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PROLOGUE

I wipe my tears then force a smile. "I'm going to miss you." I tell him. "Come here..." He opens his arms wide then engulfs me in a warm hug, tightening his hold around me with each passing second.

"When I have settled down, I'll come and fetch you so you can live with me." He says. "Promise?" I ask and he nods. "I promise." He says and I nod.

He pecks my forehead. "I'll call you everyday to check up on you, okay?" He asks and I nod. We look at each other for what feels like the longest time until a long hoot intrudes and interrupts our moment.

5 YEARS LATER

"Siphe..." Mother calls out and I quickly turn to her. "Are you okay?" She asks and I nod then force a smile. "I'm okay." She shakes her head.

"You can't lie to me, you know that." She says and I nod. "I'm not lying." I tell her.

She looks around the room as if searching for something then analyses me. "What are you doing?" She asks and I shake my head.

"Nothing just sitting." I tell her. I look at the time then outside the window, the sun is setting and time is moving so fast. "I have to go fetch water from the river." I say getting off the bed. "There's more than enough water, Siphe." She says.

"Oh then I'll go fetch wood from the woods." I say then rush out of the room without waiting for her response. I grab my doek and blade then head outside.

I tear the letter into pieces then dispose of it and make my way to the woods.

Today we're supposed to be celebrating his twenty third birthday. I've been writing him letters and sending them to his old house because I don't have his number nor current address.

I had hope, I still have hope that he'll come back and take me with him or move back here if things don't work out for him but I know my friend, he's not one to give up easily.

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TEN YEARS LATER

BHEKIZIZWE

"Dr Bhebhe, my office now." Mrs Mnyanda's voice invades my thoughts. I nod then get up from my seat and follow her to her office.

Once inside, I find her pouring herself a glass of non-alcoholic wine. I shut the door and she turns to me. "Scotch?" She asks and I nod hesitantly.

She's the most generous and benevolent boss in the history of history but never take her for granted, she switches up like nobody's business, especially now that she's pregnant.

She's beautiful too, smart and always has great ideas. Sometimes I doubt that she's younger than me.

She hands me the glass of scotch then I follow her to the sitting area. I sit next to her. She sips from her glass then sits comfortably and caresses her belly. "How are you doing?" She asks and I nod.

"I'm doing well." I say then quickly look away. She chuckles then points at my glass. "You look like you need it." She says and I force a smile.

"It's my husband's finest and most expensive, hell would freeze over if he were to learn that I poured it for you so drink up." She says. I look at her then at the glass before downing it.

"Let me guess, marriage stress?" She asks and I nod hesitantly. She chuckles. "I cheated on her again and we're struggling to patch things up. I don't know why she puts up with all of this but she does either way." I say then look at her.

Her facial expression has suddenly changes and she looks teary. She forces a smile. "You know when my husband cheated on me, I was so broken and we had already had a three year old son together.

I left him. I packed my things and moved out. I only saw him when we spent time together with our son, pretending to be a happy family for his sake. I didn't want my son to grow up without both his parents." She says.

"And, how did you guys fix things?" I ask and she giggles. "We loved each other. The time we spent apart and together helped us both realize what we wanted and we wanted to be together. Obviously things were never the same again but we tried, we pushed, we communicated, we compromised and sacrificed and that's the foundation most marriages lack." She says.

She wipes her tears then places her wine glass on the coffee table. "You should take the rest of the day off. If you're still not well tomorrow, don't come." She says.

"Will I lose my job?" I ask and she shakes her head. "No you won't. This won't affect your work and income in anyway." She says. I nod. "Thank you so much." I thank her.

The door barges open and Mr Mnyanda her husband walks in holding a bouquet of flowers as well as a big paper bag. "And what do we have here?" He asks and Buhlebami just smiles and gets up.

He holds her waist and her, his shoulders then they share a kiss. I miss those kind of moments with my wife and I know just what to do to solve all of this.

"How is my queen and princess doing?" He asks and she giggles yet again. "We're great." She responds. "I'm happy then, Lune is at his grandmother's house and I bought lunch." He says then his grey eyes trail off to me.

His stare is intense and intimidating, it makes me want to confess all my sins and to repent as well. His smirk is far worse.

"I think we're done here. Thank you Mrs Mnyanda." I say getting up. She nods and I make my way out.

What a couple.

I gather my belongings then head to my car and drive to my house.

I find her cooking in the kitchen. She's only dressed in her summer sleepwear and an apron. She's dancing to some Aaliyah music and that just explains how much she's enjoying her own company.

Had I been around the whole day, she'd be sulking and the house would be very quiet. She turns to me and instantly stops singing.

"Hey..." I greet. She turns back to her pots. "Hi..." She replies flatly. I make my way to her then hold her waist and peck her cheek. "I missed you." I tell her.

Her body tenses up and her breathing changes. "Don't..." She says and I quickly let go of her. "We need to talk, this is important." I announce.

She nods then resumes with her mission. I head to our room then change to comfortable clothes. I go back down the staircase and find her sipping on juice with her legs on the couch.

I sit next to her. "Come here..." I say opening my arms wide for her. She looks at me then at her glass as if she's debating on what to do. "Please..." I beseech. She heaves out a sigh as she places her glass on the table and scoots over to me.

I wrap my arms around her then pecks her forehead. "I love you baby, more than you can imagine and this messes me up all the time. I'm sorry for breaking your heart, your trust as well as our marriage." I say.

She raises her head. "Bheki..." I shush her. "I want to make our marriage work and that's what I want us to talk about." She nods then sits up straight.

"When we're together, things fall apart yet when we're apart..." She chimes in. "Bhekizizwe..." I shush her yet again.

"Wait, let me finish. I think we need time apart, just to think things through." I tell her.

"You want to leave me?" She asks and I shake my head. "No baby, its just a few weeks apart. You can stay here but I'll be out of town." She nods hesitantly.

"Where will you go?" She asks. "Back to Kwanobamba. I need the break, the peace and quietness so I'll be able to think and know what I really want. So, what do you say?" I ask.

She sighs.

"Six weeks and that's all." She says and I nod. She smiles then nods in agreement. "I also want to make our marriage work." She says.

"Thank you baby, thank you so much. I love you, okay?" I ask and she nods. "I-I love you too."

I'll have to take a leave then.

I haven't been to Kwanobamba in 15 years and I'm hoping it hasn't changed. Going back there will be quite therapeutic for me and I might return a changed man.

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2

SIPHEPHELO

I have a feeling this is going to be a rocky week. My eye has an irritation I cannot fathom and mom has been telling me to leave it be and that I might see someone I haven't seen in a long time.

I see all the important people in my life almost everyday. And just because I live in a village doesn't mean I have to believe all the superstitions.

I place the bucket of water down then head to start a fire outside. Mom is still asleep but I on the other hand need to get to work.

After my matric, I decided to stay home and find a job. Unlike some of my friends, we didn't even have one hundred rand note for a registration fee so I swallowed my pride and thought of ways to make money.

Mom makes the best dumpling and stew around here so we started our own road side eatery where we cooked and served that.

We sold so many plates and made a lot of money then we decided to expand our menu as well as our eatery. Fortunately for us, people loved our food.

The Royal family heard of our food and so they decided to stop by to taste the food themselves. Having mom teach me her cooking techniques, I was hired as a cook at the Royal Palace and I couldn't be more grateful.

Knowing I had that magic touch in my hand made me happy and with each plate I made, I ended up falling in love with cooking and so I love my job. My salary is fair.

Mom still runs the eatery while I go to the Royal Palace and when I have day offs, I help her out.

Cooking has also been therapeutic to me. I once fell into deep depression because of lies, deceit and empty promises from a trusted friend but like always, I dealt with it.

My problem was that I didn't save room for disappointment but that's all over now.

Once the water was warmed up, I saved some for mom then headed to my room. I had already mixed the warm water with cold water as they were boiling hot.

I pour the water into the bathing basin then strip naked and clean myself up. Once done with everything, I put on my uniform then get my bag and go to wake mother up.

Yes, I wake her up when I leave. "Travel safely." She says. I peck her forehead then run off.

Once I arrive, I greet then head to get started on breakfast.

Somahhashi also secretly pays me to befriend his daughter. I only accepted the offer because we need all the money we can get and beggars can't be choosers. All in all, the princess is not a bad person, if anything, she's the best friend I've ever had.

King Cele appreciates his French toast warm so I always serve it to him soon after I've prepared it. I bow down. "Somahhashi." I say placing the tray of food in front of him.

"Thank you, Nkosazana." I smile. "Would you like anything else?" I ask still looking down. In our village, you don't look at a man in his eyes

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it is considered a sign of disrespect.

"Yes, please do join us for breakfast." He says and I look up to check for the princess' facial expression, she's grinning. "Yes, please do join us." She adds on.

"And who would I be to defy the royal family." I say softly. He chuckles then points at the seat next to him. I hesitantly open the seat and settle on it. "Have you had your breakfast yet?" He asks and I nod still facing down.

"I thought you don't eat in the morning?" Isisa, the king's daughter queried. She knows this because I confide in her, she

must've told her father. "I had something to eat today." I lie but my stupid stomach grumbles, giving off how ravenous I am.

"Eat." He orders, traces of anger quite noticeable in his voice.

I grab a plate from the middle of the table then dish up for myself. Just one slice of toasted bread and smear butter on it then eat. "You're going to eat that?" He asks and I nod hesitantly.

He gets up from his seat then makes his way to me. He halts next to me then dishes up for me and pours me a cup of coffee. "Now eat and finish all of that food." He says.

Again, who am I to defy the King himself?

We all eat in silence and I can feel the both of them staring at me intensely. I'm scared to even swallow, maybe it'll irritate them. I finally manage to finish my food then gulp my coffee down and jolt up from my seat.

"Thank you for the breakfast but I have to get started on the princess' brunch." I say then start cleaning up the table.

The maids help me with the dishes then we all head to the kitchen.

"Siphe..." I quickly turn and accidentally drop a plate. "My apologies." She chuckles.

"Its okay, come with me." She says and I look at the mess I've made. "I have to clean this up." She shakes her head then grips on my hand. "Your job is to cook and not clean, come." She says already pulling me out of the kitchen.

She leads me outside and we walk to the garden. "So, why am I here?" I ask and she giggles. "I wanted to take a walk with my one and only friend." She says.

I just nod and we walk further in silence. "Isisa, why did you allow me to sit and eat breakfast with you?" I ask. We both stop and she looks around before turning to me. "You're my friend and I couldn't live with myself if I were to let you work with an empty stomach any longer." She says.

"You must've begged your father for him to allow that to happen." She shakes her head. "He actually agreed with no hassle." She says.

"And other workers who come here without eating, will they also join you and your father for breakfast?" I ask and she looks down. "Unfortunately not..." She mumbles loud enough for me to hear.

"Please don't tell your father anymore of my confidentialities. I confide in you because I trust you and I respect you a lot as the princess but that does not give you the right to share my secrets." I tell her.

"Why are you getting all worked up, its just breakfast. You should be grateful that you'll be able to have breakfast from now on." She says and I snort. "Then I don't want your breakfast nor your friendship." I say and she gasps.

"Siphephelo!" I turn to walk away but she grips my arm. "I'm still talking to you." She says and I yank my arm from her grip. "I'm nothing but a commoner and your father's employee. I'm just a cook and nothing more." She chuckles darkly.

"Do you know how lucky you are, getting married to an entire King and his daughter actually likes you?" She asks.

"What are you talking about?" I ask. "I'm talking about you. My father has never been interested in any other women in this village, let alone a servant from downhill." She says.

She shakes her head then walks off and I let out a lone tear. Back to depression. I don't want to marry the King, King Cele to be specific but nobody defies the King.

I'm only twenty eight and he's old enough to be my father. I'd rather die.

3

BHEKIZIZWE

I place my bag inside the car trunk then shut it and turn to Samu. I engulf her in a tight and long bear hug then peck her forehead. "I love you so much..." I tell her.

"I love you too..." She whimpers. I break the hug then pull her in for one long kiss, a goodbye kiss. "Be safe and take care of yourself." I tell her.

"You too..." She says softly. I peck her hands before releasing her and getting inside the car. I hoot as I drive out of the yard off to KwaZulu Natal.

This is going to be a four hours drive to Kwanobamba and I'm only driving because I need it. I need the quietness and the time to be alone and to think.

I had already informed my aunt that I'll be coming and she said she'll prepare my favorite meal.

I listen to some Blaq Diamond music and sing along as well. Some of the lyrics hit hard, they remind me of someone who was once special to me but yet again, my main focus is on fixing myself for my wife so I can save my marriage.

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The smile on my face as I drive down the bumpy and dusty gravel road is priceless. I haven't been here in fifteen years and it has changed quite a lot, not in a bad way but in a refreshing way.

I see the shop where I used to hang out with my best friend after school before going to her house for lunch then at my house for homework.

I wonder how she is and how she's doing, I hope she's still well. I've never forgotten about her and I never will. She'll always have a special place in my heart and in my life.

My aunt rushes out of the house holding a broom in her hand and starts dancing and ululating. I can't help but to laugh at her. My paternal family is very traditional and somewhat old school.

"Bhebhe! Makhedama! Soyengwase! Nina bakaBhebhe kaMthendeka! Mfanawami, is it really you?" She asks, excitement vividly expressed on her face.

"Yebo, it is me aunt." I say wrapping my arms around her. She pats my back then breaks the hug and cups my face. "Five years yonke Bhekizizwe and you didn't even think of visiting me?" She asks and I chuckle in embarrassment.

I last saw her when I was getting married which was five years ago and that was after I hadn't seen her for ten years. "My apologies, aunt." She shakes her head and chuckles in disbelief.

"Father god! You now drive German cars mntaka bhuti and wear suits? God did indeed come through for you." She says and claps once.

"Nonetheless, let's get inside mfana wami, its so good to see you." She says already walking back inside the house. I notice that some neighbors are now surrounded outside our yard.

I take my bags out of the trunk then lock the car and drag them inside the house.

Its pretty much still the same as I last remember it. The only difference is the paint, some new furniture and the roof as well as the flooring. She still has a rose garden and changes her roses after every two days.

She leads me to my room. She's really done a good job with this house. My room no longer feels like a boy's room but more like a man's room. "I hope you still remember your way around the village?" She asks and I nod.

"Good then. Freshen up then go and get some fresh air or rest while I finish up cooking. Driving for so many hours must be tiring." She says.

"Thank you, aunt. I'll do just that, remind myself of where I was born and bred." I say placing my one suitcase on the bed.

"I'll be in the kitchen then. Your cousin will be back later on."
She says and I nod. She walks out and closes the door.

I throw myself on the comfortable bed then decide on what to do. I really need a walk, I should go for one.

I freshen up and change into something much more comfortable and more fitting for the area then go out. "How are you, Siphe?" Aunt asks referring to the thick girl with glowing chocolate skin who is passing by.

"Ngyaphila ma!" She responds

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her voice soft yet filled with authority. You can tell she's a bullshitter.

She has a bucket over her head and she's only clad in a white vest and a skirt that shows off her thick beautiful thighs. I watch as she walks by and aunt turns to me.

"You're married njalo!" She says snapping me out of my thoughts. I force a chuckle then look down as guilt washes over me. I need to tell her what I did, I have to tell her about my cheating ways.

The problem is that she's judgmental and she'll think I'm bewitched.

"I was just looking, she's beautiful." I say and she hits me with her dishcloth. "Do you men ever get tired?" She asks shaking her head and I shrug. "There's nothing wrong with looking, I might even consider polygamy. She's not married, is she?" I tease and her smile fades.

"I doubt she'd marry you, let alone want to see you." She says facing down. "What do you mean?" I ask.

She heaves out a sigh then shakes her head. She suddenly looks defeated and hurt. "Can you even recognize her?" She asks and I shrug. Am I supposed to know her?

"Siphephelo Buthelezi." She says. My eyes widen and my mouth drops open. Siphephelo as in... "uPhelo wami?" I ask in disbelief and she nods.

She walks off to the living room and I follow her, curious for more answers to unknown queries. She opens one drawer and takes out a handful of papers and envelopes.

"She wrote these for you, supposedly to you and I'm sorry for invading your privacy but I read each and every one of them." She says. I look at them then take them from her hold. I place them on the table then sit down and start reading.

She wished me a happy birthday every year, wrote about important events in her life, wrote about her wishes and finally,

home much she hates me and how much she'll never forgive me.

One that got me reads as follows,

'I truly don't know what to do with myself. I miss you each and every day and I hate it, I hate you. You promised me heaven and earth, you gave me hope and you left me!

