-Mhlauli.

"Yes."

"Why?"

It doesn't make sense, Phangi loves that house. He doesn't even want Mhlauli sitting on his couches.

"I'm going away for a while, I don't know when I'll be back or if I will be back. You can have my cars too. I've signed everything over to you, all you have to do is put your signature. My lawyer will contact you."

Mhlauli pulls over, and parks on the side of the road. His brother is not making sense at all.

“Why does it sound like you’re dying? Don’t do anything stupid bhuti.” Mhlauli tries to keep anger out of his voice.

He's troubled by Phangi’s words, it sounds like he is on his death bed and is ready to give up ghost.

“Where are you bhuti? I’m coming over? I want to talk some sense into you.” He means punch some sense into him.

“I’m not in Joburg, don’t try to look for me. You won’t find me.” Phangi says and this doubles Mhlauli’s worries.

“Bhuti, if you’re trying to scare me, it’s working. Please stop.” He begs with a clenched jaw.

“I love you Mhlauli, don’t ever forget that.”

“No, I don’t accept your love. Take it back... and tell me where you are.”

There’s no answer, he’s talking to himself. Phangi has dropped the call.

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BONISILE

I didn't mean to make him wait, working as a maid does not mean free time in between. Today is a Saturday, the kids are all over the house. Ndlelezhle is a little reserved than her sister, I can't seem to keep up with Simengaye. If she keeps her bustle energy up, I will lose weight.

When Mhlauli called, I had just taken a bath and was getting ready to head out. I was already drowning in guilt for making him wait.

I didn't think he would take it to heart and tell me where to get off.

It's okay though, this is for the best.

My bags are packed, I can't stay here after last night. The pastor and I were talking, it got late and heaven knows how he ended up in my bed. Nothing happened like he said.

However, I can't stop this gnawing feeling of guilt, like I did something wrong. My mother will have to forgive me, I'm quitting.

My stomach reels and knots at the knock on my bedroom door, it can only be the pastor. The kids don't knock when they need something and I learnt today that Siza has no manners to.

“Yes.” I zip my suitcase and wait for the inevitable. He appears, looking more relaxed than I feel.

“You don’t have to do this.”

That’s where he is wrong. I have to do this, I am afraid what might happen if we continue with this—whatever this is.

“I have already told my mother, she is expecting me.” I lie.

MaShezi will have me for supper tonight.

Pastor Gumede stands too close that I have to hold my breath, my body seems to respond well to his hand touching mine.

“Don’t go.” He says, looking into my eyes.

“What do you want from me?” This is ridiculous, we have been in each other’s company for not longer than two weeks.

Where do I get off asking him such a question?

“I want you to stay.” He replies, lifting his eyebrows as if convincing me.

“Why?”

Shut up Bonisile! He’s your pastor.

“I don’t know, I guess I enjoy your company. I like the way I feel when I’m around you.” He says.

“We don’t know each other like that, you can’t say things like that to me.” I tell him.

My mother has no idea what her daughter is up, she will be utterly embarrassed.

“Why must time decide our fate? Can’t we just go with the wind and feel whatever we want to feel?” I don’t understand his questions.

Another issue is that he is a married man, I have always perceived married men as scary and find it disgusting to date one.

“You are doing it again Boni

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you’re overthinking. Nothing good comes out of that.” Yeah he has told me this more times than I can count.

How can I not overthink when everything we stand for is against this thing that’s brewing between us?

Besides, why would a man like him ever be interested in me?

I’m literally no one in the crowd.

Pastor holds my chin up until our eyes meet, something flips in my stomach.

“Let go of your insecurities.” He says.

Great! He sees through me now.

“You need to love yourself Bonisile. If you start to fall in love with yourself, then the rest of the world will start to fall in love with you. You don’t have to do anything, just be Bonisile.”

“I don’t know how to be myself.” Here I am showing him the very insecurities I have tried hard to hide.

“You do, you just have to stop second guessing yourself. There is something so magnificent about yourself, it takes confidence for a person to realise that. If you walk around with the mentality that the world is judging your every step, then that’s exactly what will happen.”

Gee! Is he a pastor or a motivational speaker?

“I don’t know how to be confident.” I continue to bare my flaws to the man of God. I’m going to hell.

He pulls me to the bed and sits with me.

“It’s not easy but it comes natural, we can be confident together.” He adds.

“What do you mean?”

“If you allow me, I want to be here during your growth.”

“But pastor...”

“Khuzimpi, I told you to call me Khuzimpi.”

I can't call my pastor by name, it feels wrong.

“You are married...”

Shaking his head will not make him unmarried.

“My life with Nomazulu ended a long time ago, we were both holding on for the kids, I guess.”

“What about the church?”

Why am I bombarding him with a million questions?

Could it be that I'm expecting something to come out of this interaction?

“My personal life has nothing to do with the church. I told you to stop overthinking. But...I like it when you ask questions, it means you are interested in what I am proposing.” He says.

Growing up, I was the DUFF (Designated Ugly Fat Friend) to my prettier friends. Boys used me as a boat to get to them, I got so used to it that I saw myself as the ugly duckling.

That era stuck with me that it started to show on the outside, men always choosing the pretty girl over me.

Around men, my confidence runs and hides.

But somehow when I'm with the pastor, it seems to show up and show off. I become comfortable in my own skin, my voice ceases to annoy me so much that I start to enjoy my own company.

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SIZA

I have concluded that Phakathwayo is a man who shows very little emotion. There was nothing written on his face when we told him we are getting married.

It's something he has always wanted, perhaps it'd suits him well when we are the future leaders of his church.

The day Siyakhula and I decide to pastor the church, Phakathwayo will throw the king of all parties.

I fitted a small amount of clothes into an overnight bag, most of my clothes don't fit me anymore and I haven't had time to go shopping.

My belly is bigger than it should be and I'm only in my second trimester.

Siyakhula helps me with my bag and puts it in the car. We are leaving for the weekend holiday. It's a Saturday today, I have to be at work on Monday. I will take a day off, fake a flu or something.

I need this trip to unwind.

"Take care of my baby," Phakathwayo tells Siyakhula something I would like to believe is a warning.

My husband to be nods in agreement, "She is my life. I will always take care of her." He promises.

Phakathwayo turns his gaze to me, unshed tears blind my eyes. This crying is getting out of control, we will only be gone for the weekend.

"I will see you when you come back, behave yourself out there." My father warns.

He is indirectly telling me not to trend for the wrong reasons. Although Siyakhula's sex cravings have no timing, and he wants to do it anywhere and everywhere; what happened on his birthday will never be repeated.

"I promise." I say.

Phakathwayo hugs me briefly.

“I love you Gundi, and I am proud of the woman you are becoming. Don’t ever forget that.”

“I love you too baba.” My arms tighten around him, suddenly I feel like a kid again.

He takes my hands and momentarily stares into my eyes.

“I am sorry for failing you after vowing to protect you,” Phakathwayo says, gracing me with an apologetic smile.

“I was supposed to walk with you through any and every storm, but it was akin to trying to hold on to a toddler with tantrums. I broke you in pieces and was too much of a coward to mend you. I’m sorry that I couldn’t be a good father to you.”

“Fights are common in families, Phakathwayo. It would be selfish of me to point a finger at you. My whole life, you gave me the life of a princess. I am lucky to have you as a father. I couldn’t have asked for better.”

He cradles my cheeks in his palms.

“Promise me that you will always protect your heart and soul, that if the damage from a friend is too much, you will walk away.” He says, shooting a threatening look at Siyakhula.

I can’t imagine where he is going with this, but I know it is directed at Siyakhula.

I can't say Siyakhula will never hurt me, he's human and we are prone to making mistakes. I am however confident in his love and that he will always keep me safe.

"I promise baba."

We say our final goodbyes and drive out, somehow it feels as if I will never come back here. My heart cracks and shatters as the gate closes behind us.

"What's wrong?" Siyakhula reeks of worry, I want to rid of it so I lie, yet the tears rolling down my face call me out on my lies.

"Nothing."

"You're crying, Gundi. What is it?" He squeezes my thigh, directing a swift look my way.

How do I express my gratitude? His gaze finds me the second time, he will snap if I don't speak soon.

"I love you..." My confession earns me a ghost of a smile.

"I love you too." He declares.

"I know and I am grateful. I am sorry I ever made you feel small, you are a good man Siyakhula. In you I found love I never knew exists. You are my ride or die. I will follow you to the ends of the earth."

I trace the edges of his jaw using the tips of my fingers. “My baby daddy, I love you forever and a day.”

The word love will never be enough for me to express how much I love this man.

“I love you too Gundi, forever and always.”

I should be feeling better but something is twisting my stomach.

*Be anxious for nothing.

I remember this statement during one of my father’s preaching. How do I teach myself not to give in to anxiety?

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Our destination is his father’s house before we head to the airport.

The nurse lets us in. Mlamuli is not here, perks of being God’s favourite child.

MaMbatha has made progress, she can move both her arms, that means she’s able to feed herself.

She spreads out her arms as we walk into her room, I’m thinking she wants to hug her son but her pity-filled gaze is on me.

“Mah?” Siyakhula sees it too. I hold on to his arm, not sure of what to do.

“She wants a hug.” He tells me.

But why is she in tears? It’s creeping me out.

Her trembling hands put a frown on my face, I try not to dwell into it and sink into her tight embrace.

She breaks down crying.

I will suffocate if she continues to squeeze.

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SIZA

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The nurse had to sedate MaMbatha after she became too hysterical, and wouldn't let go of me. Her grip began to hurt, and the only thing she could release were loud sobs.

I struggled against her, desperate to free myself from her grip.

It took Siyakhula unlocking her arms from around me and the nurse sedating her for the circus to die down.

Siyakhula has postponed the trip, we are waiting for her to wake up but the nurse keeps assuring us that she is okay and in good hands.

We spent most of the day in MaMbatha's room waiting.

Mlamuli can't be reached, strange for someone who claims to love MaMbatha. He should be one call away, I'm not saying I want to see him here. Honestly, I would rather we leave before he arrives. Then again, I don't always get what I want.

I'm sprawled on the couch, in front of a TV I haven't set my eyes on since I sat down.

“Gundi!” At his voice calling out to me, my heart does a cartwheel.

I turn around, the dejected look on his face is heart wrenching.

“Hi.” I timidly smile, extending a hand of comfort.

He takes it, a sigh leaves his mouth as he settles beside me. I get comfortable and lay my head on his shoulder.

“How is she?”

He remains silent, I don't like it. MaMbatha has to be okay. I shift so I'm looking at him, he eyes me so pitifully that I start to wonder why he pities me when his mom is the one who is suffering.

“I received a threatening message weeks ago,” he eventually says and because I am a little slow sometimes, it takes me a minute to grasp his words.

“A threatening message?” I ask.