I'm depressed because of you! I fail to trust people because of you! I want to end my life because of you! This is the last letter I'm writing to you and hopefully you'll receive it but just know that you failed me.

You failed me, Bhekizizwe Bhebhe and I'll never forgive you. I don't ever want to see you again, be it we cross paths or you return. I want nothing to do with you.

Happy birthday

Phelo.'

I reread the letter again and find myself crying. You can tell she was crying when she wrote this, there are dried out droplets of tears on the paper and there's so much emotion and emphasis in the words.

I throw my head back and wipe my uninvited tears. "It will be well, she will eventually forgive." Aunt whispers after placing her hand on my shoulder.

"Do you think she still hates me?" I ask and she shrugs. "There's only one way to find out..." She says handing me my car keys. I take them then storm out of the house and dash to the car.

4

SIPHEPHELO

I'm not going to work today, in fact I'm not feeling well. I'm disgusted, I'm hurting, I'm going through a lot of emotions, I just want to sleep.

But I'm struggling.

I don't know why but whenever I close my eyes I imagine myself getting married to Somahhashi Cele.

"Siphe..." Mom's soft voice awakens me. Not that I was asleep but I was pretending to be asleep. I wipe my tears then remove the duvet off from me. "Are you feeling better?" She asks and I shake my head.

I told her I wasn't feeling well when I returned home last night but I know my mother, she doesn't buy my story. She's just not trying to push me because she doesn't want me to fall back into that dark cloud again.

"Are you going to work?" I ask and she shakes her head. "I'll stay with you until you feel better. I'm not supposed to leave you on your own in such state." She says and I just nod. "Okay." She walks out of the room and I lie back down.

She was joking, right? Isisa was just joking. The king wouldn't want to marry me, why would he? He didn't even tell me or my mother so Isisa must've been joking.

I can never be the queen of Kwanobamba married to a man who's twice my age with a daughter who's my peer. But was she? Why would she joke about something so dire?

The thought of just kissing him makes me nauseous. King Cele is a very presentable king but I've never looked at him that way and... Just stop it, Siphe!

I get up from bed and make it then grab my bathing basin and head outside to get warm water. Mom is in the kitchen and judging by the maize meal on the table accompanied by white vinegar and brown sugar, she's making porridge.

I leave her be and go clean myself up. Maybe I should've went to work, maybe I misunderstood her. If I lose this job, I'm done for!

Once I'm done, mom dishes up for me and we eat in silence until she decides to break the ice. "You really won't tell me what's bothering you?" She asks and I look down. How could I tell her something I myself am not sure of? I don't want her to worry

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I don't want to stress her any further.

"I'll tell you, just not now." I say then immediately shove the spoonful of porridge inside my mouth. "I hope its not a boy. I don't want to lose you over to depression again especially because of a boy." She says.

She knows very well that I wouldn't put myself through that again, I wouldn't hurt myself like that again.

People think depression is not real and that its just in your head but its real and it could be caused by something small and simple.

I get up and take her empty bowl as well as mine then go to the kitchen to wash them using the remaining warm water.

"Sikhulekile kwaButhelezi!" I rush to the living room and peak through the window.

"Who is it?" She asks and I swallow hard. I peak again and I'm relieved to see its princess Isisa and her servants only. "Its the princess." I tell her.

"Oh, should I tell her you're not feeling well?" She asks and I nod. "I'll be in my room then." I say then walk off to my room. I grab a fleece then lie on the bed and cover myself with it.

I hear mother talking to Isisa but I can't figure out what they're saying. I just close my eyes and pull the fleece closer. Tears involuntarily roll out of my eyes and a lump forms in my throat.

I pray she tells me she was joking or else I'll end my life. There's a knock on the door before it opens. "Hey..." She whispers slightly shaking me. I open my eyes then shut them. "Hi..." I whisper back.

"How are you feeling?" She asks softly. "I'll be better by tomorrow." I tell her then open my eyes. She smiles. "I'm glad to hear that, I thought you were mad at me." She says.

I sit up straight with her help then throw my head back. "Its just a stomach bug, nothing major." I say. "We were so worried." She says. "Who is we?" I ask and she chuckles shyly.

"Mina no baba. He'll be so happy to see you." She says. My stomach instantly churns and my tears sting my eyes. "Can I get some rest?" I ask already lying back down.

She sighs then nods. "I'll see you tomorrow. Get well." She says getting up from the bed.

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The walk to the river felt much longer this evening. I couldn't stop thinking about my life, my future to be specific. How did I get here? Why am I destined for tragedy?

I should be ecstatic that I'll be marrying into royalty, that I'll be marrying the king himself? If I were someone else then I surely would be excited but then I'm not.

I pass by Aunt Ndongoloza's house and greet her. There's a beautiful looking car parked outside and she has on a grin on her face.

The Bhebhe family is well off. They're not wealthy but they're also not middle class. They have businesses and they can afford things unlike some of us.

Bhekizizwe used to live with his aunt and his cousin while his parents worked hard to secure his future. I hated that he left memories here but I had to accept the situation and move on. I have no grudges against his aunt and his cousin whatsoever but I'll never forgive him, EVER.

A young looking man walks out of the house, I see aunt scored himself a young thang!

I walk further until I reach the river and sit down near it. Today's walk was a drag for some reason and my feet are swollen.

I massage them and rest for a while before getting up and filling my bucket with water.

"Phelo..." I involuntarily drop the bucket and quickly turn behind me to see the owner of the voice that startled me.

Panic washes over me as my eyes meet familiar eyes. I scan him and I cannot recognize him whatsoever yet those eyes, I've seen them somewhere.

Phelo? I haven't heard that name in years and I mean a decade and five years. He smiles at me and steps forward but I step back.

His smile fades. "Phelo..." He calls out softly yet again and I analyze this character again.

I've never been out of Kwanobamba and I don't think he's from around here, so clean and neat. How does he know me? "I'm sorry..." He apologizes and I look at him in confusion.

"I'm sorry for not coming back to check up on you and for not keeping my promise." He adds on, his voice on the verge of cracking.

Promise? Coming back? Phelo? No...

He's the young thang that was at aunt Ndongoloza's house, it can't be.

"Zizwe?"

5

BHEKIZIZWE

"Nkosi yami! (My god!)" She exclaims. She steps forward and I also step forward. We halt in front of each other and she extends her hand to touch me but debates against it and instantly pulls back.

"I... Am I even allowed to touch you?" She asks and my heart drops to the pit of my stomach. I watch as she scans me yet again from head to toe.

"Of course, why would you ask me that?" I ask and she shakes her head. "I-I... You're so different, so clean. You reek of money and... And..." Tears roll down her cheeks and she quickly wipes them.

"I'm dreaming..." She mumbles to herself as she slowly turns back to the water and picks up her bucket. "I'm dreaming..." She repeats those words softly to herself as she loads the water into the bucket.

She then grabs her cloth on the side and places it on her head and I watch as she places the bucket on her head.

She turns to me then looks down before walking away. She's upset, right? I upset her. I promised her heaven and earth but I didn't keep my promise.

She didn't even smile at me nor touch me. Instead, she cried and tried to convince herself that I'm nothing but a dream. "Phelo!" I call out her name then turn around. She's nowhere in sight.

Why was I standing there the entire time? I couldn't move nor say anything, I just watched her walk away from me.

I groan in fury as I rub my face with my hands then throw my head back. I turn back to my car and get inside. I throw a fist at the steering wheel then drive back home.

I'll just give her some space so she can register all of this. She looked distraught like she had a lot on her mind already. A call comes through and it's aunt Ndongoloza. "Did you find her?" She asks.

"Yes but she doesn't want to talk to me. I'm coming back." I say sounding defeated. "So you're just going to give up on your childhood friend so easily?" She asks and I sigh. There's nothing else I can do.

"Aunt..." She chimes in. "Cha, Bhekizizwe! Don't come back here until you've spoken to her." She orders then hangs up.

I drive down the hill until I make it to her house. Yes, I still remember where it is. We used to come here everyday after school to have something to eat then we'd go to my house to do our school work.

Phelo is younger than me. As to how we became so close, I'll never understand but I'm glad it was her and no one else.

I park outside the gate then make myself inside. I knock on the door of which instantly opens and I come to sight with uma. "Sawubona ma." I greet. "Sawubona mfana..." She greets back as she scans me, unsure of her words.

"How are you doing?" I ask. "I am doing just fine." She responds. I smile awkwardly. "Uhm... I'm glad. I see you've made a lot of changes to the house. How many years has it been, fifteen?" I ask and she furrows her brows. "Fif... Bhekizizwe?" She asks and I nod.

"Oh nkosi yami kodwa yini?" She shuts her eyes and covers her mouth in disbelief. I open my arms wide for her then pull her in for a hug. "Look at how much you've grown." She says caressing my back.

"We clearly have a lot to talk about." She adds on and I nod. "We do." She breaks the hug. "Bhekizizwe, is it really you?" She asks and I nod.

"When did you arrive? Actually, get in!" She says with excitement.

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"I don't know what goes on in the mind of that daughter of mine but she literally woke up one day and just stopped caring." She says.

"Really?" I ask and she nods. "I obviously don't believe so but there's no other explanation. She was so hurt and torn and I think she still is, its just that she pushes everything to the back of her mind." I place my cup of tea on the table.

"Ngiyaxolisa ma. If I could, I would change everything for the better but..." She chimes in. "Why did you give her so much hope only to destroy her? Do you have any idea how much damage you've caused?" She asks and I nod then look down as guilt washes over me.

"You were her everything. She loved and look up to you. I don't even know what to say to you but behind that success of yours, lies a broken hearted girl. You have disappointed me

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Bhebhe." She says then sips on her tea.

"Zizwe?" I look behind and she's standing by the door. She looks like she'd been in a fight. I get up from my seat and make my way to her.

She had been crying, bleeding as well. She's wet and muddy.

I take her hands into my hold and come to sight with the cuts on her wrist, they are fresh cuts. "Phelo, what did you do?" I ask in disbelief.

She tries to wrestle her hands out of my hold but I tighten my grip and she flinches in pain, more tears streaming down her cheeks. "I'm sorry..." I whimper.

"You're sorry? Then go. Go back to wherever hellhole you came from and I don't ever want to see you again." She says softly and I shake my head. I won't make the same mistake twice.

"I can't do that to you..." I tell her. "You did already, what's stopping you from doing it again?" She asks in fury. "Just go, Zizwe." She whimpers in defeat.

"What did you do? Did you try to harm yourself?" I ask and she snatches her hands from me. "Siphephelo!" Ma yells out her name.

"None of this would've happened if you..." I go on my knees and wrap my arms around her waist then rest my head on her belly. "Please forgive me. I know I've wronged you, I lied, I didn't keep my promises and I only brought pain to your life but please forgive me." I apologize.

"Zizwe, get up." She says and I tighten my hold around her. "I'm sorry..." I apologize. "Bhekizizwe get up! Get up and leave!" She yells.

I look at her. She looks at me in the eyes, her soul is restless. She's full of anger and pain as well as fire. "Phelo wami I'm truly sorry." She chuckles bitterly before bursting into tears.

"I hate you and I'll never forgive you now leave." She cries. "You gave me so much hope then left and never returned. Fifteen years later you come back because of god knows why and you think sorry is going to cut it?" She asks and I shake my head.

"I'll do anything..." She shakes her head. "Its too late, you're too late. Now my life is ruined and there's nothing I can do about it. I have to marry that stupid old man and bear him an heir. I'm going to be a queen, a step mother and a wife to a man who's twice my age and yes, I blame you! Now get up and leave. I want nothing to do with you." She says.

My heart drops to the pit of my stomach and instantly breaks as I try to fathom what she just said. "What did you just say?" Ma asks getting up from the couch.

She sniffs then looks away. "Siphephelo Buthelezi, I am talking to you." She says sternly. I won't let that happen to her. She can hate me all she wants, she has that right but I'll help her either way.

SIPHEPHELO

[He snakes his hand around my waist and pulls me closer. His lips collide with mine and I involuntarily wrap my arms around his neck. Have you ever felt like you were in your own world, like nothing else mattered but you?

I follow his lead as he makes love to my lips, kissing and sucking the living daylights out of them. This is my first kiss ever and it could not be any better. Its better than I had expected it to be.

As soon as his lips leave mine, I look away. They suddenly feel dry as well as my throat. I want to do it again, I need more. "Phelo..." He calls out softly. "Ngibheke. (Look at me.)" He orders and I hesitantly abide.

He has on his ridiculous smirk, the one that makes you want to strip your clothes and do the unthinkable. "Ngiyakuthanda. (I love you.)" He says. I look away.

"MaShenge..." I look back at him. "Makhedama..." He smiles at me. "Say that one more time." He says, clearly ecstatic. I feel my cheeks heat up and I look down. "Makhedama." He chuckles.

"I love you, so much and I know you feel the same way." He says and I gulp. I don't know what it is that I'm feeling, all of this

is foreign to me. "Zizwe..." He hushes me. "You don't have to say anything. I know you don't understand what's going on so I'll make it easier for you.

I'm going to kiss you again. If you don't feel the same way as I do then stop me but if you feel like your stomach is churning and your insides are turning then you'll respond and that'll mean you feel the same way as I do." He says and I nod.

I'm nervous, I don't know what's happening with me. I think I'm going to puke. Aren't I too young for such things? "Zizwe..." His lips land on mine and all the worry disappears.

I don't stop him, instead I kiss him back. I feel him smile before he kisses me yet again with so much dominance this time. He finally breaks the kiss and I'm panting hard.

"Thank you so much..." He says with a grin. I look down. "Please don't hurt me." I say in a whisper. He lifts my head up with his fingers. "I wouldn't."]

"Siphephelo, I'm talking to you." Mother agitates dragging me out of my thoughts. "Were you even listening to me?" She asks and I shake my head. She throws her hands up as a sign of defeat and walks out of the room together with the first aid kit.

I didn't even feel anything when she was treating my cuts. You know how rubbing alcohol or soap on a wound or cut stings, I

didn't feel a single thing. That should tell you how bad things are.

I lie down on the bed and cover myself with the blanket. Yes, I tried to kill myself and I'll do it over and over again until I succeed if this is going to be my life. I hate it and I hate that my death is going to kill mom because I'm all she has and she's all I have.

But...

I'm being selfish and I'm taking the easy way out. Had Mpilo not stopped me then I would've been long gone.

I just want to make this stop, I want to take this pain away. I don't want to fall back into that dark cloud again and I just want to have a normal life but I see my ancestors have other plans for me but tough, I don't want to partake in their plans.

I close my eyes and sleep instantly washes over me.

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This is a first. Somahhashi never eats in his bedroom, EVER. I take his tray of food then head to his room. The guard opens for me and I enter. "Somahhashi..." I bow down and place the tray on his bed.

"Thank you nkosazana." He says. I nod then make my way out. I wonder why he calls me that. He never calls me by my name unless he feels like it. Its not likely for him to know his servants' names but calling me princess?

"Siphephelo!" He calls out, you see that? I halt on my tracks then turn to him. "Somahhashi..." I bow yet again. "Come here..." He orders and I hesitantly abide and walk towards the bed.

"Come closer." He says. I gulp then make my way to him and halt next to him. "How are you feeling this morning?" He asks. I gulp yet again. "I'm fine. I'm feeling much better than yesterday." I respond. He nods then scans me.

"Isisa tells me that she has mistakenly told you about me wanting to make you my wife." He says and I nod hesitantly. "My apologies then nkosazana, I actually wanted to tell your family first before telling you." He says and I just nod.

Silence erupts as he scans me yet again. "Do they tell you that you're beautiful?" He asks and I nod. Mpilo tells me that whenever he sees me, more than once even. He makes sure that his words get stuck inside my brain.

"Come." He grabs a hold of my wrist and pulls me closer. He orders me to sit next to him and I do. He snakes his arm around my waist. "Ndoniyamanzi." He chants then shakes his head with a smile.

"You are god sent, did you know that? The Cele ancestors chose well." He says tracing his fingers on the side of my visage.

"You're a virgin?" He asks and I hesitantly nod. He chuckles in excitement. Can he at least contain himself?

"Then you'll bear me an heir faster than I had imagined. I can't seem to wait till our wedding night." He says unbuttoning my top and I gulp hard. My tears are threatening to roll out.

"But how can I when you look so sexy?" He asks, analyzing my breasts. "With all due respect sire, your breakfast will get cold." I tell him.

"Then you'll warm it up." He says. "Get up so I can see how my wife to be looks like." He says and I do.

"Take those clothes off." He says. "Somahha..." A knock on the door disturbs us. "Tell them to go away." He says. "Baba, there's an emergency!" Isisa shouts from the other side of the door.

He groans then gets up and makes his way to the door. "What's wrong?" He asks walking out.

I place my hand on my chest as I try to catch my breath. I didn't even realize that I was holding it in because of how nervous I was. What kind of a king is he?

My tears roll out as I try to fathom what was about to happen. I can't live like this. I should probably go before he returns.

I wipe my tears then walk out with the tray of food. The meal is probably cold. I walk to the kitchen and feel my stomach churn. I place the tray on the table then rush to the restroom.

I stick my head inside the toilet bowl and puke. I'm disgusted and I hate myself. I hate Zizwe for leaving me with countless promises and I hate my father for not protecting me.

I hate Isisa for sourcing out information on me for her father and I hate the king for wanting to marry me and for looking at me in that manner.

He's nothing but a pedophile and a rapist. He's an abuser and a maniac. I wish he dies a slow and painful death.

BHEKIZIZWE

Last night's dinner was quiet, too quiet. Mpilo hadn't said a thing to me since he arrived, I think he's mad at me.

I told aunt what happened in his presence and he stormed out and left. He only just returned. "Mpilo!" Aunt shouts after him as he walks past us without even greeting.

"This boy has no respect whatsoever." She mumbles to herself then resumes eating. "Will you go check on Siphephelo today?" She asks and I shrug. "I don't know what to do aunt. I've hurt her so bad and now she has no choice but to marry that heartless man. I don't know how to help her."

She shakes her head.

We continue eating our breakfast and its only then that Mpilo joins us. He's freshened up and changed his clothes. He grabs an apple and sits down.

He looks at me in the eyes while eating his apple. "Did I do anything to upset you?" I ask and he chuckles. "The world doesn't revolve around you." He says.

"Mpilo!" Aunt scolds him. "Actually what are you doing here, huh? Why are you back?" He asks and aunt stops with the

dishes and turns to us. "You left your life and your wife behind, packed your shit and came back here after fifteen long years, what do you want?" He asks.

"I just needed some time off and Kwanobamba was my one and only option. Its a peaceful place and I grew up here so why not?" I ask rhetorically and he chuckles. "If that's the case then I'll stay out of your way but only if you stay out of mine." He says and I fold my arms, appalled by his request.

"Whatever do you mean?" I ask and he throws his head back in fury. "You're so slow..." He raises his head and we make contact. "Stay away from Siphephelo and we won't have any problems." He says and I can't help but to laugh.

"What do you mean I must stay away from her, she's my best friend." He shakes his head. "Your friendship ended the day you forgot about her and broke your promise." He says.

"Mpilo..." Aunt calls out. "Mom, keep quiet. You spoilt this thing of yours and that's why he turned out to be the man he is. Did he tell you that he's here because he fucked up his marriage and cheated on Samu and since he failed to fix his marriage and mend his ways, he came here?" He asks and I jolt up from my chair in anger.

He gets up as well. "Is this true?" Aunt asks. I look at her then back at Mpilo. "He won't answer you. He's not man enough to admit to his faults. I just hope you won't do the same to

Siphephelo, you've caused her too much pain." He says and I bang on the table then grit my teeth.

"I would never hurt her intentionally." I say. "Then stay away from her." He says and I chuckle. "Phelo and I never broke up. Technically, she's still my girlfriend." I say.

"Well technically, she doesn't know that you're married and the last time I checked, she hates you." He says.

I punch him and he hits the refrigerator and falls to the floor. "Bheki!" Aunt yells rushing to Mpilo. He gets up from the floor. "And that makes you feel better?" He asks slightly pushing aunt away from him.

"Punch me again, but just know that it doesn't hurt more than the truth." He says and I punch him again. He laughs.

"Bhekizizwe, stop this at once!" Aunt yells. "Stop your nonsense or leave my house and never return. You are a disgrace to the Bhebhe clan, you excuse of a man!" She yells.

"I don't want to see you anywhere near Phelo." I say pointing at him.

"Do you have any idea how much you broke her? I found her in the river

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her eyes shut, blood oozing from her wrists while her body floated on top of the water. Had I not found her, she would've been gone and it would've been your fault!" He yells.

"Shut up!" I yell.

"If anything happens to her, you'll be to blame and you will live to regret the day you were born." He curses.

He takes his car keys and storms out, leaving aunt and I in a compromising situation. She shakes her head. "Leave." She says.

"Get out of my house. Go and clear your head and learn how to control your emotions. Tomorrow morning, you will return back to your wife and mend your ways." She says.

I grab my car keys then storm out.

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I pick up a rock and throw it inside the water. I pick up another rock then hold it on the palm of my hands as I drift off to memory lane...

["Are you mad at me?" I ask and she shakes her head. "Then why aren't you talking to me?" I ask and she remains quiet. She picks up a rock and throws it inside the river.

She always does this when she's upset which means she's mad at me. "Sthandwa sami..." I call out and she looks at me.

"MaShenge wami omuhle." She looks down as she blushes.

I crouch next to her then take her hands into my hold. "Talk to me my love, what is it?" I ask and she shakes her head. "Its nothing. I just don't know how I'm going to do this without you." She says.

I peck her hands. "I thought we spoke about this." I say. "You're going to leave me Zizwe, you can't expect me to just let it slide because we talked." She says.

"I don't expect you to let it slide but think of it this way, I'm doing this for us. I'll study hard, get a job then we'll get married. We'll build our mansion, get our dream cars then start a family of our own once we've settled." I tell her.

She sighs. "Don't worry, okay?" I ask and she nods hesitantly. "Look at me." I order and she does. I pull out wild grass then tie it around her ring finger as a ring then peck her knuckles.

"Zizwe..." I hush her. "I, Bhekizizwe Bhebhe promise thee Siphephelo Buthelezi to marry you in ten to fifteen years to come and make you the happiest woman on earth." I swear and she giggles.

"Let's not make promises we can't keep." She says. "Have I ever broken a promise?" I ask and she shakes her head. "Then I promise."

"Zizwe..."

"I promise.

"Bhek..."

"Umuhle." She shyly looks away and hides her face with her hands. I chuckle at her. "I didn't get a kiss today." She giggles. "Woza ngithi manqa." She looks at me.

I pull her closer then capture her lips and lock them with mine.]

I'm disturbed by footsteps. I turn behind and see that she's walking away. I jolt up from the rock I was sitting on and run after her. "Phelo!" I call after her but she's ignoring me on purpose.

I finally catch up to her and stop in front of her. "Move." She orders. "Phelo wami." I say grabbing a hold of her hands. "Bhekizizwe, move." She commands.

"My love please listen to me." She yanks her hands out of my hold. "What do you know about love?" She mumbles to herself.

"Siphephelo, just listen to me!" I snap. "No!" She shouts. "I've been listening to people lie to me half of my life, I'm tired." She says sounding defeated.

"I'm tired of people thinking they own me and think they can do whatever they like to me and touch me anywhere without my concern." She sobs.

"Where does he get the right to touch me like that, I'm..." I wrap my arms around her and rest her head on my chest while she bursts into tears. I clench my jaws and tighten my hold around her, I'm going to burn that man alive.

SIPHEPHELO

I apply ointment on his wounds then cover them with band aids. "Why didn't you fight back?" I ask and he chuckles lightly.

"You know I hate violence." He says and I shake my head. "Now Zizwe is going to walk around thinking he owns the world and I." I reason.

He takes my hands into his hold and pecks them. "Then let him. Let him think whatever it is that he wants to think of." He says and I shake my head. "Mpilo, are we talking about the same Zizwe here or you're..." He chimes in.

"You're beautiful." He says catching me off guard. That's what I meant when I said he always reminds me of my beauty and its always unexpected.

You'd think I'm used to him by now but he's difficult to read. For as long as I've known him, he's been good to me. I was hesitant at first before befriending him because he and Zizwe are as good as brothers.

I was scared of letting him in on my world but it turns out, he was the help I needed all the while. "Do you have any idea how beautiful you are?" He asks. I'll just ignore that.

I get up from the bed but he grips my wrist. "Siphe..." He calls out softly then gets up from my bed. He takes my hand and intertwines our fingers and kisses my knuckles.

"Its getting late, I think you should go." I tell him. He frees my hand and wraps his arms around my waist and leaves a trail of kisses from my shoulder to my neck. "Thank you..." He says.

"Wh-what for?" I ask breathlessly. He chuckles deeply. "For the food and for your care. Your hospitality as well and for being in my life." He whispers.

I gulp. "You should really go before mom finds you here." I tell him. "Let me in, let me help you." He says and I shake my head. "Please stop. I don't want you to get hurt and I don't want to hurt myself as well." I tell him.

"Siphe..."

"No Mpilo. Rather I marry that king and allow him to touch me however than to get you killed. He doesn't have mercy, we both know that and he always gets what he wants. Please don't do this." I say.

"I won't let you destroy your life like that." He says. "What if I don't?" I ask turning to face him. "Maybe this is the beginning of my life. Maybe he'll give me a better life." He chuckles darkly.

"Why would he do that?" He asks. "Because he..." He turns me around and looks into my eyes. "He doesn't love you if that's what you were about to say." He says softly.

"And how would you know that?"

"Because I love you. I love you so much Siphe, I won't allow you to do that to yourself. He'll have to kill me first before marrying you." He says.

I look away. "Mom will be here any time soon..." I say in a whisper. "Let her come then. I'm not going anywhere, not until you get rid of that mentality of yours." He says.

"Mpilo..." He steps closer and his hold around me tightens. He presses his forehead against mine and cups my cheek. He uses his thumb to caress my lips while he looks into my eyes.

"He doesn't love you, none of them do. None of them will be able to make you happy. The material things that they'll give you in order to impress you and to keep you happy, that's not happiness." He says.

"Does it matter?"

SAMUKELISIWE

I knock on the door and it slides open. I find Sakhile seated next to Akeelah who's caressing her baby bump. "I hope I'm not disturbing anything?" I ask closing the door.

He chuckles then gets up. "I'll see you later." She just smiles at him and he walks out. Once he shuts the door, I rush to her and perch up next to her. "News!" I say slapping her thick thigh.

"What news?" She asks while giggling. "You and Sakhile?" I ask and she giggles louder. "What about us?" She asks getting up. "So, there is an us?" I ask and she turns to me.

"There's no us. Sakhi and I are just friends. I'm married and pregnant and I love my husband. I would never cheat on him." She says then turns back and pours herself some of her nonalcoholic wine.

"I know. I know how much you guys love each other and I could only wish my marriage was like yours." I tell her.

She walks to me and hands me a glass of wine then sits down. "How are you? How have you been?" She asks. I sip from my glass then shrug. "I'll be fine. These things happen right? I mean we get cheated on but they always come back to us, right?" I ask.

She sits comfortably and caresses her belly. "I understand why you didn't tell me about this and honestly, I would also find it hard to tell people that my husband cheated on me. It took me

weeks to tell my family that Nka cheated on me because I feared they'd judge me and that my mother would tell me that she warned me about the Mnyandas." She says.

"I'm scared, friend. I'm struggling to cope. He went back to Kwanobamba and he'll meet his ex girlfriend there. What if they get back together and he forgets about me?" I ask and she shrugs.

"He might, he might not. If he's capable of cheating on you not once but thrice with three different people then he can go back to his ex girlfriend. He's weak and he's not deserving of you. He knows he's married yet he goes and shoves his dick inside every pussy he meets..." She says and she's starting to get out of hand now.

"Friend..." She chimes in.

"No friend, you know I'm telling the truth. I know you love him but don't forget your worth. He knows that he's fucken married yet he fucks every scrubber he meets. If he keeps on hurting you like this then he doesn't love you. Don't downgrade yourself like this my friend." She says.

I wipe my uninvited tears and stare at my ring. "I love him, I can't just leave him like this." I say and she chortles.

"I'm done. Do what you have to do." She says then gulps her wine down. "But you didn't give up on Nkanyezi." I try to reason but she shakes her head.

"Nkanyezi doesn't have a tattoo of his ex girlfriend's name across his chest and he only cheated on me once as far as I know. I'm convinced that he loves me and I trust him with my life, you on the other hand? How do you sleep in the same bed with a guy who doesn't love you?" She asks.

"He loves me..." I reply and she chuckles bitterly. "If you say so but we can bet on this, if you go to Kwanobamba to see him, I'm sure you'll find that he has already paid dowry for his ex girlfriend." She says.

"No man runs away from his problems." She adds on.

I look at my glass then gulp the wine down. He hasn't seen her in years, unless they've been meeting behind my back but he couldn't do that to me.

In fact, I'm going there. I'll surprise him. "Uhm... I have to go, I'll call you later." I say already getting up and rushing out. I'm booking a flight ticket to KwaZulu-Natal.

I didn't waste five years of my life to be toyed with. I swore that only death will do us apart and if I find him with some floozy then one of us will have to die.

9

BHEKIZIZWE

I trace my finger on her name which is tattooed on my chest while reminiscing about what happened earlier on.

Although it was a heart breaking moment but I was content with just holding her and allowing her to cry in my arms and confide in me.

I shouldn't have left her here. I should've came back and married her. I shouldn't have hurt her like that.

I got this tattoo after acclimatizing to Johannesburg. I made a couple of friends from school and they showed me around. I don't know why but I willingly went to the tattoo parlor and got this tattoo.

I guess I wanted something that would remind me of Phelo and so I tattooed her name on my chest. If I could, I would've tattooed her name on my heart.

Speaking of friends, Samu also started off as a friend, rich girl vibes with two friends always following her around. She comes from a rich family but it was never about that.

I found it easier to talk to her and confide in her and she understood everything. I could tell her about Phelo at any given time and she would give me great advices in return.

Falling for her was never part of the plan but I did. After one special night with her which was on my birthday, I fell heavily for her and she liked me too so we hit it off.

We started off with no labels but soon enough, what we had labelled itself. Don't get me wrong, I love my wife and I wouldn't trade her with anything but I love my girlfriend as well, more than anything.

So that concludes that I love them both and I want them both. Problem is that none of them would understand. I've already hurt Samu and on the other hand, Phelo hates me with passion, you'd swear she went to school of hatred.

Forgetting about her wasn't as easy as I thought it would be, especially with her name tattooed on my chest. Whenever I looked at myself in the mirror, I'd just imagine her beautiful smile and flawless dark skin.

I tried and I messed up. I knew I was going change and meet someone new that side, that's why I didn't bother with keeping my promises. I love her and I don't want to hurt her.

Selfish me couldn't even call her and let her go because I knew how broken she was going to be but then fifteen years later, I rock up and all the damage I've caused is thrown right on my face.

I get my cellphone and call her. Her phone rings unanswered. She must be asleep but I really need to talk to her. "Hello?" She answers, her voice is a little shaky.

"Phelo..." I call out and she remains silent. I guess she deleted my number then, I know she wouldn't have taken my call if she knew it was me.

"Phelo wami I..." She clucks then hangs up. I look at the screen in disbelief and indeed she hung up. I call her again and it sends me straight to voicemail.

I fucked up really badly.

Aunt is mad at me, I fought with Mpilo, Phelo detests me and I'm just fucked up. I don't know how I'm going to help her if she refuses to talk to me.

I put my cellphone in the charger then get under the covers and look out the window, tis' going to be a very long night.

My cellphone pings. I sit up straight and reach for it to check. Its a text from Phelo, she says I should call her again. I can't help but to smile at that.

I clear my throat as I listen to her ringing tone and she finally answers. "Hey..." I greet her. I hear some shuffling going on before she speaks again. "Hi, Zizwe." She greets back.

I gulp at how she flawlessly says my name and how she's the only one who calls me Zizwe. Its refreshing to hear someone call me using a different name.

Bheki, Bhebhe, etc. I'm tired of hearing that.

"Uhm... I called to check up on you, I just wanted to hear your precious voice." I say trying to mask the excitement in my tone.

"Usuyizwile? (Did you hear it?)" She asks and foolish me nods knowing very well that she can't see me. "Yes, I have. Thank you Phelo, I kn..." She chimes in.

"What do you know?" She asks. She sounds upset all of a sudden

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did I say something wrong? "I know I'm the last person you want to hear from but..." She cuts me once again.

"Voetsek." She cusses. I blink vigorously in disbelief of what I just heard. "Did you just swear at me?" I ask. "Yebo, voetsek Zizwe! Voetsek yezwa?" She shouts.