Who would threaten Siyakhula? If it's Nadine, I won't hesitate to clip out her nipples with a nail clipper.

“Yes, whoever it was threatened to take you away from me forever.”

Oh! I'm the threatened. Why does Phangizitha suddenly come to mind? That spineless jerk has been giving me stalker vibes lately.

"When we traced it, it led us to a dead end. Mhlauli believes it was sent from a burn phone"

"Why did you not tell me? I've been walking around without protection."

I look at his hand playing on my knee, he better not be thinking of a lie. Why is he taking long to answer?

"You are pregnant, you don't need unnecessary stress. And I had Vuyo follow you around, from a distance."

How can I forgot Vuyo the fly? I was wrong to think I would be free from him after moving out of Siyakhula's house.

"Pregnancy is not a disease Siyakhula, you should have told me." Yes, I am still there.

"I know and I'm sorry," he brings my hand up and kisses it. "The nurse says Phangizitha has been coming here a lot."

Well, MaMbatha is his mother. There is nothing wrong with him visiting her.

"So?" I question, wanting to know where he is going with this.

“She overheard him talking about taking you away, it’s all he talks about when he visits. He’s got some sick obsession over you. MaMbatha was probably trying to warn us.” He delivers with a clenching jaw, almost like the thought of Phangi taking me away makes him sick in the stomach.

“I will never let him take me away.” I would rather die than go with that man.

Siyakhula gives no reply, I sense worry spewing from him.

He scratches his nape and sighs, confirming my assumptions.

“Phangi won’t do anything to me, I promise. I see him at work every day and he hasn’t tried anything. If he really wanted to harm me, he would have done it already.”

He disagrees with me by shaking his head, “Vuyo has been tailing you. That’s the only thing stopping Phangizitha from going ahead with his sick plan.”

He grits his teeth, and I swear I heard him click his tongue.

“Okay, so what’s going to happen? Is the trip cancelled?” It would be a shame. I was looking forward to a weekend of relaxation.

“We are still going. At this point, it’s better to stay clear of SA until Mhlauli finds Phangizitha.”

Phangi is missing? Siyakhula pulls me into his arms, holding me tighter.

“He called Mhlauli today, apparently he transferred his assets to him. I don’t know what his plan is, but it has to do with leaving the country. Of course if his plans still involve you, he won’t leave without you.” His delivery is full of concern.

How do I convince Siyakhula that I won’t let his brother take me?

“What’s our plan, then?” I ask.

“Like I said, we have to leave South Africa for a while.”

“To where?”

Please don’t say Iceland... Please don’t say Iceland.

“Mozambique.”

Amen!

“Your taste in holiday destinations eludes me, Khula.” I grumble, shifting away from him.

“What’s wrong with Mozambique?” He did not just ask me that.

I decide to disappoint him and ask what time we’re leaving for Mozambique.

“In the morning, don’t tell anyone about this. Not even your closest friends and most importantly, do not post about it on that nosy app.”

He means Instagram, and I don’t have close friends. My closest friend and I haven’t spoken in months, we drifted after that whole sex tape saga.

Hlelo hasn’t tried to reach out, I know she is still alive because she is forever posting on Instagram. She views my IG stories and sometimes leaves a heart. It’s not only up to her to reach out, I guess I am not mentally stable to entertain friends.

Maybe we can start over when we come back from Mozambique.

“My lips are sealed and my fingers are numb, I won’t say anything, neither will I type about it.” I promise.

The corner of his mouth twitches, for a second I think he will laugh but he disappoints.

“Let’s go shopping then, I need new clothes.” I stand, pulling him up with me.

He is hesitant, and I am not taking no for an answer.

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SIYAKHULA

After hours of Siza dragging me from one shop to the next, we end up at a flea market. There's some kind of music festival, vendors are scattered on all corners. The noise is torture to my ears.

I am not into this, but it seems to make her happy. I have to endure the distress just so the smile on Siza's face lasts longer.

"What is it you're looking for again?" I ask, pushing through the crowd. My hand is tightly gripped on hers, I can't afford to lose sight of her. I have never been swamped by such a crowd it's like someone opened a can of worms.

"Sandals." She replies, admiring every item that catches her eye.

"What do you need them for?"

"You can't be in Mozambique and not go to the beach. I need three pairs, help me pick." Her hand slips from mine.

She's trying on a brown pair of sandals, I should help her pick so we leave early.

I don't know what I'm looking at. These shoes look the same to me.

“Women.” I hear someone say behind me and turn to the tall chubby man with a bald head.

Confused by his statement, I stare blankly.

“I’m here with my wife, she wandered off somewhere. We’ve been here for eight hours and I still don’t understand why because she hasn’t bought anything.” He’s making conversation.

I don’t speak unless spoken to and it has to be with someone I am accustomed with.

“That’s why we love them.” I reply, eager to leave this place. The crowd seems to be multiplying.

The man laughs out loud, like I made a joke.

“Where is your wife?” His question has me whipping my eyes over my shoulder. She’s gone.

That terrible feeling when someone you love disappears sinks to my stomach. All kinds of thoughts run through my mind. Phangizitha is the first.

“Siza!” I call out to her, eyes inspecting the crowded place. There is no way I will spot her here. What possessed her to think of coming to this place? I shouldn’t have agreed.

“Siza!!” Amidst the loud music, loud laughter and commotion. My panic and quick steps stand out the most, people stare but no one bothers to ask what the matter is.

Where will I start looking for Siza? Right now, my head is thinking the worst, my biggest fear. What if Phangizitha has abducted her like he said he would?

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PHANGI

He’s made it his mission to know where Siza is, with whom and what she’s up. It’s an easy job, he would do it in his sleep.

Today he followed them here, and the big crowd made it easy for him to get closer, and with a gun pressed to her side; force her to his car for a little chat.

Not once has she shed a tear, or shown an ounce of fear. She is fuming though. She hasn’t expressed her anger as yet, just fiery eyes that bore right into his skull.

“You look beautiful every time I see you.” His mouth curves into a beautiful smile.

Siza suppresses an eye roll as she sets her eyes out the window, mentally hoping to catch a glimpse of Siyakhula.

“Why am I here, Phangizitha?” It sounds like she is warning him.

“Down to business I see.” Phangi arrogantly replies. It must be the gun giving him so much confidence.

“I want us to talk about our future.” He announces.

He’s the only one who thinks they have a future together. Siza snarls, her face turning sour.

“What future? I told you I want nothing to do with you.” Yeah... looks like she wasn’t loud nor clear. Otherwise, they wouldn’t be here.

“Oh honey, I think we will have a future after my dear brother goes back to prison.”

“What are you talking about?” Her gaze stays on him, she will miss the truth if she dares to blink.

“I have been quite busy on my side, thank you for asking about my health. So I happened to bump into a strikingly beautiful colored woman and you know what she told me?”

His brows lift as he waits for an answer, and laugh when she gives him nothing but a blank stare.

“My dear brother was once a criminal, I am talking heists. Bank robbery and murder.” Phangi opens Pandora’s box, one Siza has taken a peek into.

“I know, he told me.” She reveals with confidence that shocks Phangi out of his socks.

“And you stayed? What has he done to you? The Siza I know would never have stayed with a criminal.”

“The Siza you know is a child who thinks she is entitled to everything. But the Siza you are looking at is a grown woman who will do anything to protect her kids and her man. Don’t try me, Phangizitha, I will not go down without a fight.”

Feisty!

Phangi likes it, he purrs like a cat only for Siza to shiver disgustedly.

“I guess it’s okay that you know, the police don’t though. I mean that’s the only reason my brother is not in jail and the fact that we have a powerful man as a father. I surrender to Mlamuli, he would do anything for his children.” He tops his statement with mocking laughter and continues blabbering.

“He’s good, but he makes mistakes as well. Like not destroying siyakhula’s criminal file. I found it in his safe, cracking the code

was so easy. It's Siyakhula's birthday, typical, right?" Phangi is not happy at all. Mlamuli has a favorite child, it's bloody Siyakhula.

"What are you trying to do, Phangi?" Siza questions.

"Nothing, I just think criminals belong behind bars. Justice needs to be served. If that file gets to the wrong hands, it's bye-bye lover." Phangi states.

"Why are you doing this? Siyakhula is your brother." She's hurt. Never in her wildest dreams did she dream of this day.

"I want you back with me, everything is ready. We will go away from here, start afresh where Siyakhula won't see you. You are mine, you belong with me Siza. I saw you first, my brother stole you from me."

"I am not a thing to be stolen." Siza snaps.

"If that were the case, we would still be together." Phangi retorts.

"I don't love you anymore Phangizitha. Can't you let this go, please?"

"What about the love I have for you? What should I do with it?"

“You will get over it, eventually. If I ever come back to you, things won’t be the way they were. I can never love you again, Phangi.”

“I guess we will see when we get there. I promise I will treat you well, I’ll be a good father to our babies. The quads will call me dad, I’ll spoil them and...”

Siza shakes her head and interjects, “Stop, I don’t want to hear it.”

It’s crazy that Phangi has thought this far.

“I bought us a house,” Phangi continues to blabber as if Siza did not utter a word. “I won’t tell you where because you will report to my brother. The house is bigger than Siyakhula’s house. You are going to love it, Siza. You should see the baby nursery. The quads are going to love it.”

“I don’t want anything from you, Phangizitha.”

“That won’t stop me from giving you everything.” He starts the car.

Siza’s panic leaps, she thinks of screaming for help, but the gun in his hand is her biggest enemy right now.

“What are you doing? You said you only wanted to talk. Stop the car.” Pleading with him is futile.

“Did I say that? I don’t remember.” He grins from across. “I have a surprise for you, don’t worry I will bring you back.”

“Phangi please, Siyakhula will worry about me.”

He would stop had he cared, instead he laughs.

“What a greedy bastard, he wants you with him 24/7.”

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SIYAKHULA

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The flea market closed, there was still no sign of Siza. With the help of Vuyo and Mhlauli, we drove around the neighbourhood searching for her and asking people if they have seen her.

Two hours have passed, she is still nowhere to be found. I arrive home, thinking I will find her waiting for me. The house is empty, there is no sign that she was here.

What's worse is that I don't know where to start looking, heck I don't know if she is still alive.

I am doing my best not to be negative for her sake.

The doorbells rings, Siza has her own keys. Even so, I pray that it's her behind the door.

“Nadine?”

What is she doing here?

“Why are you not taking my calls?” She forces her way into the house.

“What?” With no place to land, my wrath lands on her.

“Siyakhula, we have to go to the hospital now.” She orders.

I do not like the tone she uses with me.

“Nadine, I have a life. You can’t order me like I am your husband.”

“You were my husband before that little girl took you from me.” I will perish if I continue to entertain Nadine.

“I was never yours, and Siza is my woman. Respect her...”

“Spare me, not interested.” She cuts in. “Your son collapsed, we have to go to the hospital.”

Olive collapsed, yet she made time to come here?

“Is this a joke?” I don’t trust anything that comes out of her mouth.

“Damn you Siyakhula. Olive is sick and you know it. You know he needs a heart transplant. Why are you ignorant to that fact? Don’t you care about your son?”

I don’t have time for this.

“Olive is on the waiting list, I applied for a heart transplant. What do you want from me?” She narrows her eyes at me, like I am responsible for Olive’s illness.

“You have money, can’t you get him a heart on the black market?” She murmurs as if there are people around us.

“Do you ever listen to the things you say? I could get arrested. Are you stupid, Nadine?” I snap.

Nadine recoils, “What happened Siyakhula?”

She touches my hand, I yank back and create distance between us.

“With what?” I ask.

“Us. We were closer than anything— Inseparable.” She closes in on me.

“Us?”

“Yes us. There was a time when I was the only girl in your life, the only one you saw.”

Why does this not shock me?

“We were young.”

“That doesn’t mean anything, Khula. You protected me and cared for me, now all you ever talk about is Siza.”

The audacity to raise her voice at me in my house.

“How many times must I tell you that we were young? Why are you pushing this? What do you hope to gain from this, Nadine?”

This woman did not come here for Olive, otherwise she wouldn't be asking all this nonsense.

“Why are you denying what you feel for me? You know you love me, you're just blinded by Siza that's all.”

I stride to the kitchen to get a glass of water, obviously she follows me.

“Answer me, Khula.”

“I am in love with Siza. I love and respect her, stay away from me and my family.” This warning does not affect Nadine. She is a stubborn woman, hard headed and believes she is right about everything.

“Okay, I will leave you alone if you answer this question. If we were never separated, would you have married me instead?”

“No.” I am confident in my answer. “Siza is the one for me, she's always been and always will be.”

“I know you don’t mean that, Khula.” Her arms wrap around my middle, catching me off guard. “You’re only saying this to hurt me, just look deep in your heart...”

“Stop it.” I yank myself from her grip. “I will not allow this behaviour.”

“Siyakhula?” Siza’s voice forces me to look up. She’s here, frozen at the door with tears in her eyes. Relief floods through me as I rush to her and envelope her in my arms.

“Gundi, you’re okay.”

She huffs, “I leave my fiancé alone for two seconds and hurricane Nadine descends.”

Siza quips, casting an evil eye at Nadine.

“You do not get to talk to me like that.” Nadine defends herself, targeting my pregnant fiancé whom is more than ready to strike back.

“I did not to talk to you, I talked about you.” Siza audaciously retorts.

“Hey!” I snap, using myself as a wall between them, right before Nadine puts her hands on Siza.

“Siyakhula, teach this bi...”

“What did I say Nadine?” I have to resort to yelling, and preying on her.

Her eyes become as wide as saucers as she staggers back, away from my predatory stance.

“Siya...”

“Get the hell out of my house, don’t ever come back unless invited.” I grunt.

“What about our son? Olive is...”

“Olive is more than welcome to visit his father’s house. Stop using him to get to me, now get the hell out.”

“Khula please. He’s at the hospital right now, we have to go see him.” Nadine continues to use my son as a card to get to me.

“Go, Siza and I will follow suit.” I instruct.

She’s hesitant but eventually takes off in a fit of rage, pushing Siza on her way out.

“Voetsek!” Siza yells after her.

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SIZA

“Baby daddy!” I randomly say, happy to see him. The smile on my face fades at the panic in his eyes.

He drags me into his arms, “Where have you been?” -
Siyakhula.

That stupid fool Phangizitha took me for a long drive

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just to torture Siyakhula. It’s sad to see that things are turning out for the worst.

I have to control the situation, keep it cool because only then will I be able to think straight and make sound decisions.

Phangi expects me tomorrow morning, his plan is that I leave Siyakhula for him.

“I got lost in the crowd, I’m sorry.” I should have thought of a better lie on the way home.

“Don’t lie to me, Siza. What happened?”

“I told you, I got lost. You saw how crowded that place was, I looked for you everywhere Khula.

The sadness on his face fills me with regret.

I can’t tell him about Phangi. Siyakhula has a short fuse, he will cancel our trip and dedicate his time to finding Phangizitha. The

police would be looking for him by then because I am not leaving him, and Phangi will run to the police because of that.

“Don’t ever do that to me again, Gundi.”

I can feel the loud thudding of his heart the second he presses my head on his chest.

“I’m sorry.”

His anger is justifiable.

Getting no response from him, I follow quietly as he leads me to our bedroom.

He runs us a bath, it’s awkward sharing a bath tub with him while he is not talking to me. He leaves me to clean the bathtub and heads back to the bedroom.

I find him in bed, still has a frown on his face. I really scared him back there, at least I owe him an apology.

“I don’t like it when you’re upset with me.” I start, hoping for a smile but no, Siyakhula Mbatha is a tough nut to crack.

I have to find his soft spot, “I’m sorry.” I repeat in the cutest tone I can find.

“Why would you do that, Siza?”

Clearly, trying to be cute didn't work.

"I wasn't thinking, I was lost in the spirit of shopping and..."

I sound so stupid.

"You were careless? What is wrong with you?" He says it so calmly but in an offensive way.

"I made a stupid mistake Khula, okay, get over it already. I said I was sorry, what do you want from me?"

Oops! I didn't mean to yell.

Siyakhula takes one look at me before facing the ceiling again.

"I want you to be careful and stop being selfish."

How does he manage to remain calm, yet still carry anger in his voice?

"Siyakhula relax, nothing happened, I'm fine."

"Maybe this might be a joke to you but not to me, I will not lose you."

Haibo! This man.

I slide under the covers, I am tired and sleepy. Can't we argue tomorrow?

"Please accept my apology so we can move on. I don't want us to fight." I plead.

Finally his eyes find me. He stirs on the bed until he is facing me, he puts his hand on my waist and kisses my lips.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to be rude. I just... I don’t ever want to feel like that again. You were right next to me, then I turned and you were gone, that killed me, Siza. I remembered what he had said and I can’t let that happen, I can’t let him take you. He’s sick and dangerous, I swear when I get my hands on him, I will kill him.”

I hope it won’t come to that.

I am not trying to have a murderer as the father of my kids.

I heave a long sigh, “Please don’t talk like that. I don’t want to talk about it anymore, I don’t even want to think about it. Please let’s not ruin our night.”

The whole conversation itself is a mood killer.

Siyakhula reaches out his hand to caress my cheek. “I’m sorry I got angry, but I am not sorry for wanting to protect you. Siza, you’re more important than anything and I need to know you’ll always be safe.”

Maybe it was careless of me to want to go to the market.

“I will be careful next time.” I’m closing this subject.

He sits up and says, "I have to go see Olive at the hospital. I doubled security, there are men all over the yard. Vuyo is somewhere in the house, you are safe."

I didn't have doubts, I feel the safest when I'm home. He kisses me and leaves after I instruct him to create a 2metre safe distance between him and Nadine.

I can't sleep, I think the babies are not settled today, my lower back hurts. The pain is not severe, but it's there. My belly feels hard as a rock, come to think of it, the babies have been awfully quiet today. I lay on my side and cuddle a pillow, placing it against my belly.

It must be because of the stress I have been under.

My phone buzzes with a text message from Phangi. He's sent me a picture of a nursery.

Phangi: I painted the nurse by myself, please tell me you are proud of me. I can't wait for you to see it, if it were up to me, you would come over right now. But I know my brother won't let you, he is controlling you. Don't worry baby, it will change soon I promise.

Me: I'm not leaving him.

Phangi: Yes you are. (Angry emoji)

Me: I am not leaving Siyakhula. Do your worst Phangi, get him arrested. You know your father will pull some strings and he'll be out before the judge convicts him."

This fool has no idea we are leaving the country.

Phangi: You are making a mistake Sizalobuhle Gumedede. (Explosion emoji)

I blue tick him and block his number.

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SIZA

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I haven't heard from Phangi, it's as if he disappeared from the face of the earth. In a way I am glad he is not bothering me. I am hoping he got the message loud and clear. I want nothing to do with him. If it happens that he reports Siyakhula, Mlamuli will have to clean his son's mess.

I woke up extra early today, I'm very eager to leave the country before Phangizitha does anything stupid.

We are at the airport waiting for boarding, there are men keeping a watch on us as we speak. Some are assigned to search the area to make sure we are not being followed.

I'm on the phone with my father while looking at Siyakhula, he is buying overpriced coffee at Starbucks.

Phakathwayo is worried about Simengaye and thinking of getting her professional help. I feel so bad for leaving at a time like this.

I can only keep her in my prayers.

Siyakhula is coming back to where I am with a large Coffee in his hand and a bag of goodies. I have to say goodbye to my father and promise to call when we arrive.

“I got you blueberry muffins.”

“Thanks.” I dig in. “Aren’t you going to eat something?”

He didn’t eat anything this morning.

“I’m not hungry.” You can’t force a man.

“So, where is this resort we’ll be staying in?” I hope it’s not at a village. My poor skin will be fried.

“It’s in the western part of the country, Vuyo organized everything for us.”

Western means rural, right? Did God honestly let me love this man?

I don’t ask further, afraid I will hate the trip before we arrive.

The speakers boom just in time, calling all passengers to board. We both stand and join the line for boarding. In no time, we are

in the plane and loading our bags in the overhead compartment.

“I want to sit by the window, it might be my first, and last time.” My statement earns me a glare. I need to learn to keep my mouth shut.

He hates it when I say I might be doing something for the last time.

Siyakhula is holding my hand throughout the flight. Today he is the clingy one. I have zero complaints.

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I’m relieved when we land, airplanes make me nervous. I hold on to Siyakhula’s hand as we make our way out the airport.

“I don’t like the atmosphere in this place.” I introduce my worry.

The air is dull and thick, there is something dark about this place.

“Why?” Siyakhula asks.

“I don’t know, you know when you’re at a place you are not supposed to be and you get this urge to turn back home.” This is how I feel.

“You must be tired, I will look after you while you rest. The resort is not far from here.” He says.

I must be tired like he said. My hand clutches around his, to be honest, it’s a beautiful country. I can’t seem to enjoy the scenery though.

There’s a car waiting for us, the driver is bubbly and very talkative. He reminds me of our Uber drivers back home.

Siyakhula opens the door for me, my feet refuse to move.

“What’s wrong?” He questions.

I would tell him if I knew.

“Can we take the bus?” I don’t know where that came from, I guess I don’t want to travel with a car.

“There are no buses this side ma’am. You will have to travel to town in order to catch a bus.” The driver butts in.

“We’ll explore the city tomorrow, get in.” At Siyakhula’s request, I enter the vehicle.

I sit close to him, my head on his shoulder.