"Siphephelo." I call out to her. "What Bhekizizwe, what? Go to hell yeva? Go and jump in the nearest lake and kill yourself, I never want you see you again and don't ever call me again!" She shouts.

"Siphe, what's going on?" I guess that's her mother asking. "You are the devil's incarnate, you won't see heaven. I swear if I ever see you again, I'll kill you myself!" She shouts.

"Siphe!" Her mother reprimands. "Siphephelo listen to me. I know you're angry at me but swearing at me? I'm not Mpilo, I will beat you up." I warn and she chuckles bitterly.

"Uzwile ma? Zizwe wants to beat me? Yazini, show me what you've got. You beat women up, right? I'm coming up there, show me what you've got." She says then hangs up.

I throw my phone on the bed then groan in frustration. She really just pissed me off, I didn't mean what I said.

I lie back down on the bed and look up at the ceiling. My job is the only thing that's going well in my life right now. I used to tell Mpilo everything and now that I messed up, I really need to talk to someone.

A few minutes later, I hear female voices shouting outside. I really hope it's not Siphe because I'm drained as it is. I won't be able to see anything from my window so I put on my pants as well as a tshirt then head out of my room.

I bump into Mpilo who just ignores me and we both rush outside to see what's happening.

Its Phelo and her mother with some of the neighbors already outside to see the drama so they'll be able to gossip tomorrow morning.

"He wants to hit me, right? I am here now, ngishaye! (Hit me!)" She shouts. Her mother is trying to reprimand her but she's not listening.

"iDrama engaka eyani, Siphe wami?" I ask and she chuckles and claps once.

"My love, what's going on?" Mpilo asks after opening the gate. They share a long hug and that's enough to anger me. "Your brother thinks he can hit me?" She asks and Mpilo eyes me.

"Of course I'll hit you if you keep on talking to me in that manner. I'm not your friend, Phelo." I warn.

"Don't talk my girlfriend in that manner wena sfebe!" Mpilo agitates. "You want me to beat you up in front of her?" I ask and he stretches his neck.

"What's all this chaos about?" Aunt asks rushing out of the house. "Siphe my dear, what's going on?" She asks and Siphe looks at me.

"Tell her about how you beat women up." She says looking at me in the eye. "Bhekizizwe!" Aunt shouts. "One of these days, I swear I'm going to kill you!" Mpilo shouts.

"Find your own girlfriend first before saying that shit to me." I say pointing my index finger at him. "I beg your pardon?" I look at Aunt then at Mpilo.

"Yes, he should look for his own girlfriend first instead of going after my girlfriend." I agitate.

Aunt claps once as she chuckles. "Bhekizizwe, did you hear what you just said?" Aunt asks and I huff.

"Phelo and I never broke up so technically she's still my girlfriend." I say.

She wrestles herself from Mpilo's hold but he's holding her tightly. "Let go of her wenja." I order. He does then charges at me and punches me.

"Yeyi! Stop this at once!" Her mother shouts.

"Siphe, let's go. If I ever see you in this house again or hear you speak of the Bhebhe family, I'll kill you myself. As for all of you, stay away from my daughter!" She orders.

"Maybe marrying the King isn't such a bad idea at all, actually come. Let's go home!" She grips her arm and drags her out of the yard.

SIPHEPHELO

"What were you thinking? Do you see how much damage you've caused? Is this what you wanted?" He asks and I look down. "Please don't say that." I beseech.

"Phephisa Mlotshwa, I'm really sorry Mkhathini. I was so angry at Zizwe that I..." He chimes in.

"That doesn't justify what you did, Mashenge." I nod vigorously. "I know and I'm sorry. Things spiraled out of control. I shouldn't have spoken to him to begin with." I tell him.

He looks really hurt, I've hurt him. "Am I still going to be able to see you or should I prepare for a royal wedding?" He asks. I wipe my tears.

"I'm not going to marry that man, Mpilo." I say sternly. "And I don't want you to. I want to marry you." He says and I chuckle lightly.

"I'm serious my love, phela this is straight up chicken murder." I giggle then cover my mouth. If mother hears me, I'm dead for sure.

"I can't even imagine him on top of you." I giggle louder. "Siphe stop laughing and please stop being so melodramatic." He says.

"I'll stop, I promise. Now, can I please see you tomorrow by the river?" I ask him. "Of course, you know I can't go a day without seeing you. Usual time?" He asks. "Yebo."

"I'll see you then. Sleep well, sthandwa sam." He says. "You too and please apologize to aunt for me since I'm required to stay away from the Bhebhe household."

"You do know that that's not the Bhebhe household, right?" He asks. "I know Hlase wami kodwa your mother is from the Bhebhe family and Zizwe is still here." I reason.

"Whatever, I'll apologize on your behalf. Ngyak'thanda uyezwa?"

"Yebo, goodnight." I hang up without waiting for his response. I place my phone on the side and shut my eyes.

Mom will give me a tight slap accompanied by a mouthful tomorrow morning for what I did and I hope she didn't mean what she said.

The man is technically older than my father and his daughter is the same age as me. I don't want to have such responsibilities to my name.

I just want to study and take care of mom and I, not the whole village, not my peer and most certainly not a greedy and gruesome king.

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Morning came faster than I anticipated and for some reason
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I woke up later than usual. I was tired and emotional. My eyelids felt heavy and walking was a mission and a half.

I'm experiencing period pains which only means my periods are nearing. I hate them to the gods and back. Its funny how I worry before my menstruation thinking I might be pregnant even though I'm still a virgin yet I hate it when I'm on my periods.

Mom hasn't said a word to me unless she wants to order me around or say something important. The last time she was this angry with me is when she found out I was depressed and trying to kill myself because of Zizwe.

That was years ago.

I try talking to her here and there but she doesn't budge. I eventually give up and we both silently tend to the pots before us.

A beautiful white rental Mercedes car pulls up in front of us and a beautifully dressed woman steps out. She looks like the one from televisions and music videos, the ones with beautiful bodies and they get paid to twerk throughout the video.

Her hair is nicely braided and her makeup is not too heavy. Do not even mention her beautiful platform heels and her Versace jumpsuit. The watch on her wrist probably costs all my past and future salary.

She smiles as she makes her way to us. She carefully steps on the rocks covered with dusty red soil, careful not to dirty her expensive red bottoms.

She smiles as she makes her way to us and I get to see the big rock on her left hand. She's married. I'm not surprised, she's beautiful. Probably the most beautiful girl I've ever seen.

"Good day." She greets with a megawatt smile and I get to see her beautiful white teeth. "Hi, how can I help you?" I ask then instantly touch my stomach as nerves get the best of me.

You can tell that she'd educated and she speaks English as her home language. "I heard that you make the best food around. I'm actually going to visit my in-laws and I was in such a rush that I forgot to bring something for them." She says.

"Oh uhm... Would you like to see our menu?" I ask and she shakes her head as she giggles softly. "I don't think that would

be necessary. This is my first time here and I'm not really familiar with South African cuisine. What would you get your in-laws?" She asks.

You can tell this is her first time here, who wears heels in such a place - rocky, dusty with only gravel roads?

"Uhm... Everything? We are very popular on dumbling, tripe and beef stew but our food runs out all the time." I say trying convince her.

"Great then I'll get everything." She says and I nod. "That will be..." She chimes in.

"Is three thousand okay?" She asks and my eyes pop out. "I beg your pardon?" She giggles.

"Three thousand rands?" I ask and she nods. We make that much money every two weeks, not in a day.

"That's too much, I'm sorry we cannot accept that." I tell her. "Its not a problem at all plus I'll need a friend around here. I'll need someone to show me around, I know my husband will be too busy to do that." She says.

I look at mom then cover my mouth. "This is too much, I'm sorry I can't." I tell her. She steps closer and grabs my hands. She has the longest and most beautiful nails I've ever seen.

"Its really okay." She says.

"So, can you be my friend?" She asks and I nod vigorously.

"Sure." I say. After what she has just done, I owe her that much.

"Great then." She smiles further.

"I didn't even introduce myself." I wipe my hands on my skirt then stretch one hand out to her. "I'm Siphephelo Buthelezi." Her smile fades and she squirts her eyes.

"You're more beautiful than I thought." She says taking my hand into hers. "Samukelisiwe Bhebhe." She says slightly shaking my hand.

"Is that your marital surname?" I ask and she nods. "Yes, I'm married to Bhekizizwe Bhebhe, I'm sure you know him." She says and my smile instantly fades.

My heart rate drops and I feel like I'm running short of breath. I force out a smile. "Let me get your order, please make yourself comfortable." I tell her then quickly rush out.

BHEKIZIZWE

I woke up earlier than usual this morning so I could go for a walk and think things through. Kwanobamba is very beautiful and slightly chilly in the morning because of the rivers and whatnot but I'm used to this weather and I like it.

It also has the most beautiful sunset. The sky turns into a shade of pink mixed with orange while the sun glazes the land with its golden light.

Its beautiful and calming, just like Siphephelo. uPhelo wami madoda...

Her beautiful smile, her glowing chocolate brown skin, her beautiful big eyes and her unorthodox personality. I miss her, I miss holding her and kissing her. I miss hearing her crazy stories and her funny laughter.

I miss her irritating demeanor and her wild thoughts, how she always thought out of the box and always did the opposite of what she said she'll do.

How she always challenged me and argued with me until I yielded. I love how she doesn't give up and never took the easy way out. She always considers other people's feelings and thinks of the consequences for her decisions.

I like how hardworking she is and how she handles herself in general, calm and never retaliates. Only last night she did, I could see how upset she was. She was upset, I have never seen her like that before.

That could only mean that she still loves me. I mean, you don't just forget about someone you once deeply loved in a snap of a finger. I put her through a lot, surely she remembers and misses me, probably still loves me.

I halt in the middle of the road and give her a call. It sends me straight to voicemail, maybe she blocked me.

That's no problem at all, I'll get myself a new simcard and send her a text or a recording. I'll tell her how I feel and what I think. I'll also apologize and if possible ask to meet with her.

I'll tell her to break up with my cousin if they are dating even. The only reason they're so close is because Mpilo and I resemble each other quite a lot and I'm sure about that.

Why am I even thinking of her? I'm just hoping MamButhlezi didn't mean what she said, about Phelo marrying the king. I swear that wedding won't happen whilst I'm still alive.

Its my first week here yet things are already going south. In five weeks, I'll have to go back home to fix my marriage. I'll have to

inform my parents about my infidelity and I'm hoping Samu hasn't told them yet.

I also have to apologize to Samu's family for wronging their daughter.

I resume my music and walk further until I see a corner shop opening up. I look around and see that the sun is slowing creeping up.

I make my way to the shop and get myself a new simcard and as I turn to leave, my eyes land on Phelo's favorite chocolate bar.

I used to get her one every day. That's how much she loved it
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she couldn't go a day without at least one. I grab two of them and pay for them then head out. I shove them inside my pocket as well as my new simcard.

Since I've been walking for what seems like forever, I decide to turn and walk back home.

I had left a note for aunt telling her I'll be out for a walk. I know she's still mad at me but she cares and there's no way I'm leaving here until I'm ready.

I find myself making my way to the river. I was hoping to find Phelo here for. For some weird reason, I feel like my love for

her grows with each passing day and after last night, I'm convinced that she feels the same.

I love her, I love her so much. Whenever I see her, its like the first time seeing her beautiful self. She reminds me of the very first day I laid my eyes on her.

•

I shut my book and lie on my back. I've been studying, hard for my upcoming examinations. I hate school but I want to get dad off my case.

If I pass with flying colors from now till matric then surely he'll get off my back and stop pestering me. I try my best yet its never good enough.

He always puts pressure on me and compares me to who and who and the only way to get him to stop is to make him proud. I'll even sacrifice my happiness and spare time just to get him to stop being such a prick.

"Bafo, let's go for a walk." Mpilo says perching up next to me. "I can't, I have to study." I tell him then shut my eyes. "Well you look like shit and you need a break or you'll forget everything you've learnt." He says.

True but I don't need a distraction right now. "Just go alone." I say pushing him off the bed. "Come on! Look at yourself. Just

come with me then you'll rest after that. You'll revise in the morning." He says pulling me off the bed.

"Okay fine!" I finally give in. He punches the air in excitement then drags me to the kitchen.

He hands me a cap and a bottle of cold water with ice cubes then we head out after locking up since we're home alone.

"Where are we going anyway?" I ask after sipping from my bottle of water. "Downhill, there's this place where they sell good bunny chows." He says with a grin on his face.

They must be really good for him to be this excited. "What were you even doing downhill?" I ask. "I had to fetch some work from my classmate." He responds.

"Your classmate downhill? That doesn't sound right." I say trying to fathom what he just said. Downhill is for the poor. He cannot have a classmate downhill.

"Well her name is Siphephelo Buthelezi. She lives with her mother and she's super smart... And beautiful too. Her mother works her butt off to ensure that she has good education." He responds.

I just nod and we walk further with him telling me about the bunny chow and many other things I couldn't catch because I was stuck in my thoughts.

"And here we are." He says as we are approaching a red container shop or rather an eatery.

Once we get there, he orders bunny chows and cold drinks for us and we sit on the chairs waiting.

Two girls make their way to the container shop and Mpilo smiles. One is a beautiful chocolate skinned girl with long hair and the other one is a light skinned.

The dark one is a slightly thick and has big brown eyes. She's beautiful. Mpilo clears his throat and shakes his head with his eyes shut. "Uhm... That's Siphephelo, the one I was telling you about." He whispers and I just nod.

They order whatever it is they're ordering then Mpilo calls them over.

They debate before finally coming to us. My eyes are on the dark skinned girl the entire time. "Ladies..." Mpilo greets and the light skinned girl greets back. The dark skinned one seems shy.

"Siphe..." Mpilo calls out. She steals a glance at me then looks at Mpilo, she looks uncomfortable. "This is my cousin slash older brother Bhekizizwe. Bafo, this is Siphephelo and her friend Funani." He introduces.

I scan 'Siphephelo', she's indeed beautiful. Now I don't blame Mpilo for grinning like a fool whenever he sees her. "Nice to meet you." I say extending my hand to her and she just glares at it.

Funani elbows her and I chuckle. She looks at her friend then shakes my hand. "Nice to meet you too..." She says softly then snatches her hand from my tight grip.

I hadn't realized I was still shaking her hand nor how I was lost in her beautiful eyes.

The sun kisses her, causing her dark skin to glow. She looks at Mpilo then back at me. I swear my heart just skipped eight beats at once.

-

My cellphone rings from my pocket and its Mpilo. I thought he was mad at me. I answer. "Urh bafo, your wife is here and she came with Siphe." He announces.

Oh shit!

SIPHEPHELO

"Makoti? Sipe?"

I look at Samukelisiwe who has a grin on her face regardless of the look on Aunt's face. She looks like she had just seen a ghost. "Greetings to you ma." She greets aunt. "Greetings to you too, brother inlaw." She greets Mpilo as well.

Nerves are kicking in and I feel barf slowly rising up my throat. I'm scared, after the drama I caused here I never thought I'd set foot here again. I feel like running out of the house and never looking back.

"My goodness." Aunt looks at Mpilo then back to Samu. "Why didn't you tell us you're coming, we could've prepared something for you to eat." Aunt says hugging her.

"Don't worry ma, I passed by Siphephelo's eatery and bought some food. I was in a rush to arrive, I forgot to bring something." She says with a smile. Is my food even welcome here anymore?

"I'll go get the food." I say already walking away. Samu didn't lock the car so I just open the door and take the bags of food out. I turn and find Mpilo standing behind me. I jump in fear. "Don't sneak up on me like that." I say in a whisper.

"I'm sorry my love but... Did you come with her?" He asks and I nod. "Do you know who she is?" He asks and I nod. "You do?" He asks, his eyes full of guilt. I hold his gaze and nod.

"Samukelisiwe Bhebhe, Bhekizizwe's wife. Relax, she already introduced herself." I say and almost cringe as those words left a rather acidic taste on my tongue.

"I'm sorry for not telling you about her." He apologizes and I force out a chuckle. "Its okay really. It doesn't matter even, all that matters is how I'm going to apologize to aunt for the drama I caused here." I say.

He let's out a nervous chuckle. "And you know that she's a hard nut to crack." He says and I nod. "Just like you, like mother like son. Let me take these inside before they get cold." I say.

"And I can't wait to indulge." He says. I giggle as I walk into the house. They are both seated on the stools already in a deep conversations while the kettle is on. Aunt loves her tea. I place the bags on the table and walk.