My heart is sitting in my throat, and my knees are weak. What are these babies doing to me? I will never let him get me pregnant again.

“Are you okay?” Siyakhula nudges me, I look up and nod.

“You are too quiet, I’m starting to miss you.” He teases.

“I’m here...” I let out a long breath. “Can I ask you for something?”

“Anything,” he says intertwining our fingers.

“Please tell me you love me, I need to hear it.” He holds my chin, brings my face closer to his and pecks my lips.

“I love you.” He confesses.

“I love you more.”

He pulls me in to cuddle and I snuggle into his neck, he kisses the top of my head.

“I know, I’m the only man you love.” Smug.

Thirty minutes away from the airport, we’re stuck in traffic. This side of town reminds me of Noord Street back home, I have been there once with Hlelo. Too many people, too many cars and too many vendors.

“What’s going on?” Siyakhula’s question slurps me back to his presence. I lift my eyes to the front, it looks like there is a march. Again, I am reminded of my country.

“Angry farmers.” The drivers shrugs.

Taking a closer look, I notice the strikers are a group of men wearing balaclavas and face masks. They are carrying machetes and butcher knives.

“Are we safe here?” I ask, concerned we might get caught up in something we know nothing about.

Siyakhula squeezes my hand, “Is there another route we can use?”

“No sir, unfortunately this is the only route.”

That can’t be possible, those men look angry and ready to kill.

I would be at ease if they were singing like back home, then I’d know it’s a peaceful march. These men look like they are skilled in killing people.

I would rather trust my life with Ted Bundy than them.

“But what are they angry about that they would walk around carrying machetes? Is that even legal?” I ask.

Where are the police anyway?

“I am not from this side of town, I wouldn’t know.” This driver is proving to be useless.

“Let me ask that guy.” The driver calls a man passing by our vehicle. He too is wearing a face mask. A shudder runs through me as his bloodshot eyes meet mine.

My stomach becomes a whirlwind, I think I’m going to throw up.

“What’s going on?” That’s the driver asking the strange looking man.

“Word has it that there is a wealthy foreigner that bought half of the farms in the village and is going to build apartments on the farms. We are going to lose our jobs, our children will be thrown out of school.” He’s roaring with anger.

I can’t begin to imagine how they must be feeling.

“He landed in the country today, we are here to stop him from reaching the village.” His eyes keep running to us at the back. I cling on to Siyakhula and timidly shift closer. He sort of shields me with his big build.

The farmer keeps a menacing face as he points at Siyakhula, his eyebrows crumpling in a frown.

“It’s you

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you're the foreigner who came to take our jobs."

No, this man must be smoking banga. Not my Khula.

"I don't know what you are talking about baba, I am not the man you are looking for, you are mistaken." Siyakhula denies.

"I am not blind, your picture was plastered all over the village." He holds up crumpled photograph of Siyakhula, my entire world crumbles beneath me.

My grip tightens on Siyakhula's shirt, "Please drive, bhuti."

I instruct the driver, fear making my voice shake.

"We can't go forward nor back, ma'am. There is no way out of this traffic."

He's right, there are cars everywhere.

"Get out of the car," the man bangs the window, his breathing heavy and anger written all over his face. "I found him, he's here."

He calls the other men.

"Siyakhula." I cling on to his arm.

"Calm down, nothing will happen." He's cradling my face as he says this.

I want to believe him but more of them are coming this way. Siyakhula extends his hand to open the door on my side, it's locked.

"Unlock the door." Siyakhula commands the driver. Seconds feel like hours as we wait for this man who has not moved an inch.

"I said open the damn door." He repeats, the driver looks back with a smug look on his face.

"Sorry, I'm afraid I can't do this."- The driver.

Ooh Lord, this is not happening to us.

He is one of them.

It's too late for us to run out of the car. Like a swarm of bees, the angry mob surrounds the vehicle.

Only now the driver decides to unlock the doors, he jumps out and weaves his way to safety.

"Siza hold..." Siyakhula doesn't finish talking, someone has smashed the window on his side. He shields me from shattering glass by covering me with his build.

I'm startled by another window shattering, this time it's on my side.

"Siyakhula!" I scream, hiding my face on his chest and clasping my arms around him.

Siyakhula keeps shouting that we are innocent, he might as well be a stray dog barking at vicious pitbulls. These people are too angry to listen to us.

Hands grab my shoulders from behind me, they are pulling me away from Siyakhula's arms.

"Khula!" I scream.

A crippling fear settles in, and makes it hard for my lungs to function the way God intended when he put me in my mother's womb.

"Siza don't let go." Siyakhula grips my wrist, three men are trying to drag him out of the car. He's hit on the head with a thick log, I think I heard his skull crack. Or I'm imagining it, everything that's currently happening.

"Don't let go." He yells above the noise and amidst the pain, still pulling me to him. I'm a crying mess, bawling my eyes out. What did we do to deserve this?

“Please... stop... stop.” My voice is not that loud, this is all I’ve got. A pathetic desperate cry. They can’t hear me, these men. They are akin to wild animals, and lack humanity.

Siyakhula receives another blow to the head, and another one and another one, until his hands start to loosen around my wrists.

His bloodshot eyes roll to the back of his head. Suddenly, I see thick redness on his temple. At first it comes thick and strong, the next, the blood is gushing down his face.

“Gu... Gundi...” He weakly calls my name just as they drag him out of the car, leaving me screaming in agony.

“Please, stop. Please...” I beg for his life.

It’s pointless, they are not listening.

Siyakhula is on the ground with the angry mob hovering over him like hungry animals, and in a split second they are crushing him with their feet.

I scream, fighting against the men holding me back.

I’m pulled out of the car, and in this instant, a large pair of arms clasp around me from behind.

I yelp, trying to set myself free but the person locks his arms over my shoulders. My knees weaken, giving in and send me to the floor. But the person holds me up.

His lips brush against my ear before he whispers, “It’s okay Siza, it will be over soon.”

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BONISILE

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For the first time since he was released from prison, Khuzimpi decided to go to church. He took the girls with. Not wanting to see my mother, I stayed behind.

I will see church when the guilt of having unsolicited feelings for my pastor has subsided.

It's insane how he is always on my mind, sometimes he appears in my dreams. It could be that we spend so much time together.

The house is clean, lunch is ready. I'm waiting for everyone to come home from church, Khuzimpi had said something about a family Sunday. He wants us to go watch movies with the girls, I am not sure about being seen in public with him.

People talk.

There's a buzz at the gate, it can't be them. I'm expecting them around 12:30.

I hurry outside when the person starts hitting the gate with a stone. I almost gasp in shock seeing Nomazulu, she's carrying a black dustbin bag.

Her face welcomes a frown, "Bonisile? What are you doing here?"

"I work here." This woman is intimidating even with that big scar on her face.

"Since when?" She takes a step forward, attempting to walk in. I block her path.

"You can't come in," I politely say.

"I can't come into my house? Are you insane?" She barks.

"Pastor Gumede said I shouldn't let you in." I tell her.

I knew it was going to be a difficult task when Khuzimpi gave me these instructions, he doesn't want the girls to see Nomazulu yet.

Like he said she would, Nomazulu starts yelling and swearing. My mother's ass is mentioned, my life of poverty and dowdy looks.

"Get out of my way," she pushes me but I remain rooted. I am not going to lose my job because of this woman.

“Please go, or wait out here for the pastor. He will be home soon.” I say.

Nomazulu should take this up with Khuzimpi and not involve me. I am only following instructions.

There is a car coming, it's the pastor. He parks in front of the gate, I hear him tell the girls to stay in the car as he dashes out.

“What are you doing here?” He whisper shouts, frowning down at Nomazulu.

“Mpi, this lowlife refuses to let me in.” She pokes my head and pushes me.

“You are not welcomed here Nomazulu, go back to where you came from.” He exclaims, looking back at the girls who are watching through the window.

“I am your wife Mpi, this is our house. You can't chase me out. I have every right to be here. Suka wena.” The last part is said to me as she pushes her way past the gate.

Khuzimpi rushes after her before she could take another step.

“This house is under Siza's name, have you forgotten? I bought it before we got married. You have nothing Nomazulu. We got married out of community of property.”

Nomazulu looks confused, she bites her lower lip as she stares at Khuzimpi.

“I don’t care about any of that, I am your wife. I belong here, with you.” She insists, and turns to continue walking towards the house. Again, Khuzimpi stops her.

“It’s over Nomazulu, get out of here.” –Khuzimpi.

“What’s over?” Her voice trembles.

“This marriage, I filed for a divorce. The reason you haven’t received your copy of the papers is because your address was unknown.”

“Mpi?” Tears fill her eyes. “You can’t do this to me, please. I have nowhere to go. I have nothing.”

Khuzimpi shrugs, “You are not my problem anymore.”

“Daddy!” Simi comes running, I didn’t see her leave the car. Ndlelezhle is not far behind.

“My babies,” Nomazulu opens her arms for them. They run into their father’s arms instead.

Pain covers Nomazulu’s face, she grips Khuzimpi’s hand and starts to cry.

He steps away from her touch and glances at me, “Boni take the girls into the house.”

“What?” Nomazulu’s jaw drops.

I scoop Simi up and take Ndlelezhle’s hand.

“Let go of my kids,” Nomazulu tries to grab Simi from my arms but Khuzimpi grabs her wrists and gestures that I hurry.

He's my boss and I have to do as he says, if Nomazulu decides to kill me, it will be on him.

“No, I want my kids Mpi. Give me my kids.” She’s screaming like a mad woman. “They are my kids.”

“You lost the right to claim them when you put their lives in danger.” Khuzimpi retorts.

“You are crazy.” Nomazulu yells, she doesn’t care that she might be scaring the kids.

As we get to the door, I put Simi down and tell them to go to their room. They nod and shut the door as soon as they walk in.

I like things, so I stayed behind to see how things turn out between Khuzimpi and Nomazulu.

“There is nothing for you here, Nomazulu.” He grabs her by the hand and starts dragging her out.

“No, I’m going to fight you, Khuzimpi. I raised those children, they are mine. You can’t give them to another woman.”

I’m probably the other woman.

Khuzimpi doesn’t say anything, he closes the gate and turns to me.

“Let’s go inside.” He leads the way, completely ignoring Nomazulu screaming and banging the gate.

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SIYAKHULA

I have lost sight of Siza, her screams have stopped and that scares the shit out of me. It’s more scary than the thought dying in the hands of these men pounding me.

“Siza...” I thought my voice would come out loud and clear but it fails. I’m on the ground, curled like pretzel, taking every kick and thrash.

A whistle blows, causing my attackers to flee. Voices rise around me, the streets are filled with men in uniform. I’m guessing they are police. I can see nothing with my failing

eyesight and spinning head, every bone in my body is in sheer pain.

“Sir, are you okay?” I hear a male voice.

As if answering his question, I cough and pain shoots through my chest.

“Sir—sir,” the man leans down over me, his gaze worried as he hovers. Either I am going blind or losing consciousness. The last thing I hear is a voice shouting, “call an ambulance.”

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Bright lights, loud noise and a rattling bed. I blink my eyes open, managing to fight the haze surrounding me.

Panic is the first feeling to attack me, then pain.

I rattle on the bed, desperate to move my body that’s screaming with pain. It feels like something heavy is pinning me down on the mattress.

“Sir, calm down.” I look around to see a lady in a nurse’s uniform.

“Where am I?” My voice comes out as a hoarse whisper, it hurts to talk.

“The hospital, you were brought in this morning.”

This morning? I was with Siza this morning. What time is it?

It's still light outside, that means the sun hasn't set.

"How are you feeling?"

Like a train ran over me.

"Siza... where is Siza?"

"Who is that?"

"My fiancé, she's pregnant."

"You were brought in here alone, there was no one accompanying you." The nurse reveals.

I feared those men might take Siza. Who is behind this? Why would they lie to those farmers? Were they really farmers or it was an excuse to commit a crime?

The nurse clasps my shoulders

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pushing me down on the bed. That's when I realize I'm pushing myself up.

"Sir calm down, please. You were badly injured."

"It hurts." I wince at the pain attacking me.

"It's a miracle that you survived such a beating."

No, my heart is slowly tearing. It hurts.

“Need to make a call.” It takes me a while to get the request out.

I have to call Mhlauli, and Vuyo. Siza is missing. Where will I begin to look for her? We are at a foreign country.

“The police are here, they want to ask you a few questions. I will get the doctor, he will decide if you are fit to answer any questions.”

She leaves, ignoring my plea to use a phone.

I try to get out of bed, pain sends me back down. How am I still alive when I’m in so much pain?

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A man in a black hoodie suddenly walks in, his face is half covered. He hands me a phone and strides out without any explanation.

“Hiiii!” The high pitched voice comes from the phone, it’s Phangizitha. He’s staring right at me.

“I thought I should do a video call, just to check in on my big bro.” He says.

I'm confused for a while, how does he know I'm here?

"Shit! Those men did a good job rearranging your face." He laughs. "You look ugly."

I get it now, he is behind the attack? I should have known.

"You bastard..." I wince, I hate that he gets to see me in pain and helpless.

"I'm a genius aren't I? You must be feeling like a big loser, big bro. Asking yourself how I was ahead of you."

He's right, I feel like such an idiot right now.

"Did you know my father's house is bugged? That I know everything that happens there?"

"You sick bastard, why would you bug your own father's house."

"Simple, I wanted to know what you and my baby were up to. Having mom staying there worked in my favor, I just knew that during one of your visits, something would come up and hey—here we are today."

I could vent and tell him how fucked up he is but that won't bring Siza back.

"I took the last flight to Mozambique right after Siza rejected my offer to elope with me. While in Mozambique, there were

men keeping a watch on you and reporting back to me, your little bro has eyes everywhere. Money can even buy you a seat in heaven.” He chuckles it out.

“I spent the entire night planning my revenge, the farmers, and the driver were all paid by me.”

He speaks with pride. I don’t care about any of that anymore, I need to get to Siza.

“Where is Siza?” The words leave my mouth through gritted teeth. Had I been stronger, I would be out there looking for her. Bloody hell, I can’t move a muscle.

“Siza is with me, where she belongs.” He grins widely. “We are going far away, to a place where you will never find us.”

“You sick son of a bitch, where is she?”

He smiles and flips the camera to the side, he’s sitting in the car and in the back seat is Siza tied up.

There is a gag in her mouth, her eyes widen with desperation as she sees me.

She tears up, and squirms to probably release herself from the ropes binding her.

“Gundi, I’m going to find you baby. I promise.”

Phangi bursts out in laughter, and turns the camera back to himself.

“Find her where? At the bottom of the deep blue sea? Good luck with that brother.”

He smiles with his whole face before turning the camera around revealing the sea in front him.

Oh God no!

Instantly, I’m aware of his sick plan. My stomach drops.

“Isn’t it beautiful?” He says, excitedly. His face appears on the camera.

“It’s going to be glorious when the ocean swallows us, you are lucky I am giving you first row tickets.” He laughs.

My heart stops, I’m not sure if I’m still alive or stuck in a bad dream.

“No, no. Phangizitha, please don’t.”

I plead while pushing my painful body up, I want to get up and run to Siza. This bastard made sure I won’t be physically fit to stand on my feet.

“Stop pleading, you sound ridiculous.”

“Phangizitha, she’s pregnant, can’t you see that? Why are you doing this?” I’m yelling, my fingers tightening around the phone in my hand.

“If I can’t have her, you can’t either.” The car moves.

I panic and yell, “Wait. I will walk away, you can have Siza. I will leave the country and you’ll never hear from me again, please don’t kill her. She’s pregnant Phangizitha.” I am at his mercy, and he is enjoying seeing me grovel.

“Who are you to give me what is already mine?” He is looking at me with madness in his eyes.

“Phangi, I am begging you, don’t do this... don’t kill her.” I feel helpless lying in this hospital bed. I will never forgive myself if anything ever happens to Siza.

I can hear Siza’s moans and cries, I’m desperate to see her face and tell her I will find her. But what I say to her may decide her fate, Phangizitha will snap.

“I will disappear, it will be like I never existed. Just... don’t kill her please. Ngiyacela bhut’ wam.”

Don’t kill my love.

“Where are you? I will come there, and we’ll talk.”

I swallow the lump in my throat.

Phangizitha peers over his shoulder, he's looking at Siza.

The camera is flipped over, showing me the view of the ocean. My eyes widen as the car starts moving, I jolt to my feet, ignoring the excruciating pain. My body is not strong yet, I fall on my knees, loudly groaning in pain.

“Stop... Phangizitha stop.” I scream, tears pouring down my face. The car is not stopping. Why is he not stopping? Siza's muffled cries pierce through my ears, they will forever be engraved on my soul.

The door flies, three nurses stride in.

“Sir, what are you doing on the floor.” They try to help me up, I push them away.

“Sizalobuhle Gumede, I love you.” Phangi shouts before showing me Siza's terrified face. Her eyes are wet with tears, and she's frantically shaking her head.

“I'm sorry— Gundi, I'm sorry.” I growl, helplessly sobbing.

My chest tightens and I hold my breath as I watch the car fly over the bridge and slowly sinks into the sea.

“Siza!!!”

Season Finale

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For the next five days, rescue missions are sent across the sea to the area the car plummeted, hoping to find survivors to no avail.

The hotel room is buzzing with police officers. Siyakhula was discharged yesterday, four days after the incident.

He is stable, his head injury left him with severe migraines. Other than that, he is recovering.

However, he is slowly losing his mind not knowing if Siza is alive or dead.

Mlamuli and Mhlauli flew to Mozambique the following day of the tragic incident. Khuzimpi is awaiting his visa.

“This is my fiancé we are talking about, my fiancé.” Siyakhula shouts at the police officer who is trying to convince him that they are doing their best to find Siza and Phangizitha, which is not good enough for Siyakhula.

“Let us do our job sir, we wouldn’t be here if we didn’t know what we are doing.”

That's the officer's favourite line. Five days later and he's still singing the same song.

"If you knew what you were doing, Siza would be here with me." Siyakhula barks.

It's all he's been doing lately and he does it so well, not caring about the migraines that won't leave him alone.

Watching from the corner of the room, Mlamuli releases a deep sigh. It's a sigh of defeat, he's never felt so useless before. He's always been able to make things happen with money, but things are different this time.

His first born is drowning in searing pain, while the other is supposedly dead, and if Siyakhula doesn't stop yelling and letting anger get the best of him, he will find himself back in the hospital.

Mlamuli's hands are tied.

He walks up to Siyakhula and pats his shoulder.

"Son calm down please, let the police do their job. They will find them."

Them? That's not what Siyakhula wants, Phangizitha better stay missing. His Gundi is the one he wants home.

“And when will that be? It’s been a week, and there is no sign of her.” His voice breaks, a tear almost escapes. He pulls himself together, pushes back tears and sinks down on the couch, burying his face in his hands.

“Okay, everybody out.” That’s Mhlauli instructing the officers, as soon as he shuts the door after their departure, he sits beside Siyakhula.

“Bhuti!”

“I failed her Mhlauli,” his voice is a pained whisper.

“You have done everything but that.”

Siyakhula looks up at him, “Where is she, then? Why is she not here with me?”

“What if the video was a prank? Phangi loved MaGumede, I don’t think he would ever hurt her.” Mlamuli adds his two cents, of course Phangi was perfect in his eyes.

“Only a fool would believe that,” Siyakhula snorts, standing to his feet. “Phangizitha is crazy, he’s capable of anything. I saw the crazed look in his eyes, he would rather kill Siza than let us be together.”

It has never crossed his mind that his brother would go to such an extent to keep them apart. It will be the end of him if anything happens to Siza and the babies.

The thought of never seeing her again sinks in and drives his senses into the deep end.

“Oh God, I don’t know if Siza is still alive and that scares me to death.” -Siyakhula.

Mhlauli stands to his feet, and pulls his brother into his arms. He wants to tell Siyakhula that he is allowed to cry. However, crying would be accepting that Siza is really gone.

“What am I going to do, I can’t lose my family.” Siyakhula vents.

“You have to be strong. That’s what you need to do, you can’t give up now.”-Mhlauli.

Siyakhula’s body is visibly shaking, Mlamuli frowns as he observes him. It’s at this moment he realizes that his son’s love for Siza runs deep. But his heart can’t be torn in two, he can’t choose one son over the other.

The door suddenly opens, the officer in charge of the investigation dashes in with eyes wide as saucers.

“A body has been found.” There was a better way to say this.

Siyakhula’s heart drops, he stumbles but Mhlauli has him in his arms.

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AT THE GUMEDES

Just when he's been appointed pastor of Living Waters again, filed for divorce and was in the process of getting his life back on track; he receives tragic news from Mozambique that his daughter is swimming with the sharks.

Khuzimpi is beyond devastated, he cannot comprehend the pain he's under. It's too much for him to bear.

If it were not for Bonisile holding everything down, he would have crumbled, bringing the church and his kids down with him.

Women from church hold prayer meetings at his house every day, at first he felt crowded but he's slowly getting a hang of things. They are here to help.

Today is no different, it's midday, the women will be here in two hours.

Their leader is a little early today, way too early.

MaShezi.

She's more dedicated in praying for Siza than anyone who knows how to call on the name of the Lord.

Bonisile walks in to find her mother bustling in the kitchen. Her mood instantly changes, this is one mother who never takes no for an answer.