"Uhm... I should leave. It was nice meeting you." I say looking at Samukelisiwe and she just smiles, what a beautiful soul. "I'll call you soon. I hope you're not busy tomorrow." She says.

"I- I'm working tomorrow." I say and her smile disappears. "Oh, I guess we'll keep in touch." She says and I nod. I look at aunt

who looks like she's confused. "Uhm aunt, I would like to apologize for the drama and chaos I caused here at your house. I didn't mean for things to get out of hand." I apologize sincerely.

She smiles at me. "Its okay my dear. Please make us your delicious tea before you leave." She says with a smile. I nod then make my way to the cupboards and take out two cups.

"You're not making one for yourself?" She asks and I shake my head. "I have to go back to the eatery."

"Just one cup of tea then you can go." She says. I bite the insides of my cheeks then nod and take out another cup.

I take out sugar and a spoon and place it in the middle of the island. I place their cups of tea in front of them then sit next to aunt.

I wonder where Mpilo has disappeared to...

"You don't drink sugar?" Aunt asks Samu and she shakes her head. "I usually drink green tea and I pour a spoonful of honey." She says.

Well
this is awkward.

"My dear, this is Bhekizizwe's wife, Samukelisiwe and they have been married for about five years now if I'm not mistaken." Aunt says and I nod forcing a smile. "She has already introduced herself aunt." I respond and she nods.

"Well I thought she didn't. Have you two become friends now or something?" Aunt asks and I look at Samukelisiwe. "I figured I'd need one during my stay here and luckily, Siphe grew up around here and she knows this place like the back of her hand." She says with what looks like a genuine smile.

"Is that all?" Aunt asks and she nods. "Yes." She responds then sips her tea. "You do know that she's Bhekizizwe's ex girlfriend, right?" Aunt asks and I look at her in aghast. How does she say something like this so easily?

"Don't look at me like that, she has to know hawu." She says. Samu giggles. "Don't worry, I already know that and I don't have a problem with that." She says.

"How did you know?" I ask and she giggles yet again. "Well, Bheki used to talk about you all the time. He even has your name tattooed on his chest." He says and I furrow my brows. That doesn't sound right.

"What do you mean?" I ask. "Crazy, I know but that's the first thing he did when he arrived in Johannesburg." She says.

I finish off the rest of my tea while trying to take in what she just told me. "I bet mom is waiting for me." I say getting off the chair.

"I'll drop you off." Samu says and I shake my head. "Its okay, really. I need the walk." I say. I don't think I'd survive another minute in her presence. Its somewhat suffocating me.

"Nonsense. I brought you here, so I'll take you back." She says. I look at aunt who's just smiling at us. Does she know something I don't?

"Samu, its okay really." I agitate and she shakes her head. "One thing about me, I'm stubborn as hell so we'll argue until you yield." She says.

"Well, you two have three things in common already." Aunt says then sips her tea. We both look at her then back at each other.

The door slides open and Zizwe walks in followed by Mpilo. They look like they've been running. "Phelo..." He says almost breathlessly. I look at Samukelisiwe and her smile has vanished. "I was just leaving." I say already making my way to the door. "I'll accompany you." Mpilo says making way for me and I just nod.

I guess he'll have to drop me off far from the eatery so that mom doesn't see him. "Are you okay?" Mpilo asks opening the door for me. I just nod as I slide inside the car.

"I'll accompany you." Mpilo says then walks after her. I watch as she sashays to the car and sways her hips as well. I'm dying to touch her again. I'm dying to caress her beautiful glowing skin and to hold her into my arms like my life depends on it.

I shouldn't have done her like that. The least I could've done was to give her a phone call, send her a text message or leave her a voice mail explaining exactly what I had been thinking of.

Maybe she wouldn't hate me and we'd be friends at least. Maybe she wouldn't have dated my brother and maybe she wouldn't have been forced to marry a whole king.

I hate seeing her hurt. I hate seeing her sad. I knew very well that I would fall for some city girl and forget about her. The sad truth is that I did meet some city girl and I fell for her.

Our marriage is based on more than just a business deal by our parents in exchange for a lavish life, I love Samu more than I ever imagined. We were friends who happened to fall for each other.

She understood me, she gave me a shoulder to cry on, she gave me advice and most importantly, she didn't judge me. She NEVER judged me.

I look at aunt who is just slurping from her cup. I bet its tea and it was prepared by Phelo. I'm not one to drink tea but she makes the best tea. Yes, its possible.

I look at Samu and storm off to my bedroom. I'm met by her last size suitcase, the largest of the set, and I'm pissed off by how her scent has already filled the room.

Why doesn't she ever listen to me? I push her fur coat towards the pillows then perch up on one corner of the bed. I bury my head on my hands and sigh out loud.

I thought I came here for a breather but none of this is working. Maybe I shouldn't have come here to begin with. Coming here messed me up, it puzzled me to the core.

"Baby..." Her soft voice fills my ears. I instantly look up and I'm met by her watery eyes. She settles next to me and wraps her arms around my waist while she rests her head on my shoulder.

"Why are you here, Samu?" I ask. She remains quiet for a few seconds before she could respond. "I missed you." She replies.

"Samukelisiwe why are the here?" I ask yet again. She raises her head and looks into my eyes. She never does that, this is a first. "I'm tired, Bhekizizwe. I'm tired and this marriage is weighing me down." She says.

The last part forcefully grabs my attention. "What do you mean?" I ask. She chuckles and shakes her head then looks away. "Remember when we first started dating? I felt like the only girl in the world.

You would call until I told you to stop. You would pop out of nowhere with food, invite me over for movies and a good intimate session. We would go out for dinner dates, we even went to the club together as a couple.

You would spend your last cent on me just because you wanted to see a smile on my face and we were each other's world. What happened to that? What happened to our relationship? Why did we have to change because of marriage?" She asks.

I wonder where that is coming from. "Now you don't even see me, I don't even get a kiss on the cheek as some form of greeting. You wronged me yet I'm suffering
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how is any of that fair?" She asks.

"You ran all the way home just to check if I didn't manhandle your precious ex girlfriend, isn't it?" She asks.

"That's not true my love, I know you're not a violent person." I respond. She smiles. "You still love her. You came here to see her because she's your peace, she's your 'place of peace' as you like to describe her." She says, her tone slightly changed.

Jealousy doesn't suit her at all.

"Mam' Bhebhe, I chose you, I married you, I..." She chimes in. "Yet you still cheated on me. I thought I gave you everything you wanted but clearly I didn't."

I sigh then look out the window. "I love you sthandwa sam." I tell her. "And I love you too but I refuse to be made a fool. You didn't even tell the poor girl that you're married. You fool everyone because you're god wena, right?" She instantly gets up from the bed.

She grabs her handbag and takes out what looks like a picture. She stares at it for a good minute before she hands it to me. I hesitantly take it. My eyes widen as I scan it and I break into shivers.

She wraps her arms around her stomach and throws her head back. "We're thirteen weeks pregnant, can you believe it?" She asks. I look back at the scan then back at her.

I'm having my first child ever? I get up from the bed then pull her in for a hug. I lift her from the ground and spin her around as waves of excitement hit me.

I put her screaming self down then kiss her plum lips. "I'm going to be a dad, we're going to be parents?" I ask and she nods then giggles. "We're going to be parents, my love." She responds.

I'll have to get my shit together then. I have to be a great father as well as husband. "How about we go back home?" I ask and she grins. "I'd love that but first, I'm hungry and I bought food." She says breaking free from my grip.

She changes her heels to slippers then rushes out to prepare the food. I slide my phone out of my pocket and I'm met with a text from Siphe.

I don't know how you do it but surely you have mastered hurting me. You just keep hurting me and it never stops. Life was much easier when you weren't around, please do me one last favor and leave this place Her text reads.

I sit on the bed and try calling her but it sends me straight to voicemail. She must've blocked me again after sending the text.

I hope she's okay wherever she is. I'll call her with aunt's phone just to check on her, I'll also tell her that I'm leaving and hopefully, things won't end on a bad note.

SIPHEPHELO

I'm woken up by my cellphone vibrating next to me. Its aunt Ndongoloza, why would she call me so late at night? "Aunt..." I hear some shuffling.

"Phelo, its me." There's only one person who calls me Phelo and its Zizwe. "Don't hang up, I promise I won't bother you ever again." He says. He's good at promises, isn't he?

"I'm leaving Kwanobamba and I doubt I'll ever come back so all I want is to see you for the last time." He says.

"I don't want to see you." I respond. "I'm begging you, MaShenge omuhle. I just want to see you for the last time. Besides, I'm already outside. You don't want me to come knocking, right?" He asks.

Oh great.

"Fine, I'm coming." I say then hang up. I get out of bed and grab my robe as well as slippers then sneak out. Mom is a light sleeper and I don't want to wake her up.

Well unlocking the kitchen door is a mission and a half, why the hell is this door so loud?

I think the window will do in this case. I doubt I'll even fit.

I unlock the door and lift it up while opening it so it doesn't make any noise. I take the keys and close the door then lock it.

I put on my slippers and robe then make my way to the gate. I swear mom will kill me after this.

I unlock the gate then lock it once I'm outside, I can't even see him yet he said he's outside.

My heart stops beating when I feel a hand on my waist as well as on my mouth. "Sshh, relax. Its me." He whispers and I sigh in relief.

"We can't stand here, let's go." He says already pulling me to god knows where. "Where are you taking me?" I ask. "To the car, I hid it in case of... Emergency." He says in a whisper.

Once we get to the car, he opens the door for me and closes it once I'm inside and he, the same. I've never been inside such a car.

Its beautiful and looks very complicated. I know nothing about cars and I have no interest in them whatsoever but this is a nice car.

"Phelo..." He calls out, startling me out of my thoughts. I sit back and turn to him. "Why did you want to see me?" I ask after pulling a straight face.

"Like I said, I'm leaving Kwanobamba and I don't think I'll ever come back. I don't want to make the same mistake I made fifteen years ago." He says.

"Which is?" I ask.

"Which is deceiving you and keeping you in the dark. I don't want to make anymore promises I can't keep and I don't want to hurt you any more." He says.

I just sigh out loud. "Phelo, the reason I came here was because I was running away from my problems. I wronged my wife and... And things were getting too much for me. Things were getting out of hand, I couldn't take it anymore." I chime in.

"Then you ran off and came here." I add on and he nods. "Yes, I came here- to my place of peace. I came to isiphephelo sami." He says. I look down and bite my lower lip.

"Ngibheke MaShenge uma ngikhuluma nawe. (Look at me when I'm talking to you.)" He orders and I clear my throat. "Why are you telling me all this?" I ask.

"Because I want to. I want you to know the person I've grown to be and I want you to know that you don't have to cry

because of me. I'm not the old Zizwe who was a gentleman and was raised to respect women." He says.

"What are you talking about?" He takes my hands into his hold and I just stare at them and get lost in thoughts. I remember how much effect his touch used to have but now, its all dead.

"Phelo, are you listening to me?" He asks and I bite the insides of my cheeks
I heard nothing at all.

"I changed Phelo. I changed for the worst and I regret it. I regret some of my past decisions and its a shame that you cannot decide to love someone, it has to come from within. You have to feel it even in your blood." He says.

"Honestly, why am I here? I didn't sneak out of my house to listen to your sob stories." He chuckles.

"I read your letters, all of them. I now understand all the pain I've put you through and I know that no matter how many times I apologize, it won't make a big difference.

I don't know what to do but to sincerely apologize from the bottom of my shattered heart. I thought I was protecting you, not knowing that I was breaking you. Please forgive me, Phelo."
He says searching for my eyes.

He scoots closer and takes my one hand and presses it against his chest. "I'm so sorry, please forgive me." He apologizes.

His eyes are watery and his tone of voice is soothing and much softer.

"I... I..." He chimes in. "You don't have to forgive me. What I did to you was unforgettable and unforgivable but please do it for yourself. Do it for your sanity and for your solitude." He says.

"You have a great heart, purest of them all. Don't allow your hatred towards me to taint your innocence. Don't allow the world to change you."

I have to get out of here, I shouldn't have come here. I try to yank my arm from his hold but he tightens his grip. "Let go of my arm, Zizwe." I say sternly.

"I don't want to. I don't want to let go of you." He says. I try to wrestle my arm out of his grip but he pulls me closer.

He snakes his arm around my waist. "I love you, Phelo wami and I never stopped loving you." He says.

Wrath instantly surfaces from within. I want to slap him right across his handsome face and wipe that smirk off. "And I hate you so much, Zizwe."

"Calm down, we're having a cordial talk." He says while chuckling which angers me more than I already am.

"Let go of me." He tightens his grip. "Are you calm?" He asks playfully. I swear I'm going to strangle him after this. "Zizwe let go of me!" I shout.

"Hey, calm down! Why are you shouting? You want witches to hear us?" He asks. Does he ever take me seriously?

"Okay okay, I'll let go of you if you tell me you don't love me." He says. "I don't love you." He chuckles.

"What's the rush? Look into my eyes and tell me that crap." He says. "Bhekizizwe, let go of me."

"I said..." I chime in. "I hate you and I don't love you. This trick of yours might have worked a year ago but it won't work this time.

I hate you and I love Mpilo more than I could ever imagine. You, disgusting excuse of a man, are married yet you're busy declaring your love to your ex girlfriend."

"Girlfriend." He says. "No Bhekizizwe. Its ex girlfriend. What we had died along with your empty promises and I'd be grateful if things were to remain that way." He says.

He chuckles darkly. He has his psychotic tendencies nje. "I courted you and if and when I want to, I'll end this relationship." He says.

I gape at him and shake my head. "You're crazy, you need to get checked." I tell him.

"Phelo, your words sting." He says. I chuckle in disbelief. "You... You need to get checked. Something is not okay in your head. Let go of me."

"Okay, I'm sorry. I just... I'm doing all of this because I love you Phelo, why don't you just listen to me for once? I love you and I won't stop loving you whether you like it or not." He says.

BHEKIZIZWE

I open the door and I'm met by my dear wife in her sexy sleepwear. She's holding what looks like a novel but I know very well that she was waiting for me.

I wasn't intending on staying that long with Phelo. What was meant to be a goodbye turned into something beyond my imagination.

Her allowing me to kiss her means so much to me, it means she still loves me. No matter how much I've hurt her, love will always overcome the obstacles. Even though she regretted it, I don't regret it one bit.

If only she let it go further then I would've popped her cherry and we'd connect beyond the physical world but the spiritual world too.

But then, with her being forced to marry a king then he's the one who's going to have to break her virginity. I swear I'm going to kill that man, that wedding is not going to happen.

"Babe, why are you still up?" I ask with my back pressed against the door. I'm trying to keep a straight face and to hide my excitement but I think I'm failing.

"I woke up and you were not in bed. I couldn't sleep so I was hoping to read myself to sleep but now that you're here..." She shuts her book and places it on the nightstand. "You can just rock me back to sleep." She says.

She left me so many missed calls and I know aunt is going to roast me for keeping her cellphone with me. "Oh uhm... Let me go for a wee then I'll... Yeah." I say already heading to the ensuite bathroom.

Once inside, I shut the toilet seat and sit on top of it. She has already responded to my text and it reads. *We really shouldn't have done that. You're married and I can't hurt Mpilo yet again. He hasn't recovered from the news about the king and now you. You really should leave.*

I roll my head back and heave out a sigh. Just when we're making progress, she pushes me away. *You don't love him anyway so just set him free.* I text her back and she instantly starts typing.

Just because we kissed doesn't mean I don't love him. Just like how you still love your wife yet we kissed. I chuckle at her text.

Its not the same. You're using Mpilo to get over me because we kinda look alike. She sends a laughing emoji followed by a moon and stars.

Goodnight She replies.

I cluck as I shake my head, she really knows how to upset me.
*I'll fetch you tomorrow morning and drive you to work
because it seems like we have a lot of talking to do.* I text her.

"Baby, are you okay in there?" Samu asks. "Yeah, almost done. I actually think I'll take a shower!"

Just go to your wife and leave me be She goes offline. Dang!

"Should I join you? I could use some glory right now!" She says.
I guess I could use some glory too.

I get off the toilet and flush it before walking out. "Let's skip the shower." I say crawling on top of the bed. She flashes a seductive smile and spreads her thick legs for me.

I hold her waist as I devour her delicious lips and she wraps her arms around my neck. "Don't be loud, okay?" She nods then kisses me yet again. "I mean it, baby. I don't want aunt on my case tomorrow." She giggles then nods.

"I'll try my level best to keep it down." She says softly. She helps me out of my tracksuit and her, out of her nightdress then lies down and I hover over her. "May I go on top?" She asks. I peck her lips then nod.