MaShezi gives her one quick look before attending to the coffee mugs she just removed from the cabinet.

"That took you long, pastor Gumede is waiting for his tea." She's basically complaining like she always does.

Bonisile sighs, loudly that MaShezi catches but she doesn't care.

"Mah, I asked you not to come here without the church women. This is my place of work, what will my boss think?"

MaShezi cackles, this child does not take life seriously.

"Don't tell me you still call him pastor." She stops and places her hands on her hips, glancing at her daughter with condemnation in her eyes.

"Why are you so slow Bonisile? I thought you would be sharing his bed by now."

Bonisile's eyes pop out. The cat is out of the bag, MaShezi has revealed her intentions.

“Mah?” She looks back to check if Khuzimpi is nowhere close. “Is that why you got me this job? To jump into the pastor’s bed?”

“Yes.” Such confidence is enviable. “You are not getting younger Bonisile, you need to find a man and settle down.”

“And you thought the pastor would be that man?”

“Why not? He’s educated, a man of God and is good with children.” MaShezi’s confidence seems to stretch, meanwhile Bonisile is beside herself with shock.

“Had I known, I wouldn’t have agreed. I am your daughter mah, how can you sell me off like that?” Her voice rises, and gets on her mother’s nerves.

“Relax, don’t be so dramatic Boni. I was merely looking out for you, you should be thanking me. Men don’t want you, otherwise you would be married with kids.”

“I’m twenty three

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what are you talking about?”

“Exactly, twenty-three, single and no one is looking at you. Do you want to be called a spinster when you’re old and single? Stop with your dramatics and make the pastor some tea. He needs to see that you are able to hold his house together. Another

thing, I hope you are good with those children, he will fall in love with you when he sees how well you treat his kids.”

She turns back to her mugs, humming to one of her favourite church songs.

The lump on Bonisile’s throat is hard to swallow, with her mother’s back turned, she rolls her eyes and rushes out of the kitchen.

She bumps into Khuzimpi on her way, he holds her still so she doesn’t fall.

“Hey?” He tilts his head slightly to look at her. “What’s wrong?”

Bonisile buries her face in her hands to hide her tears.

“Bonisile?”

“I’m fine,” she manoeuvres past him but Khuzimpi clasps his arms around her, with a sigh loosing from his mouth.

“I heard what your mother said.” He says.

Bonisile fiddles nervously against him, she wants to run and hide.

This is the worst thing that could happen to her. How could MaShezi be so vindictive?

Khuzimpi is dealing with a lot, but it means nothing to MaShezi.

He should be in Mozambique, searching for his daughter, not here witnessing trivial fights between a controlling mother and her naïve daughter.

“I am so sorry, you shouldn’t have heard that. I swear that’s not my intention, I didn’t know my mother had such plans for us. I will take my things and leave.” She reasons.

“It’s okay,” Khuzimpi tightens the embrace. “I had a mother once, I know what they are like. Don’t let her words get to you.”

He grabs her chin, forcing her eyes to look at him.

“Don’t go,” Khuzimpi murmurs. “I like having you around and maybe I want you to stay for a very long time.”

He loves her company, and he feels something for her. It’s not that deep yet, but it’s there.

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Things are not looking up back in Mozambique, the sky has darkened and covered the sun that was gloriously swaying in the sky.

They arrive at the sea side, miles away from the bridge where the incident took place.

It's flooded with police cars, and an ambulance.

The news reporters did not miss a chance to broadcast this tragic news, they were one of the first to arrive at the scene.

"Why is it so crowded?" Mhluali asks.

He's frustrated by the invasion of privacy. All they want is to be left alone during this difficult time.

Then again, it would be asking for too much, humans in general are lovers of all things wild and shocking.

"I should have brought my gun to scare off all those gossipmongers."-Mhluali.

It sounds like a joke, but he means it.

Mlamuli who is sitting in the front looks over his shoulder, "Don't act rational out there. Phangizitha has ruined the Donda name enough already."

Really? Whose father is this one, again?

Mhlauli loudly clicks his tongue, it's not a habit otherwise Mlamuli would have cut it out long ago.

They took a cab here, Siyakhula is the first to exit the car.

The first thing his wandering eyes catch is a wrecked car, it must be the one Phangizitha was driving.

Siyakhula hurries toward the scene, and as he attempts to jump over the police tape, he is stopped by one of them.

"Sir this area is restricted."

He doesn't care, he needs to know whose body they found.

A distance from where they are standing, lies a body covered in silver coil.

He looks with horror in his eyes, at this point he is sure his bones are about to jump out of his skin.

The fear of not knowing lives in him, any second now he'll scream. His hands itch, he's ready to punch his way through. Prison be damned.

Siyakhula feels a hand on his shoulder, it instantly calms his demons.

"Take it easy bhuti."

This is Mhlauli's form of comfort, he doesn't know how else to do it.

“Is... is that her?” Siyakhula mumbles under a shuddering breath.

“We are waiting for the family to come and identify the body of the deceased.” Explains the officer.

Deceased! This word feels like a sharp knife plunging into Siyakhula’s heart.

Mhlauli makes sure to keep an arm around his brother’s shoulder.

Mlamuli nears them, and as if he is an important somebody, an officer opens the police tape letting them through.

Siyakhula’s feet freeze, refusing to move. He is not ready to know who is behind that coil.

“Bhuti, let’s go.” Mhlauli takes his hand but Siyakhula won’t move. He shakes his head when his little brother locks eyes with him.

He’s not the only one paralyzed by fear, Mhlauli feels it too. Phangizitha is his brother, he fears losing him.

A loud wail echoes, both their hearts stop. Their father is on his knees, his heart wrenching cries echoing through the open

field. He's holding the deceased in his arms, rocking them back and forth.

"My son! My son!" Pride has gone out the window, Mlamuli couldn't hold it in. His heart has been split into pieces, the evidence is through his loud cries.

Mhlauli's lower lip trembles, tears fill his eyes. He knows Phangizitha's body is the one they found.

"Bh... bhuti." He loses all the strength he was left with and falls butt first on the hard ground, he covers his face with his hands and weeps for his brother.

Siyakhula wants to be there for him, hold him up like he did for him. But he can't, he needs to know if Siza has been found too.

So he treads closer to the team of police officers, on his way, he passes a weeping Mlamuli holding his dead son in his arms.

"Phangi open your eyes, please open your eyes." The voice belongs to Mhlauli. When did he get here?

Siyakhula's heart twists seeing his father and brother in so much turmoil, but he can't bring himself to shedding a single tear for Phangizitha.

One of the officers makes eye contact as he approaches.

“Si... Siza.” Siyakhula’s voice cracks, he’s seeing double. It must be the pounding headache.

“We found these,” the officer holds up two plastic bags. One of them has a ring in it and the other a woman’s shoe. Siyakhula recognizes them. This is one of the shoes Siza was wearing, and the ring looks exactly like her engagement ring.

He snatches the items with shaky hands.

“There is no sign of her, either she was eaten by sharks or she is lost at sea.” These police officers and their insensitive hearts, he is unaware that he just killed Siyakhula Mbatha without actually pulling the trigger.

This time when Siyakhula stumbles backward, there is no one to hold him up. In a second, he’s sitting on the ground, weeping for his beloved.

Finale

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This is not the family gathering Mhlauli had in mind when he pictured the Donda brothers as one again. Phangizitha is in a casket and Siyakhula far from home. Turns out fate had its own plans.

Today is the funeral, everyone has come to pay their last respects, everyone but Siyakhula.

Mhlauli has tried talking to him, but he won't see reason. His big brother wants nothing to do with Phangizitha, even in death. When everyone travelled to Bergville for the funeral, Siyakhula chose to stay in Joburg.

MaMbatha took it the hardest. When Mlamuli broke the news to her, she collapsed. They expected her to break down in sobs, but she hasn't shed a single tear.

MaMbatha is rather livid, she wants answers. Why did Phangizitha do this to his family? He didn't stop to think what his family will go through after his demise.

Maybe if he had died in a more natural way, there would be piercing screams now and again. But the family is too angry to cry. There is tension hovering around.

It's one of the coldest funerals the town has ever experienced.

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KHUZIMPI-

Grieving for loved ones is among the hardest things most people will do in their lives, regardless of the circumstances of the loss. But the families of the ones who have gone missing have an especially horrible situation to face.

To be left without precise knowledge of what really happened to their loved one is a devastating fate.

Siza has been presumed dead, the family held a small memorial service for her and erected a cenotaph (a gravestone without an associated grave). It's six months after the memorial service, Khuzimpi is still not the same.

At the age of thirty-seven life has dealt with him accordingly. He found out his brother and wife have been having an affair.

He's gone through a divorce, his youngest daughter is schizophrenic and he's lost his eldest daughter and grandkids to a tragic death. He's too young for this for Christ's sake.

It can't be a test from God. What could he possibly be testing?

Bonisile is still around. Nothing major has happened between them and nothing will anytime soon.

He's not holding her hostage, she knows where the door is if she wants to go.

However, Bonisile has made it clear that this is where she wants to be. The girls are fond of her, and that's a big thing to Khuzimpi. His children come first.

"This is my official resignation." Says Hendricks, handing him an envelop.

He's stepping down as CEO. Pastor Ngcobo left without a word, not everyone was happy about Khuzimpi's return.

"Is this your final decision?" Khuzimpi asks.

"It is, I am not fit to lead the church. However, I am not saying goodbye. This is a family church, my children were born and

dedicated to God in this church. We will continue to serve the Lord here.” –Hendricks.

Khuzimpi stands and shakes hands with him.

“You are a good man Hendricks, I apologize if I ever offended you knowingly and unknowingly.”

“Likewise. The church is in good hands, may the Lord bless you and keep you pastor Gumede.”

The door opens, revealing Bonisile. She stops at the door when she sees Mr. Hendricks who acknowledges her with a head nod before turning back to Khuzimpi.

“My spirit greets your spirit.” Mr. Hendricks says.

“My spirit greets your spirit.” Returns Khuzimpi.

Hendricks takes his leave.

“Are you okay?” Khuzimpi asks Bonisile.

“Yes, the girls are sleeping in the car. Are you done?”

“Yes, let’s go.” He gathers his things and lets Bonisile exit first. Around here, she is known as the Gumede maid. The church would surely point fingers if they found out that the pastor confides in her behind closed doors.

The sun has set, seven pm is approaching. They make a stop at an eatery and buy Pizza before driving back home.

“How was Simi’s therapy session today?”-Bonisile.

Simengaye has been diagnosed with schizophrenia, a disorder where a person has difficulty distinguishing between what is real and what is imaginary.

“There’s progress, she will be fine as long as she continues taking her medication.” Khuzimpi says.

It’s one step at a time, the child just needs guidance.

“My mother hasn’t stopped praying for her, she thinks the voices in her head are demons.”

Khuzimpi steals a quick look, “That’s MaShezi for you.” Bonisile adds.

He’s thought about MaShezi's theory, maybe if they pray it away, Simengaye will be set free.

He stops at a red light, and like on most traffic lights, someone knocks on his window.

“Nomazulu?” He quickly rolls down the window. She’s carrying a tray of tomatoes and onions.

She looks completely different from the woman he was once married to. She has gone from riches to rags in a space of six months.

How the mighty have fallen.

The last time he saw her was when they finalized the divorce. He recently won full custody of the kids, which Nomazulu did not protest.

“What are you doing here?” Khuzimpi asks.

He is shocked by the state she is in.

“Making a living.” She sounds grumpy. “Are you buying or do you want me to beg like I begged you to take me back?”

Still bitter.

Guilt hangs over Khuzimpi like a mistletoe, “Where do you stay?”

“Around.” She answers. “The light will turn green soon, are you buying or not?”

She raises her voice, her firm gaze is mostly on Bonisile.

“Uh—get in, it’s late. I will drop you off.” Khuzimpi offers.

“I don’t need your charity Mpi, I’m doing fine by myself.”

It doesn’t look like it.

“The girls are in the car, please get in. I will drop you off.” He insists.

Nomazulu sends her gaze to the back and indeed her children are peacefully sleeping.

She hops in with her tray, the light turns green just in time.

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SIYAKHULA

Over the past six months, I have dedicated my life to finding Siza and the quads. She’s disappeared without a trace, apart from her shoe and ring that were found by rescue missions, not one fragment of her belongings has been found.

I have hired experts who are working overtime to finding her, they are tired I could tell, but I’m paying them extra.

My heart is torn apart and no one seems to understand. They are all out here, on my face telling me to move on, every day without fail, as if sent by the devil himself.

My family constantly reminds me that Siza and the quads are never coming back.

“Man up Siyakhula.” Mlamuli once said.

“There is no use crying over spilt milk, your son is here. Focus on him.” These words came from Nadine. Nothing she says offends me, I have mastered the art of not letting her words get to me.

Olive’s operation was successful. I want to cut ties with Nadine but it won’t be easy, we have to co-parent.

MaMbatha is showing so much progress, she can speak now. Sometimes I wish she was still mute because whenever we talk on the phone, she speaks about Siza and Phangizitha.

She knew what he was planning, he had told her everything.

His initial plan was to blackmail Siza into leaving me, when it didn’t work, he devised a suicide murder.

I hate hearing Phangizitha’s name. I hate that we are from the same womb.

Mhlauli kind of feels my pain, out of everyone, he is soft and tries his best to cheer me up.

He is here, in Mozambique with me.

He arrived a month ago, I don't know what he wants from me. He says he's going to stay here until I am ready to let go and move back home.

Today like every other day, I am woken up by his loud singing. He sings when he's cooking or taking a shower, I wonder what it is this time.

I feel like I was ran over by a truck as I step out of bed, my body feels heavy too. The migraines come and go, I take medication for them. Sometimes I am tempted to let them kill me, but I can't die yet. Siza will ask for me when she comes back.

The door opens just as I'm about to leave the room, the smile on his face used to drain me. I'm slowly getting used to it, the singing as well.

"Good morning." He chirps.

It's never a good morning, my heart is in shackles.

"Thanks." I accept the cup and settle on the chair situated by the window.

"Did you have another dream?" Mhlauli asks.

I can't remember when the dreams started, Siza is all I see each time I close my eyes... the last image I have of her in Phangizitha's car, bound and gagged

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hunts my dreams.

“When will this stop?” I’m tired, I have no strength to carry on.

“Time heals all wounds bhuti.” Mhlauli.

It’s a lie, time heals nothing. Six months later, I am still suffocated by pain.

Siza has disappeared from my life. How do I live with that? How do I accept that she is gone? That I will never see her again?

“We crossed the line Mhlauli, this is fate punishing us. Had I controlled my heart, I wouldn’t have lost her because she never would have been mine to lose.”

This truth torments me whenever I’m awake. I knew Siza was slowly occupying my heart and instead of fighting it, I let it happen.

“Stop torturing yourself...” He taps my back.

“Tell my heart to stop breaking.”

My heart still cries out to Siza, I miss everything about her.

Mhlauli lets out a heavy sigh, he’s probably getting tired of witnessing me in self-pity.

“I’ll get the door,” he hurries out of the bedroom to answer to the knock.

I throw in something decent and head out, and like I expected, it’s Timothy. The man I’m paying extra to find Siza.

“Any news?” I ask, joining him on the couch.

Every next day, I expect feedback on the previous day’s search.

“My boys worked overtime yesterday, we found nothing as usual.”

I could punch him, then fire his ass for that last line. What does he mean as usual? He’s basically calling me delusional.

“Is that all?” I ask, shielding the irritation surging through my bones.

“The latest speculation is that she is at the bottom of a particularly deep part of the Indian Ocean, more than 2.8 miles from the surface.”-Timothy.

“What are you saying to me?”

“Sir, if this is true, there is little likelihood of her to be recovered. The pressure at such depths makes it impossible for us to navigate the area where she likely is. The highest possibility is that her body is stuck on a rock, or something is holding her down which makes it impossible for her body to float upward.”

Siza is not dead, I will never accept that.

“I am not paying you to speculate Timothy, I want facts.”

I am tired of the rollercoaster ride of hope and despair of not knowing what happened to Siza, it’s draining the life out of me.

“But sir...”

“Get the hell out and come back when you have done your job right.”

He leaves without holding an argument.

“Bhuti.” Mhlauli says behind me as he places a hand on my shoulder. “How long will you keep doing this yourself?”

I move away from his touch.

I don’t like his question, he of all people should know how much I loved that woman.

“If you are going to convince me to go back home, then leave because you are wasting your time.”

I find my way to the kitchen, I need another cup of coffee. I can’t afford to fall asleep.

“Bhuti, if this is your plan of getting rid of me, forget it. I am not going anywhere.” He joins me on the bar stools.

I rented this house the day I came back from South Africa. I had to check on my mother, she wasn't taking Phangizitha's death well.

I couldn't stay for more than three days though, I flew back to Mozambique with a mission to find Siza.

Khuzimpi held a small memorial service for his daughter, I didn't go. It would've been the same as accepting that Siza is gone... I am not ready for that.

"Why are you here?" I ask Mhlauli, he takes my coffee and drinks.

I have to make another one.

"You know why I'm here." He says.

I try not to sigh, I appreciate his presence and that he is trying.

"MaMbatha misses you, bhuti. Mlamuli is slowly falling into depression." I miss MaMbatha too, that's why I make sure to call her every night before I go to bed.

Mlamuli is the least of my worries.

"What's wrong with him?" I ask.

"He lost two sons, one to death and one to..." he pauses as he sees the look on my face.

I don't like talking about Phangizitha, Mhlauli knows this.

"Mlamuli is a strong man, he can handle anything and he has two wives, he doesn't need me crowding his space." I say.

Making up with my father is the last thing on my mind right now, I'm no longer mad at him for abandoning us.

After the long talk I had with MaMbatha, I realized that I have imprisoned myself by holding a grudge against my father.

I told him that I forgive him, that we can start afresh. The only problem with him is that he wants me to let go of Siza and go back home. That's one thing that will cause a rift between us.

After pouring another cup of coffee, I stroll to the sitting room. Mhlauli is behind me, something tells me he thinks I will do something stupid, like taking my life.

It's how he keeps an eye on me that has me questioning the real reason he is here.

He grabs the remote, and hops from one channel to the next.

"The quads would be three months this month." I introduce, he pauses and gives me his undivided attention.

"Really?" His tone is condemning, he thinks I'm crazy.

“Siza was in her second trimester, six months pregnant. I don’t know the exact day she was going to deliver, but it was three months ago. If my calculations are right, they would be three months.”

The hand on my shoulder again, “Did you guys discuss names?” He asks.

We didn’t, so much was going on in our lives that we didn’t give the quads that much attention.

“No.” I look at the TV, my gaze slowly getting lost in space.

“Did you have any names in mind? I can help you choose names if you like.”-Mhlauli.

This is a conversation I should be having with Siza.

“I don’t think that’s...”

Mhlauli cuts in, “Quad number one, Nqabile because they dodged death. God didn’t want with them.” It means a lot that he shares the same sentiments as me.

“Quad number two, Phenduka, meaning they came back home.” He continues.

This name has a deep meaning, but I don’t think Siza will like it.

“Siza would kill you for naming her child Phenduka,” I give Mhlauli a warning.

He laughs, “She will love it once I explain the meaning.”

I won't argue with him.

“Quad number three, Omunye.”

I think I should stop him right here, he's off-ramping now.

“Why Omunye?” Why am I even asking?

“Twins are common, but not triplets. So Omunye; another baby came as a shock. Like huh? Another one.” He emphasizes by showing me a shocked expression.

“Do you have any idea that my child will be bullied because of this name? No normal parent would name their child Another One.” I dispute.

“Don't translate it to the nearest English bhuti. This is the greatest thing about being black, we can get away with names. Look at you for example, you parents named you Siyakhula. It sounds beautiful, but translate it to English and people will laugh. Your name means we are growing, sounds terrible right. So let's stick to our language.”

It's not like he is giving me a choice.

“Okay, so quad number four is Trymore.” He says.

Not this one, I am putting my foot down.

I'm afraid to ask why he is naming the last born Trymore, but I have to.

"Explain." I say, sounding the least bit interested.

"Trymore means this is not the end, that Siza's womb will carry more babies. You guys will try more than once for another baby. We want as many as her womb can produce." Mhlauli explains.

I don't even have to guess hard to know that this is his way of cheering me up.

"I thought you said we are sticking to Zulu names." I entertain my little brother.

"Yes, but the last born needs an English name just to balance the other three. Besides, I don't want to limit his chances of ever getting married. Who would want to marry a person with the name Zamanifuthi?" He says.

Zamanifuthi sounds better than Trymore.

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Epilogue

BONISILE

FIVE YEARS LATER

“Come on girls, we are going to be late for church.”

You’d think the house would be less quiet with the girls now grown. It gets louder each year. Ndlelezhle is turning twenty this year, she lives in campus and comes home every weekend. I appreciate her for that because her father cried the day she left for Uni, he wants them where he can see them.

Simengaye is doing her matric, she has come a long way from the girl with schizophrenia to a healthy child.

She loves helping around at church, and has made her father proud by leading in the children’s church. She wants to study theology next year, she is slowly following in her father’s footsteps.

I have never seen Khuzimpi bursting with pride than when he looks at Simengaye.

There are times I wish their mother was here to see how much they have grown. Nomazulu is said to have eloped with some BEE.

It's strange how she forgot her children. They haven't heard from her in four years.