She grins then gets up and pushes me down. She cradles my laps then kisses me as she grabs a hold of the jolly rod. She breaks the kiss and moans softly as she inserts it in her slit.

She places her hands on my chest for balance and starts moving. I hold her waist to help her ride faster. I find myself lost in the moment and I close my eyes.

This is what I've longed for, her glowing chocolate skin against mine and her doing unimaginable things to me like she is now. Her soft moans penetrating my ears and her juicy lips on mine.

I squeeze her ass and she cusses. I grab her waist and start thrusting furiously from underneath.

She bites her lower lip as she tries to keep her moans in. I can tell she wants to scream out loud but she knows she can't.

"Baby stop." She says in a whisper. "I should stop?" I ask and she shakes her head. "No, don't stop. I'm so close, I need to scream." She says as if she wants to cry.

"What should I do?" I ask. She looks around and grabs a hold of her nightdress and stuffs it inside her mouth.

She holds on to me as she starts grinding on me and let's out a muffled cry. She trembles lightly as she gushes all over me and I

cuss under my breath. I squeeze her ass yet again as I feel my climax nearing.

I moan her name softly as I release every single juice inside of her. I rest back and try to catch my breath until I feel a sting on my cheek.

My eyes snap open and I'm met by an angry Samu. Her eyes are watery and she looks like she's ready for war.

"Why do you keep on doing this to me?" She asks. "Baby, what are you talking about?" I ask and she lets out a sob and covers her mouth.

"We make love and you call me by her name? You were with her, weren't you? You fucked her, didn't you?" She asks. I sit up straight and grab a hold of her wrists then press them together.

"Baby..." She shakes her head. "Let go of me! You disgust me, Bhekizizwe." She cries. "Baby, I'm sorry. I'm so sorry, okay?" I apologize but she shakes her head.

She lets out a sharp sigh and throws her head down. "I gave you everything. I did everything you asked of me and this is how you thank me? This is how you repay me?" She asks and I shake my head.

"Baby, listen to me..." She chuckles. "How was she? Is she better than me? Did you imagine her as we were making love?" She asks and I swallow hard and look away.

She yanks her wrists from my hold and gets off the bed and rushes to the bathroom. She locks the door and I hear water running.

I knock on the door for the hundredth time but she doesn't open. She's been in there, crying for almost three hours now. I'm scared she might harm herself and she might harm our baby or even lose our baby, the stress is not good for her.

"Baby please open up. At least come to bed. I'll do anything you want me to do." I tell her.

She sobs then sniffs. I knock on the door once again. "Baby, Phelo and I didn't have sex. Infact, she hates me more than I could ever imagine. I won't lie and say I don't love her but I love you too." I say and hear her sniff.

"Even if I wanted to be with her, I can't. She has to get married to the king in a few days time. Even though she doesn't want to, there's nothing we can do." I say.

"I'm sorry baby. I know I keep on hurting you and I honestly don't know what's wrong with me." I apologize. The door slides open and I jump up from the floor.

Her light skin has turned rosy and her eyes are bloodshot. I wrap my arms tightly around her and she starts crying all over again. "I'm so sorry, my love. I'm sorry."

16

SIPHEPHELO

5 YEARS LATER

I fix the flowers before me and place them on the cold granite stone and caress it. I miss him, more than I can ever imagine. He crosses my mind every single day and it always takes me back to the day he left me.

He left me all alone with no one to protect me nor fight for me. He left me to fend for myself in this cruel world. I had to put on a fake smile because I couldn't face the world with tears of sorrow in my eyes.

They were blinding me, they still do but having no one else to wipe them for me and tell me everything is going to be alright, I have to wipe them myself. I have to laugh and assure everyone that everything is alright because they would never understand my pain.

'You're a married woman, you shouldn't worry about other men.'

'You're a queen, you have a king and the whole kingdom to worry about.'

'Have patience, everything will fall into place sooner than you can say pain.'

'Don't cry, don't cry, stop crying!'

I quickly wipe my tears and look at the gravestone I'm sitting on. The wound is still fresh, it feels fresh. The hole in my heart can never be filled by any other men. What the Bhebhe men did to me can never be undone.

They keep on hurting me, one way or another. Whether they're here or not, they always find ways to hurt me. My body may be here, on earth living amongst others but my spirit is not on this earth. I can never find peace for as long as I still think of them, both of them.

On this day
the love of my life left me. He left me to marry an old and cruel king. He left me to become a submissive to an abusive pedophile. He left me to suffer with no shield whatsoever.

Today five years ago, isthandwa sami left me and it was all my fault.

"We have to get going before dad let's out a search team for us." Isisa says rushing towards me. I look at the gravestone one more time then back at her. She helps me up and leads me to the royal car.

The chauffeur opens the door and Isisa slides in first and then I follow with the chauffeur's help then he shuts the door and gets on the driver's seat.

"Dad called, I had to lie and say we got delayed at the shopping center so please stop crying." She says and I nod. She has been a great help to me since I married the king and became queen.

I couldn't have gotten this far without her help. She's the one who put me in this position after all. She influenced the king to want to marry me by reporting every single thing about me to him.

He says he loves me but in all honesty, only he knows.

She takes out her small makeup bag and starts beating my face so she could cover up the eyebags as well as my dried up tears.

She takes out eye contact lenses and helps me put them on, so I'll be able to have a scapegoat when he asks me why I was crying should he notice my bloodshot eyes.

"All done. Now remember, we got delayed at the mall. Taxi drivers were fighting in the middle of the road and that caused traffic from inside the mall throughout." She says and I nod.

The taxi rank is inside the mall, only on the side so it'll make sense that taxis caused a massive road shutdown and we were stuck in traffic until they stopped fighting.

"Are you okay?" She asks and I nod and force out a smile. She smiles too then focuses on the road.

I never allowed her to call me mom. That is just weird. I may have married her father but in all honesty, you'd think I'm her sister rather than her step mother.

Once we're nearing the royal palace, she takes out her cellphone and calls someone. "Please come out of the palace with aloe water and a cloth. Make sure no one sees you nor asks questions." She orders then hangs up.

We usually wash our hands with aloe water when we're from the cemetery for god knows why. I grew up doing so and I still practice it. Its a cultural value and so I will not question my mother's knowledge, really.

We find her waiting outside the gate. The car comes to a halt and we step out of the car so we could wash our hands and wipe them when we're done.

I don't think I'll be able to keep it together for long. I need to get out of here. "Come with me to Johannesburg tomorrow." I tell her and she nods with a grin. She has never been to Johannesburg before and I know Cele won't allow me to go alone.

"Did you ask dad?" She asks and I shake my head. "I'll ask him tonight." I tell her. "Do you think he'll agree?" She asks yet again. I bite the insides of my cheeks as I try to think of a way to get him to agree then turn to her.

"But of course he will." I respond.

"Why do you sound so sure?" She asks with her furrowed brows. "I've been married to Cele for five years, I know what he likes and how he likes it. I know his moments of weakness and so I'll get him to agree right when he's weak." I say with a lopsided smile and she cringes.

"Okay, spare me the details. Some things are better left unsaid." She says. I giggle then look out the window. The car instantly comes to a halt and door opens. The driver helps me out and Isisa follows.

She takes my hand and we head inside the palace. We ask the servants where the king is and we're told he's in his office and so we head there.

I knock on the door then open it without awaiting his response. He looks up and flashes a smile. "Aww MaPhungashe, you're back already?" He asks getting up from his seat.

You can tell he was stressed. If he thinks I'm still at that stage where I attempt to run away then surely he's missing a few screws. "Yebo baba." I respond looking down.

"Ndodakazi, thank you for taking care of your mother." He says to Isisa who just nods and walks off. Her presence is no longer required.

"How's my little boy doing?" He asks already rubbing my bump. "He's behaving today." I say and he grins. "That's all I wanted to hear, let's go make another one." He says snaking his hand around my waist.

I guess this is my chance.

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SIPHEPHELO

"Take care of yourselves as well as my son, okay?" He says and we both nod. He confessed to not liking the idea of me having to go back to Johannesburg.

Cele can be surprising at times. I don't know why he allowed me to study four years in a culinary school as well as open my one year old restaurant if he didn't want me to be independent.

Zulu men and their insecurities always leave me baffled. Sometimes I just feel like he did all of that because he wanted me to love him. Maybe he thought that if he helped me and he was kind and caring with me then I'd fall in love with him.

I don't know if I love him but I've come to terms with this marriage. I've accepted that this is my life and I'm not going anywhere. I've accepted that I'm a whole queen and I will always be one.

"I will take care of myself, baba. I will also take care of your children." I say to him. He let's out a sigh then nods. "A week feels long." I giggle and shake my head. "Its really not, we'll be back before you even know it." I tell him.

He pulls me to his embrace and pecks my forehead.

"Ngiyakuthanda maCele." He says softly. "Nami ngiyakuthanda

Cele." He finally releases me after what feels like the longest time then heads to say goodbye to his daughter.

I wait inside the car until Isisa enters and we drive off to the nearest airport. Surely we would've driven four hours to Johannesburg but my pregnant ass can't sit that long.

An hour flight will do.

-

I turn the lights on and drag my feet to the lounge. Isisa is still looking around the house while I settle in on the couch. I've missed the peace and quiet of the suburbs.

I grew up around cattle and sheep, yes but sometimes I just want to sit by the terrace and enjoy the calm wind without having to smell cowdung.

"This is your house?" Isisa asks snapping me out of my thoughts. "Yes, this is the house. I would show you around but my feet hurt." I say to her.

She looks at me then at the huge staircase in front of her before screaming out loud. She giggles as she jogs up the staircase and I chuckle then shake my head.

I understand her excitement. She's in her early thirties yet she still lives under her father's roof and abides by her father's

rules. She'd sometimes come to me crying and tell me about how being Cele's daughter can be exhausting.

She just wants to have a normal life and have a job. She wants to go on dates and have actual friends and drink wine but then she's the Cele princess and she has a reputation to maintain.

Royalty can be quite overwhelming.

"This house is so huge!" She shouts as she comes rushing down the staircase. "Why does it have two lounges?" She asks.

"The one upstairs is called a pyjama lounge." I tell her. She nods as she throws herself next to me. She takes my legs and places them on her thighs and starts massaging them.

"Thank you for everything. You're truly a blessing from above and I couldn't have asked for a better step mom." She says and I can't help but to giggle.

"I told you not to call me that." She chuckles. "I know but... Thank you. I owe you my life. You sacrificed your life because of my father and I." She says.

I don't want to cry now but I bet this damn pregnancy won't let it slide. "Well I benefited from it, didn't I? I got to go to school, I have my own restaurant in the city, I live in a whole mansion and I have a car under my name. I couldn't have asked for a

better life." I tell her so we could move on from this topic but it seems like she's not ready to move on.

"Do you love him, my dad?" She asks and I shrug then lay back. "Five years is a lot of years my dear." She continues to massage my feet.

I grab my cellphone and order McDonalds on the Mr D Food app.

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"This tastes so good." She says digging in on her food. I'm glad she's enjoying it.

After showing her around my restaurant
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we went to my private space so she could taste some of the food we serve here.

I've always had a passion for good food, my main aim was on African cuisine. Well I stuck to that but the difference is that I added some love into my recipes.

I created something extraordinary out of just tripe and intestines. Not only that but all the African cuisines you can think of. "I'm glad you're enjoying it." I say to her.

There's a knock on the door before it slides open and one of the waitresses walks in. "Ma'am, a customer is requesting your presence." She says looking nervous.

I grab a wet wipe from my bag and wipe my hands before following her out. I hate it when my life has to stop because of some arrogant customer who's complaining for no reason at all.

"Is it someone important?" I ask and she shrugs. "One of them is a regular here and they work at MegaCorp." She says softly.

MegaCorp is a software and robotics company owned by a woman called Buhlebami Mnyanda who's married to a business guru named Nkanyezi Mnyanda.

I heard they're some big shots of some sort following after the infamous Zinzile and Jason Mnyanda. There's a lot of drama that follows their surname because people just cringe at that.

I'll need full details after this.

I follow her to the two gentlemen seated at the VIP section. "Are you the owner?" One of them instantly asks and I respond with a polite smile. "Yes I am, Siphephelo Cele. How may I be of your assistance?" I ask and the other one raises his eyes from the screen on his hand.

"So it is you, I thought this dumpling and stew tasted familiar." He says. I look into his eyes as I try to recall that voice. "Zizwe?" I ask in disbelief and he chuckles.

I turn to look at the waitress next to me and excuse her. "And we always find our way back to each other." He says with a lopsided smile. I gulp then look down as I try to gather some courage to face him.

"Is there anything wrong with the food or the service?" I ask and the guy he came with shook his head. "There's nothing wrong actually. We just wanted to see the creator of this recipe because I couldn't believe him when he told me it was his ex girlfriend." He says.

Are you kidding me right now?

"You're pregnant?" He asks. I ignore him and turn to his colleague. "Is that all, Mr Ngcobo?" I ask looking at his name tag. "You're still beautiful." He says looking into my eyes.

These men have got to be kidding me right now. "Okay, enjoy your lunch." I say then turn and walk off. Who the hell does that?

"Sir, you can't come in here!" I hear someone shouting and quickly turn back. He's fighting to enter looking all sorts of angry. "Leave him be!" I order.

The guards step down and he fixes himself then walks my way. "What do you want?" I ask. "Why did you marry him?" He asks and I chuckle in disbelief.

"You're the last person to ask me that." I whisper. He grabs my arm. "You're selfish, you know that? My brother died because of you and you go on and marry his killer!" He shouts.

I wrestle my arm out of his hold and instantly slap him. He tries to speak but I slap him again. "If I ever cross paths with you again, I swear I'll kill you Bhekizizwe Bhebhe. Don't ever come back here again." I warn him before walking off.

SIPHEPHELO

'I thought this dumpling and stew tasted familiar.'

'And we always find our way back to each other.'

'You're still beautiful.'

"I wonder what the poor tripe did to you." Isisa says snapping me out of my thoughts.

"Oh, you're up already?" I ask checking the time. "Yeah, a friend of mine from around here offered to take me on a tour." She says.

I look up from my tripe and wipe my hands. "I didn't know that," she shrugs then makes her way to the refrigerator. "I can give you his number if you want. You can call him or even track both our cellphones if it'll make you feel safe." She suggests.

I just nod and turn back to my tripe. "Honestly, what's eating you?" She asks. I glare at her then continue eating. She grabs a slice of toast and smears butter on it then pours herself a glass of juice and sits down.

"Its Bhekizizwe, isn't it?" She asks and I ignore her. I don't want to hear that name ever again. "Otherwise you wouldn't be chewing so hard on that tripe," she adds on.

I bang on the counter top and she slightly jumps in fear. "I would appreciate some peace and quiet right now, is that too much to ask for?" I ask. She looks down in guilt then shakes her head.

"Sorry..." She apologizes and I just shake my head and continue eating. I honestly need to get back to the gym after this. I swear I'll be sitting on a wheelchair in a couple of weeks.

Once she's done eating, she rushes out of the room and returns carrying a handpack. She hands me a note, "Here's his number, I'll be back before eight pm." She blows me a kiss then rushes out.

I sometimes forget that we're actually the same age.

I dispose of the rest of the tripe then wash my hands and head up to brush my teeth.

I need to stop eating so much.

-

"Mrs Cele, someone is here to see you." She says. "Do they have an appointment?" I ask with my eyes glued to the screen before me.

"No but he said its urgent." She says. I heave out a sigh then nod. "Let him in." I say. She nods then closes the door. I shut my laptop and sit back on my chair then caress my belly.

The door opens shortly and what was left of my mood instantly dropped. He walks in and shuts the door. "I come in peace and I won't take much of your time." He says.

"Have a seat then." I say pointing at the seats on the other side of my desk. He nods and settles down. "Hi." He greets. I chuckle while shaking my head. "Hi Bhekizizwe." I greet back.

He chuckles as well and scratches his head. "Uhm... I came to apologize about yesterday. It was selfish of me to say all of that to you and I shouldn't have blamed you for Mpilo's death." He says.

He places his car keys as well as his cellphone on the desk and leans forward. "I... Uhm... Its okay, the truth hurts sometimes." He chuckles.

"Do you mean that?" He asks and I nod. "That's if you mean your apology," he nods. "I can't afford to miss out on such delicious food." I chortle and he joins in.

Our laughter dies down in a few seconds and silence erupts. He clears his throat then leans forward. "How are you doing? Its been like what, five years?" He asks and I nod.