Ndlezinhle is the one who seems to miss her mother the most, Simengaye hardly ever talks about her. Their healing is different.

Nevertheless, they know they have a friend in me.

Tonight is Simengaye's special day, it's her first night as the youth pastor. Kingdom Generation is what she named the church youth.

She's shown me videos of Hillsong Young, that's the vibe they are going for. Her passion for this product is so strong, I know she and her team will pull it off.

Khuzimpi finally has someone to take over the church when he retires. He hasn't forgotten Siza, there is a huge portrait of her in the living room.

Her room hasn't been touched for years, it still has Siza's belongings.

He talks about her once in a while, sometimes I wish he'd allow himself to have friends outside Siyakhula. They end up crying when they come together because all they talk about is Siza. I love their friendship but it needs to progress, they will never heal if all they ever talk about is Siza.

Qeda was sentenced to ten years in prison with no possibility of parole. We don't know how he's doing, Khuzimpi doesn't visit him. I doubt he gets any visitors in there. In my opinion, the less we know about him the better off we are.

I am happy to say, my mother is not as troublesome as she was. Old age is catching up with her.

"Sis' Boni, I can't find my scarf." That's Ndlelezhle, shouting as she sashays past me.

"What's that over your shoulders?" I shout back.

She stops, looks at the scarf hanging over her shoulders, then at me with a smile on her face.

"When did that get there?" She says.

"I can't find my bible, sis' Boni." Simi voices her problem.

I wave the bible up in the air, she always forgets where she puts it.

"What will I do without you?" She places a kiss on my cheek and rushes outside.

"See you guys at church." Ndlelezhle says, following her sister out.

So much for waiting for them, I thought we were taking the same car.

“Hey, I thought we were travelling together.” Khuzimpi enters the room with these words. He stole them right out of my mouth.

“Ewww!” Comes a reply from outside. It’s Ndlelezhle, she thinks we are too old and will cramp her style.

The perks of being married to a man 14 years older than me, people assume I am just as old.

Yes, married. We tied the knot two years ago, I couldn’t have asked for better. I love this pastor of mine, God really showed off with this one.

He stands in front of me, I must be looking at him through the eyes of love, but dang he looks good in a suit each time I see him.

He tilts his head so we are standing head-to-head.

“I think I forgot something too.” He says.

I hope it’s not his socks, he always misplaces his socks.

“What?” I ask.

He attacks me with a kiss, “This.”

“Mr. Gumede, I will have to retouch my lipstick now.” I complain, he doesn’t care. Instead, kisses me once more.

“Have I ever told you, you look sexy carrying my baby?” His hands are on my belly.

I’m eight months pregnant, heavy and tired. I am ready to have these babies out of me. We’re having twins, a boy and a girl. It came as a shock to us, I think it’s a Gumedede thing. Siza was pregnant with quads.

“Yes, you told me this morning.” I remind him.

“Did I?” He feigns confusion, my reply is a nod with a smile on my face.

“Can we go now? Simi won’t be happy if we are late for her first night.”

“Not before I tell you that I love you. Thank you for the family you’ve given me. Without you, this family would be scattered all over the place.”

He doesn’t have to thank me, I would do anything for him.

“I love you more, Phakathwayo.” It’s not every day I call him by his clan name, it makes him happy nonetheless.

God has been good to me.

SIYAKHULA-

I have never felt so uncomfortable in my life. Mlamuli knows I don’t do suits and ties. This one I’m wearing for an event is no

different, he is holding the event, that's why I'm trapped in a suit.

"Son, time is of the essence." That's him knocking on my hotel door.

Like I have a choice, "Meet you outside."

Mhlauli bailed out on me, he always does when Mlamuli wants to flaunt his sons in front of his business associates.

My little brother has made it clear that he wants nothing to do with the family business, instead of taking over from his father, he opened a bar in Mpumalanga. Far from Mlamuli's eyes.

I don't blame him, this old man can be exhausting.

I head down minutes later, and find Mlamuli waiting for me outside.

"We'll be traveling in different cars, I have somewhere to be first." He says.

I'm glad I won't be travelling with him, this could give me time to rethink this whole event attendance.

"Loosen your shoulders son, you look stiff."

"I don't get why I have to be present at this event. You know I'm not interested in joining the company."

I have shares at Madoda Connect, but Mlamuli runs it better. The company name change happened a year after the death of Phangizitha. Mlamuli said Donda Connect reminded him of his dead son, I don't know how.

“Can't you do a small favour for your father? If you are still sure that you want nothing to do with the company after this event, I will leave you alone.”

That is a good bargain, I can show disinterest with my eyes closed.

“What is different about this event and the others anyway? You are obsessed with it becoming a success.”

He looks at me the way he looks at MaMbatha when she pisses him off. This must be serious.

Speaking of MaMbatha, she is back with him.

Her sister wife MaKhuzwayo was more than welcoming, part of me believes none of them wanted to fight for this old man, so they agreed to grow old with him while spending his money.

“There is a company that wants to merge with us, it will be a great gain to Madoda Connect. The company needs a leg to stand on, and today is the day we find that leg. I'm getting old son, too old to be running around sealing deals. You are my heir the first born. If anyone can fill my shoes, it is you.”

I wish he did not have this much faith in me, I am not into networking. My mind is blank, I work better as a carpenter.

Carved is doing great and is ranked number one in the newest rising companies in Africa.

“I also have a company to run, besides, I don’t know the ins and outs of Madoda Connect.”

“You can always learn. I have never bound you to anything son, I let you go your way and do what you want. Do this for me, I don’t want to leave you and your siblings with nothing.”

Fancy for him to involve my siblings in this so I would have no choice but to agree.

I’m saved from his long speech by his driver pulling in.

I know when I’m wasting my time. I’m currently reading an annual report for Flourish Enterprises, the company Mlamuli wants to merge with and the only way to save it is to acquire it then sell it for scraps.

FE should have declared bankruptcy two years ago.

“Black, how far are we?”

“Not very far sir, we will be there in less than five.”

“Make a U-turn, I’m not going anymore.”

Black looks at me through the rear view mirror.

“May I ask why sir?”

“No Black, you may not.”

He wants to convince me to attend the event. My father should know what he is getting himself into. This company is not worth our time.

“Sir, your father is expecting you.”

I did say he wants to convince me.

“Your point?”

“He is going to be utterly disappointed if you stand him up, today is an important day for him.”

Black has been my driver for three years now, I trust him with my life. Vuyo found a woman, got married and retired. He checks in once in a while.

“Drive us to the event, Black.”

He’s right, it’s not about me, but Mlamuli. He’s been nothing but good to me the past five years, I owe him a lot.

Two years after I moved to Mozambique, he came for me and convinced me to go back home. I guess I grew tired of facing disappointment after disappointment, tired of waiting for news of Siza. It had to stop, and the only way was to come back home to my family.

I didn't stop the search, it's ongoing. Every year, I appoint a new team to search for Siza both on land and in the sea. If she did pass on, then her remains must still be in the sea. I have been declared insane by my family, it does not deter me.

The hope of ever seeing her again is what keeps me alive.

"Sir, your phone is ringing." Black pulls me out of my thoughts.

What does Nadine want now? I don't want to deal with her, she will ruin my day like she always does. I am surprised I haven't blocked her number. Olive has a phone, he's fourteen and doesn't need his mother speaking for him.

"Sir..."

"Yes Black, I know."

I let it ring, then put the phone on silent.

We arrive at the hotel where the event will take place.

"Will you need me tonight sir?"

He wants time off, something I cannot give him.

"The reason you are here Black is because I am in need of your services, so the answer is yes. Don't go anywhere."

"Yes sir."

He might think I'm harsh, but he is at work. He needs to focus, I don't give any of my employees special treatment.

The interior in this place is mesmerising. My father knows I love this hotel, it's my number one go-to, that's why he chose it to host his event.

I don't get why he wants to merge with a company that's on fire, we are going to acquire a major loss.

I'm walking to the reception when a bunch of drunk girls appear from the elevator, giggling and talking loudly. This is a prestige hotel. Why is this noise permitted?

I look around for the manager, but someone bumps into me.

"Watch it grandpa." She yelps, laughs while swiftly walking past me. Her friends crack in loud laughter, as if she is the joker in the crew. I'm left irked, while watching them disappear down the hallway.

As I take a step toward the empty reception, I trample on a hard object. Someone dropped their cell-phone. It must be one of those unruly girls. Do I leave it here for the next person to take or hand it over at reception?

The latter seems more like a better option. I bend over to pick it up and someone jumps on my back, making me fall to the ground.

"What the..."

“Give me my phone grandpa.” She is sitting on top of me, yelling and trying to grab the phone from my hand.

“Get off me.” I wiggle, but she presses me down while fighting to get the mobile.

“Give me my phone first.” She shouts.

This is ridiculous, so much drama over a phone I am not interested in.

I toss it over my head, finally she frees me as she rushes to get it. This gives me a chance to get up and time to even my creased suit.

“How dare you touch me? Who do you think you are?” I grumble, eyes on my suit.

I didn’t want to wear it, even more now that it’s crumbled.

How am I going to present myself in front of my father’s business associates with a wrinkled suit?

“You didn’t have to tackle me like that.” I tell her, fixing myself up and not caring to give her a single glance.

“You shouldn’t have stolen my phone, you think this is Noord Street?”

I am offended. Am I dressed like I’m going to Noord? She spits on the screen and uses the sleeve of her jacket to clean it.

“I was going to drop it at receptionist.”

“Yeah, sure you were grandpa.” She replies.

I’m explaining myself to an insolent girl who has not even looked up or offered an apology. I’m giving myself a headache trying to look at the face hidden behind strands of braids.

“Had I not come on time, you would’ve ran off with my phone.”

Such lies.

“I have no interest in that cheap thing.” I’m offended by her insults.

She laughs, her focus still on cleaning the screen of the phone.

There is something familiar about her, not just her voice. Her posture as well. She is wearing all black, from head to toe. A black leather miniskirt, a top-let with a black leather jacket, and long boots. She must be one of those gothic people.

“Just so you know, I won’t press charges. You should thank me.” She declares, finally looking up and my world just stops.

“Sizalobuhle?” My voice fails me by delivering a whisper.

She’s different, way different. This doesn’t look like the Siza I met and fell in love with years ago.

She has lost so much weight, she must be a size 30. Her full upper lip has a deep cut smeared with dry blood. The right side of her forehead is black and blue with a cut as well, all the way to her hairline.

Then she fucking smiles, “Like what you see grandpa?”

She sticks her tongue out. Oh. My. God! She has a tongue piercing. The stud rolling out as it traces the cut on her upper lip.

Like she doesn't recognize me or has never seen me in her life, she turns around and walks away.

I have my mouth gaping open to call her back, stop her from walking away. But nothing comes out.

What the hell just happened?

.....**THE END**.....

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