"Well, I'm taking life one step at a time

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how about you?" I ask. "Well, I can say the same. My life hasn't been great but its nothing a bottle of beer can't fix." He says.

I wonder how people are able to drink that. I tried once and it took me an hour to recover from the horrible taste. That was one hour of my life I'll never get back and guess what, it was Zizwe who convinced me to taste it.

"You still drink?" He nods. "Yep, its my escape plan. My marriage has been a rollercoaster ride and my son has been giving me headaches lately." He complains.

"Son?" I ask and he nods. "Njabulo, he's five years old." He says. I nod then continue caressing my belly. "Well, pregnancy suits you." He compliments.

"Well thank you but I can't do this anymore. I swear if I don't give birth soon, I'm going to force him out of me." He chuckles. "You look like you're about to pop."

"Well, four more weeks to go before my little chap comes out into the real world."

"Oh, so its a bouncing baby boy?" He asks. Well, I can't miss the sarcasm in his voice. "Don't throw a shade at my son, he's the future-"

"Umuhle." He chimes in, complimenting me yet again.

"Thanks." I look down then bite my lips. I'm such an emotional wreck. I swear I don't want another baby after this.

"I mean it, you're truly beautiful. I don't know why I keep messing up my chances with you." He says. "Well, you don't look bad yourself." I tease.

Well he truly doesn't look bad. He has a fresh neat haircut and he had his beard trimmed nicely. He doesn't even look like a married man, I mean your typical married Zulu man.

"What are you doing tonight?" He asks and my eyes widen in shock. "Why do you ask?"

"Well, I want us to catch up over dinner. Its just dinner as friends, nothing drastic." He says.

"Pinkie promise?" I ask sticking my pinkie finger out. "Pinkie promise." He responds then intertwines his pinkie finger with mine.

"I'll fetch you at eight?" He asks already getting up and I nod. "I'll send you my address. Same number?" He nods then heads to the door. He glares at me with a smile before heading out.

SIPHEPHELO

I looked at work dresses in front of me and just sighed out loud. I'm thinking of canceling this stupid date, I don't even know why I agreed to have one.

How could I be so naive? I'll never deny the fact that I love him dearly but forgiving and forgetting so easily? No. I can't let him back into my life just like that.

Whether he's a friend or not, I don't want to go back to that dark place again. I don't want to go five years back.

"Lime green, it looks good against your skin." Isisa says peaking from the door. "You're back?" I ask and she nods with a grin. "I'm back and I think I'm going to head to sleep." She says already walking away.

"Wait!" She turns back. I look down and scratch my arm. "You don't want to know where I'm going?" I ask and she shrugs. "Wherever you're going, be safe and take care of yourself." She says.

"Oh uhm... You should pair that dress up with that black fur coat in case you get cold and those fluffy looking heels for your swollen feet." She says pointing around my closet.

I chuckle and shake my head. "Thank you. I don't know why you're..." She chimes in. "Don't sweat it." She says smiling.

I look around me then back at her. "Please help me up," she giggles then helps me up from the carpet. "Okay, I'm off to sleep. I love you." She says walking out.

"I love you!" I shout after her.

I finish dressing up then head out. I don't know why I'm doing this but I'm doing it anyway. I'm keeping peace between us for Mpilo's sake.

I pour myself a glass of non alcoholic wine and sip on it while waiting for Zizwe. I have already sent him my location and I hope he doesn't get lost.

I hear a knock on the door and tend to it almost immediately. I open the door and I'm met by white roses. I giggle then throw my head back.

"How cute..." He chuckles from behind the flowers. "They're for the angel herself." He says and hands them to me. I take them and allow him in. He settles on my highchairs while I look for a vase for the roses.

"Would you like anything to drink before we head out?" I ask. "No its okay. Do what you have to do so we can go." He says.

I finally find a beautiful vase and fill it with water then put the roses inside along with the seedy things that they came with. I place the vase near the window for some light then head back to him.

"I'm done, let's go." I say. He looks at me then around. "So, this is you huh?" He asks and I nod. "Yes this is me. Should we go or you want a tour around the house?" I ask.

"Maybe some other time, let's go." He says getting off his seat. I make my way to the door with him following me out and lock the door once we're out.

He places his hand on my lower back as he leads me to his car. "Did I tell you how beautiful you look?" He asks and I can't help but to flush. "I think lime green is my new favorite colour, it looks so good on your flawless skin." He adds on.

"Stop it!" He chuckles then opens the door for me. He helps me settle in then shuts the door once I'm in and jogs to his side.

He actually looks good in a suit. How cliché of him to leave his top buttons unbuttoned, I can see a glimpse of the tattoo of my name across his chest but he looks good.

I wonder why he didn't hide that tattoo if he cannot remove it. Once he drives out, music starts to play.

Its a familiar song yet I can't register it. I look at the screen and its written 'Blaq Diamond - Kwanobamba'

"Whoo mina ngathol' intombi

Emaweni

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Emaweni, emaweni angalena ngaKwaNobamba.

Mina ngathol' intombi

Emaweni,

Emaweni, emaweni angalena ngaKwaNobamba..."

I looked at him and watched as he joyfully sang along to the lyrics. He steals a glance at me with his beautiful panty dropping smile then back at the road and continues singing.

Why do I feel like he's singing about me? I wouldn't be surprised if he had the song actually made for me.

The song finally comes to an end but he starts singing another one.

"You heal my heart and touch my soul

Ngivele ngshaywe luvalo

Wangithanda ngenanto

Ngelosi yami yokphila

Ng'cel uhlale nami

Uthando lam dali

Lubanzi lijulile
Ngifisuk chith' insuku zokphila nawe
Ithemba lam dali
Lyophelela kuwe
Injabulo yensuk zonke my sweet darling

Sthandwa sami, woza my love, woza my love
Bambo lwami, woza my love, woza..."

"Stop the car." I chime in. He glances at me then back at the road. "What's wrong?" He asks and I try to put on a brave face. "I need you to stop the car right now." I say sternly.

He slows down but doesn't stop. "Talk to me, what's wrong?" He asks and I sniff. "What do you want from me Bhekizizwe?" I ask and he remains quiet.

"Answer me or I'm going to jump out of this car." I warn. He instantly locks the doors. I glare daggers at him, awaiting his response to my question.

"What do you think I want, Phelo?" He asks. "I want you, I always have. Staying away from you has been hell. These past five years were the worst years of my life and I promised myself that I won't make the same mistake thrice." He says.

I shake my head in disbelief. I knew there was something wrong with this date. Agreeing to this was just a mistake.

"I only agreed to this because I want to keep peace between us. I know Mpilo would finally rest peacefully with us at peace. I'm not doing this because I want you to break my heart all over again.

I'm happily married and I'm a queen. I'm pregnant as well as you can see Zizwe. You on the other hand are married and if we cannot be friends or good acquaintances then forget about it."

"Phelo..." I fold my arms and look out the window. "That won't stop me from loving you." He says and I shake my head.

"Just take me home Zizwe, this was just a mistake."

BHEKIZIZWE

I pull up in drive way then lay back. I glare at her before shutting my eyes, awaiting her to step out of the car. "I'm sorry..." She apologizes.

My eyes snap open and I turn and look at her. She's crying for some reason and I don't know why she's apologizing. "Phelo..." She sniffs then wipes her tears.

"I don't think I can do this with you. I can't be friends with you or anything more than that." She announces. I sit up straight and take her hands into my hold.

I can't lose her again. I'm not making the same mistake thrice. "Don't say that." She shakes her head. "Okay listen to me..." She chimes in.

"No, you listen to me. This was a mistake. I wasn't thinking straight and I shouldn't have let you back into my life. I dated your brother for goodness sake and we're both happily married." She says.

I free her hands and turn to the front. I grasp onto the steering wheel and hear her sigh heavily. "Please don't contact me and I won't contact you. It'll be better if you don't come to the

restaurant as well so we can stay away from each other." She says.

I look at her but she quickly looks away. "I'm sorry but I won't be able to stay away from you." I tell her.

"Its not up to you, Zizwe. I have a whole new life and I can't just abandon it because of you. You had your chance and you blew it. Now you think you can just waltz back into my life? It doesn't work like that."

"Phelo..." I feel her lips on my cheek before she opens the door and slides out. I rush out of the car and follow her to the door.

"Please... Please don't do this." I beseech her. I hold her hands and go on my knees. "Zizwe, get up." I shake my head. I don't want to get up, in fact I wrap my arms around her waist and rest my head on her big belly.

"What are you doing?" She asks. I look up and she's looking at me in disbelief. "We don't have to be anything more than friends but I just want to be in your life and you in mine. I don't want to lose you again nor lose out on what was happening in your life.

I love you so much that I'm going to give you then space you want or need and I'll give you time to think about what you really want. If you do want me in your life then please give me a

call and if not then I'll stay away from you... I might not but I'll try."

"Okay fine. I'll think about it." She says. I jolt up from the floor and pull her into my embrace.

"I'm sorry for ruining tonight's supposed dinner." I apologize. She chuckles. "And I'm so hungry, you don't have timing at all." She says breaking free from my embrace.

"I feel worse than before. Should I order you something to eat?" I ask and she shrugs then bites the insides of her cheeks. "Pizza and wings sound good. We could wait over a movie if you want." She suggests and I can't help the grin on my face.

Obviously I want to. I want to spend time with her and make up for the past years. I know I won't be able to cover for all of them but I will use the time I have to make sure she's happy and smiling.

"Uhm, that sounds cool. Let me get my cellphone and lock the car." I say already rushing to the car.

I grab my phone and lock the car then head back. She's already inside the house but not in the kitchen nor lounge.

I look around and it looks like she has done well for herself. Its quite a gigantic house with a beautiful and stylish interior. I must say, I'm proud of her.

A vibrating sound fills my ears and I look around and spot her vibrating cellphone on top of the island. I head back to the kitchen and check.

Its a call from her husband if I may call him. I'm going to respect her space as well as her marriage and pretend I didn't see the call.

I return to the lounge and make myself comfortable on the one long couch. "I'm sorry for disappearing, I just needed to freshen up." She says coming down the staircase in her nightdress.

White really looks good on her, light colours look great on her beautiful dark skin. She looks like the angel that she is. "Why are you looking at me like that?" She asks snapping me out of my thoughts.

I quickly look away from her and look at my misbehaving rod that has a mind of its own. It better stay put and not rise because I won't be able to drive with an aching boner. "Romans or debonairs?" I ask reaching for my cellphone.

"Romans please and buffalo wings from Wing Kingdom." She says heading to the kitchen. I quickly order and she returns with a jug of juice and snacks as well as her cellphone.

"Juice?" I ask and she chuckles. "You're going to drive so no alcohol for you mister." She reaches for the remote before making herself comfortable next to me.

We spend the rest of the evening watching a romcom on Netflix and with her laughing her lungs out. She has a beautiful laughter, I wouldn't mind listening to her laugh for the rest of my life.

"You should stop looking at me like that." She says removing her legs from my laps. I didn't even realize that the movie is over. I was watching her this entire time.

"Its time for you to go, mate. My little chap and I need to rest." She says teasingly. She gets up from the couch with the tray of bowls and an empty jug and heads to the kitchen.

I grab the plates we were eating from from the coffee table and follow her to the kitchen. "Should I help you with those?" I ask and she shakes her head.

"I'll see them in the morning. Samu must be worried sick about you and Cele must be freaking out wherever he is." She says. My mood instantly drops.

"You should get going, thanks for spending the evening with me. I needed this much fun." She adds on.

"I have to go." I rush back to the lounge to get my cellphone and car keys then storm out. "Zizwe!"

SIPHEPHELO

I'm staring at my cellphone still trying to call Zizwe but my calls are not going through. I'm scared because he stormed out of here looking livid and I don't want him hurting himself.

Driving while angry is not such a good idea. You will lose focus and most probably collide with another car or lose control and get into an accident.

I've already sent him countless voice messages hoping he'd respond but he doesn't. I honestly don't know why he suddenly changed on me and stormed out of here without even saying goodbye.

I put my cellphone on the counter and grab my cup of tea and gulp the remaining content in one go. "Whoa, someone had a rough night." Isisa says walking in.

I glance at my reflection from the mirror adorning the refrigerator and well, its quite evident that I did not sleep. I was hoping this makeup thing would fix my worn out face as well as hide any patches on my face and eye bags under my eyes instead, it highlighted everything.

I should get myself an energy drink. "Tell me about it. We had to bring the date here because of complications but then it ended badly and so I couldn't sleep." I say to her.

She turns to me while gasping. "Did you guys have sex?" She asks and I cringe. Having sex with someone else while pregnant is just gross and having sex with someone else is a red flag to me. I literally can't imagine myself having sex with someone else other than my husband.

As old as that man of mine seems, he knows what he's doing. "Don't look at me like that, pregnant women do have sex with different men." She says. I shake my head in disapproval. "I would never do that, its just weird and I don't believe in infidelity."

"Then what happened?" She asks as she fixes herself a cup of coffee. I'm dying for some strong, black coffee with a little bit of sweetness. I can't wait for this baby to get out of me now.

"He just stormed out and left. I don't know what I said or did that angered him but it drove him bananas and he's not taking my calls. I just hope he's safe and just angry at me."

She chuckles. "You still love him, don't you?" She asks. I carefully get off my chair and walk to the sink. "I love your father." I tell her. "But you still feel something for Bhekizizwe." She protests.

"No I don't. Ever since he broke me years back
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I was unable to forgive him or to love him. I then fell for Mpilo and he left me as well. Now I have Cele and he's my life. I love him and I'll never look back."

Silence.

I turn behind to see her expression and she's just shook. I wonder what's going on in that brain of hers. "I actually thought you were just saying that because you were forced to..." She finally speaks.

I sigh out loud and wipe my wet hands. I had accepted that I was never going to escape Cele and so I came to terms with my new life. "Like I said, five years is a long time. Cele may be much older than me which people find gross but I learnt to love him."

She nods then downs her coffee. "I have to go to work, take care of yourself." I say to her.

I hurry to get my handbag as well as cellphone from the lounge then head out.

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I hate being unproductive. My thoughts are running wild and I can't seem to concentrate. Zizwe better be safe wherever he is

or else I'll lose it. I better calm down because I don't want to harm my baby.

I so don't want to complicate my pregnancy because of stress. I grab my handbag and take out my stress ball of which I start squeezing on.

I'm doing my breathing exercises trying to keep myself calm but then it strikes me... Maybe he went back to Kwanobamba to clear his head.

I get my cellphone and call aunt Ndongoloza. I haven't spoken to her in a couple of weeks and I know she'll be shocked by this but I have no other option. "Haww Ndlovukazi," she answered!

"Aunt, how are you?" I ask. I badly want to cut to the chase yet again she's still my elder and so I have to respect her. "All is well on my side, how are you ntombi?" She asks and I sigh out loud.

"I'm not doing so well ma, I'm worried about Bhekizizwe. Is he there by any chance or has he spoken to you?" I ask. "My brother's son? I haven't spoken to him in a few days. Should I be worried?" She asks.

"No no no, don't worry aunt. He's not answering my calls and so I was just checking whether he's safe. I'll try contacting his wife." I say to her and earn a chuckle from her.

"His wife? Sophe, Samu and Bheki are getting a divorce." Aunt says. I swear my heart just skipped a beat. "Ma?" I ask in disbelief.

"Yes my dear. Their marriage wasn't doing so well. They thought they would love each other as time went on but they just couldn't. Not all arranged marriages end in happiness. Theirs has ended in tears." She says.

I'm still trying to wrap my head around what I just heard. "Arranged marriage?" I ask. "Yes my dear. Samu and Bheki's marriage was arranged because of their families. Both families had businesses but the Bhebhe family business was going down the drain. Samu's family had enough money to save our business but there was a condition."

"Which was to get their children married to each other." I chime in. "Exactly. And with the pressure Bheki was getting from his father, he had no choice but to agree."

I shook my head in disbelief and raked my hair with my fingers. Why am I only hearing about this now?

BHEKIZIZWE

I slowly open my eyes and quickly shut them as they get penetrated by the harsh rays of sunlight reflecting on the incredibly white room. I slowly open them again and quickly look around.

I spot Samukelisiwe laying her head on my bed with the rest of her body on a couch. Why is she here? Why am I in the hospital? Who brought me here and why am I still alive?

I try to sit up straight but I accidentally wake Samu up. She looks at me confused before getting up and helping me sit up straight. "Do you need anything?" She asks and I nod.

"Water." That's all I can utter. I can't bring myself to talk as my entire body is on fire. Every inch of my body is aching and talking is a mission and a half. My mandibles feel tired and heavy.

I watch as she pours me a glass of water from the water dispenser then hands the glass to me. I raise my arm and try to hold the glass but my trembling hand is failing me.

She has no choice but to help me drink up. God, even swallowing is hard, feels like I have tonsils on both sides of my throat, hurts like they're swollen.

"Thank you." She places the glass on the side then sits back down. She stares at me and I just look out the window. I don't know what she's doing here after I clearly told them to call Phelo.

I wonder how she's doing. Is she worried about me, beating herself up about why I stormed out or just continuing with her life? I hope she's safe and healthy as well as her baby.

I should probably give her a call just so she could know I'm safe. "Where's my cellphone?" I ask but she gapes at me. She chuckles. "Are you kidding me right now? You almost killed yourself and you're asking me where's your cellphone?" She asks.

I roll my eyes and look away from her. "I just want to call someone and let her know I'm alright." She chortles and claps once. "We're not even through with divorce yet you already have a someone?" She asks and it's now my turn to gape at her even though my jawbones feel heavy.

"What are you talking about? You live with your boyfriend. You're playing happy family together with your son." She attempts to talk but stops herself. I guess the famous cat got her tongue.

"Why are you here to begin with?" I mumble but she hears me. "I'm still your wife, what do you think?" She asks. No, she's not getting it. "Why did you come here?" I ask.

She shakes her head and makes her way to the door. "I'll get you a doctor." She says. Couldn't they call my mom? That would've been much better. She would've said a mouthful and probably broke down here and there but she's so much better than Samu.

She walks back in with an Indian looking doctor. "Hi, I'm doctor Harishima." She introduces herself with a polite smile.

"Uhm doc

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can I please have my cellphone. I need to call someone important." I tell her. Her eyes widen before she turns to Samu. She sighs out loud before taking my cellphone out of her pocket and hands it to me.

Great, there's enough battery.

I have countless missed calls from her as well as voicemails. There are a couple of text messages too.

I see aunt tried to call me as well as dad which is strange because he never calls. "May I please get some privacy?" I ask. Samu refuses to leave while the doctor promises to come back in less than ten minutes.

I breathe out loud before placing the call. Her cellphone rings twice and she answers. I hear her sniff before she speaks. "How could you do that to me, Zizwe?" She asks, her voice is breaking which means she was crying.

A part of me is happy because that means she still cares. "Why would you just disappear from the face of the world like that without saying a single thing? Are you okay? Are you safe? Did I do something wrong?" She asks all at once and I can't help but to chuckle.

"I'm sorry Phelo wami. I got in an accident as I was driving home. I'm now in hospital and I promise I'll be out of here in no time." She sniffs yet again. "First it was Mpilo now it's you. You want to die Bhekizizwe Bhebhe?" She asks and I chuckle yet again.

"Don't laugh this is not funny. If you know what's good for you then tell me which hospital you're in." She says. I look around the ward and spot a poster on the wall with the name of the hospital written in bold.

"It's the city hospital, sweetheart." She clucks and I hear some shuffling sounds before she speaks again. "I'll be there in a minute. Just stay put." She says.

I hope she gets here quickly and hope she drives safely. The road is not safe, especially when your heart is not at ease.

"Phelo, if anything happens to me just know that I love you so much and I'll love you till the end of time." I say then hang up without awaiting her response.

She was probably going to tell me to not say that and I don't want to hear it. If not for her then I have nothing to leave for but I can also die for her without even thinking twice. If anything does happen to me, I want to see her for the last time, hold her and most probably kiss her.

I can't go to the other side without having a good memory with her. I want to make up for the pain I caused her because I don't know when I might die.

"Let me get your doctor." Samu says. I had even forgotten she was in the room.

SIPHEPHELO

I hold on to my bag, shut my eyes then breath in... And out. I just want to calm my nerves before going inside. I breathe in and out once again then push myself to walk inside the ward.

Two pair of eyes land on me and I nervously gulp. I close the door then slowly make my way to them. This is so nerve wrecking.

I haven't seen Samukelisiwe in such a long time and seeing them together brings back bad memories I thought I had forgotten about. I can't help but to feel a pang of jealousy even though they are getting a divorce.

"You know what, I can come back later..." I say then turn back. I want to have a long and private conversation with Zizwe and being in Samu's presence is just... It feels wrong.

"Please stay..." I stop. "Yeah, please don't leave on my account." Samu says. I turn back and watch as she gets up from her seat. "I should probably get going." She grabs her bag and walks past me.

"Oh uhm Sipe... Please take care of him, he really loves you. You were always in his heart and you'll always be. No one will ever be good enough for him but you." She whispers.

She doesn't wait for me to respond, she just walks off. I breathe out loud when I hear the door close. I touch my belly button caress it with my eyes shut. I swear I almost peed on myself.

"Phelo..." Zizwe's voice snaps me out of my thoughts. I make my way to him and he pats on his bed after making room for me. Is he kidding me? Can he see how big I am?

"I'm not going to fit." I tell him. He just smiles and waits for me to get on the bed. I take my slippers off then slowly settle on the bed and lie on my side. He's just smiling at me.

Oh, I'm supposed to be angry.

"Why are you smiling? You stressed me out the entire night and almost died but you're smiling like everything is alright?" I ask and he chuckles. "How are you feeling?" He asks. I furrow my brows.

"I'm not fine Zizwe. I'm angry, I'm fuming and my blood is boiling." Why is he looking at me like I'm crazy? "I learnt that you're getting a divorce, your marriage was arranged and you almost killed yourself. Why didn't you talk to me instead of pushing me away? We could've avoided a whole lot of things, Zizwe."

He cups my cheek and caresses it with his thumb. "There was nothing you could do just like how there was nothing I could

do. I did what I had to do to save my family's dignity and reputation." I roll my eyes and he gives me a look.

"What about yours, what did you gain from this? How did this help you?" I ask and he shrugs. "I don't really know what I gained from this but it most certainly helped me realize that I can't be without you."

He takes my hand and places it on his chest. "I was so miserable without you. When aunt sent me pictures of your wedding, I pushed everyone away from me and distanced myself from everyone. I was a mess, Phelo wami and I don't want to go back there.

I love you so much, please don't leave me again." I bite my lip then look at him. "I'm a married woman and I'm pregnant. I might give birth any minute now and we both know how dangerous our love is. I can't leave him and I most certainly can't be with you." He shakes his head.

"Don't worry about him. We can be together, we will be together if you want us to. If you agree then our love will make way for us to be together..." He places his hand on my bump. "This baby right here, he's as good as mine. I'll love him and raise him like my own."

I furrow my brows at how easy he's making this seem. He seems to forget that Cele killed Mpilo and forced me to marry him. He can go to any lengths to get what he wants.

"Bhekizizwe..." He places his index finger on my lips and hushes me. "Stop worrying my love if anything happens to me you'll regret not listening to me."

"Bhekizizwe, are you okay? Do you have a fever, should I call your doctor? Maybe the blow to your head is starting to mess you up." He chuckles and shakes his head.

"I just love you so much Phelo wami."

"I would do anything for you, even die for you." He adds on. I shake my head. "No. No Zizwe no. We lost Mpilo because of this so called love. Cele won't let you go for this."

"We can always elope. Aunt will move to Johannesburg as well as your mother. They'll be protected this side." He suggests.

"And Isisa? I can't leave her alone with that man." He grins. "So that means you're willing to elope with me?" He asks and I look down.

"Cele is a very traditional man with a powerful healer and witch doctor. What if he goes after us? I bet he also has connections in upper places."

"Don't worry about that. I know someone who's much powerful and we'll do whatever it is that you want, as long as you come with me. We'll go wherever you want as well." He says.

"And my son?" He caresses my belly once again. "Like I said, I'll raise him like my own and whether you want him to know his biological father or not, its up to you." He says and I nod.

This is nerve wrecking. I'm a whole queen, a mother, a wife. I'm supposed to leave everything for a man who broke my heart countless times and for some unknown reason, I want to.

He's just so convincing and handsome and sexy with that gorgeous smile...

I mean, he sounds honest and sincere. Its like he means it this time, unlike the other times. "I'm scared, this is all too much. I... I want to but I'm scared." He hushes me.

"Don't worry about anything. All I need is a go ahead from you and we'll be out of here before you know it." He says. He sounds like he's been planning this for a very long time.

"And you can take your time and think things through because this will change your life forever." He says. I sigh out loud and shut my eyes as I allow everything to sink in me.

I don't want to make the same mistake, I don't want to ruin people's live nor to end their lives. Cele is ruthless and he would do anything to get what he wants.

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I settle on the driver's seat then grip on the steering wheel. My cellphone rings from my hand bag and I throw my head bag in a hurry. I'm not in the mood for any kind of stress.

I take it out of my hand bag and gulp before answering.
"Cele..."

"Yebo MaCele. Isisa says you're not at home and I called your workplace they said you left in a hurry." He says.

"Uhm... I was at the hospital. I was experiencing pains and so I rushed there." I hear him sigh from the other side. "Is everything alright?"

"Yebo, everything is fine. I just need some rest, that's all. Can I call you when I get home?" I ask.

"I'll be waiting for your call. Drive safely." I quickly hang up and throw my phone on the passenger seat.

I hope he didn't hire someone to follow me.

BHEKIZIZWE

I'm finally being discharged today. I couldn't wait to get out of here, especially since I was on bed rest. I swear if they didn't discharge me, I was going to discharge myself.

I try calling her once again but she doesn't take my call. She's been ignoring my calls for a while now and when she does take them, we speak for less than thirty seconds. She blocked me at some point.

If only I had Isisa's number then I would've called her and asked what's going on with Phelo. Maybe I freaked her out with my plans to elope.

Or maybe she has doubts and doesn't trust me. I don't blame her, I've put her through a lot of confusion, heartbreak and pain. I bet she doesn't know what to believe.

Samu is fetching me for some unknown reason. I don't know why she feels like it's her duty to care for me. Well, she has always been caring but I thought she'd stop now that we're separating.

"Hey..." She greets with a grin on her face and I just nod. Her grin fades and she just starts the engine and drives out of this god forbidden place.

I'm glad she's not talking to me cause I don't want to talk right now. uPhelo wami is stressing me and I don't need anymore stress, especially from Samu.

She pulls up at a gas station and jogs inside to get whatever she said she's going to get. I slouch on the seat and look outside, scanning the area.

There's a black Jeep behind us. It looks like those cars that accompany the president to god-knows-where if not everywhere.

She finally gets back with a bottle of spring sparkling water, gums and flavored water. She hands me the sparkling water and I thank her then shove them on the side and focus on the road.

My phone vibrates from my pocket and I smile when I see that its a call from Phelo. "Are you okay?" She asks and I furrow my brows.

"Yes I'm okay, are you?" I ask. She sounds nervous and she's whispering. Something is up. "Look around you and tell me if you see a black Jeep anywhere near you." She says and I lowkey adhere to her instructions.

I spot the black Jeep I saw behind us at the gas station. Its still behind us but not so close. "Yes I see one." I finally respond. "Should I be worried?" I ask and she sighs.

"Cele... I think he hired people to follow us. I wouldn't be surprised if this call was being recorded without me knowing." She says and chuckles.

"We won't be able to meet nor talk and please don't call me. I don't want anything to happen to you and please don't do anything foolish. I love you, okay?" I throw my head back in furry and scratch my hair.

"I love you." I feel Samu's gaze at me and I ignore it as I try to digest the new learn information. "I'll call you but with a different number. I have to go." She says then hangs up without awaiting my response.

I stare at my blank screen for a while then shove my cellphone inside my pocket and stare out the window. "Is there something wrong?" She finally breaks the ice.

I gaze at her. I bet she doesn't want a response to that. "Yes. I just need to think." She nods and turns the volume of her absurd music up.

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We finally arrive. She pulls up on the driveway and I grab my bag and slip out of the car. I hear the door closing and that instantly tells me she's following me. "Bhekizizwe!" I halt on my tracks and turn to her.

"I hope you know what you're getting yourself into." She says
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worry written all over her chubby face. "Take care of yourself."
She adds on then walks off.

I need to do more research on this Cele dude. I already know that he's a crazy murderer and a pedophile. I head inside and make myself comfortable.

I grab my PC and cellphone then take a seat. I spend almost an hour trying to find some dirt on him but he's all clear on the internet. People view him as a good Samaritan and an angel.

Some don't understand the fact that he married someone his daughter's age but in his defense, 'age is just a number'. He claims that they love each other and that's all that matters.

I came across pictures of him and Phelo. This queen title suits and fits her very well. In their recent pictures, they looked so happy but I know that's not how she feels when she doesn't have cameras in her face.

This is just making me angry...

I grab my phone and search for Akeelah's number and call her. She answers after a few rings. "Hey uhm... I'm sorry to disturb you but I need a huge favour."

"Shoot..."

"I need some dirt on a Kgabule Cele. He's the King of Kwanobamba."

"That's all?" She asks. "No. I want to know everything about him. His time management, his bank balance, the number of his teeth, everything." I tell her.

"Roger that. I'll get back to you in three hours." She says then hangs up. I don't know what I'll do for three full hours. I get back on the internet and try to find more information on him but the whole royal family is just private.

I come to sight with his net worth and see that he's a multimillionaire. He might not make the exact amount provided here but clearly he makes money moves.

I have an idea.

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"I'm sorry, I had to come. There's quite a lot I found on this king dude. Murderer, pedophile, rapist, full on criminal." She says taking her PC out.

"Yeah, about that. I have an idea." I say. Both her and Sakhile stop and look at me. "His weakness is Phelo and money."

"You want to steal his money?" He asks and I nod then sit on down. "We steal his money and expose him for the criminal and excuse of a man that he is."

"Well I'm game, but are you sure? He seems to be a dangerous man." Sakhile says.

"Its worth the risk." I'd do anything for Phelo. "Is it true that he killed your cousin?" She asks and I nod.

She purses her lips and bats her long lashes. "Can we get to it?" I ask and they nod. This is going to be a long day.

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KWANOBAMBA

CHAPTER TWENTY FIVE

SIPHEPHELO

He's sleeping peacefully next to me. I wonder how he does it. I wonder how he's able to sleep so well after all the cruelty he has put me through. I wonder how he's able to smile all day and claim to love me after all the torture I've been through because of him.

A week has passed and we're supposed to be back at Kwanobamba but I was surprised to see him arrive here with a few of his guards and his last size suitcase.

That's how I knew there was something wrong. Cele is a very jealous and proud man. He had people keep an eye on both Zizwe and I and we were followed everywhere.

I wouldn't even be surprised if he was actually behind Zizwe's accident.

I don't know how long he's planning on staying here but I hope its not for long. Him coming here awoke all the pain I had forgotten.

This situation with Zizwe reminded me of how Cele caught Mpilo and I and how he brutally murdered him in front of me.

I still remember how he kicked the door open and dragged Mpilo out of the bed we were sleeping on. I begged him so much to not kill him but he did. Mpilo's blood was all over me within a few seconds and I watched the whole thing.

He passed in front of me, because of me. What was meant to be our special night turned into a nightmare, my worst fear.

I have no doubt that if Mpilo had impregnated me, Cele would've killed my baby just so he could have his way.

He hated me. He locked me up in the palace because I disgusted him. We weren't even married by then yet he kept me locked up, for months.

Everything was done behind my back and before I knew it, it was my wedding day. I was forced into it all and I hated it. I hate how I couldn't attend Mpilo's funeral to say my final goodbye and I hate how my family sold me to this monster next to me.

I most certainly do not regret my first time. It was special, beautiful and romantic. It was all I've ever imagined. Mpilo will always be an important part of my life and Cele, he'll curse the day he married me.

I still remember how he forced himself on me on our wedding night. I bet he was upset because I was not a virgin anymore yet he had his way with me.

A week after our wedding, I attempted to run but I was caught. I tried the following week after that and I succeeded. I ran to my house but mother called Cele and he came to fetch me.

After that, I turned into a zombie. I refused to eat, to bath
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to sleep and everything else I was offered and ordered to do.

I straight up tried to drown myself after they had forced me to stay and just when I thought I succeeded, I woke up in hospital with a lot of tubes on my face and an IV connected to my veins.

I was fed through the IV in order to avoid starvation and malnutrition.

And after all the trying and failures, I finally gave up and accepted my situation for what it was. I was the Queen of Kwanobamba, married to King Cele IV and I had a step daughter who was the same age as I was.

There was no way out but to face the truth and live on it. I was alone and so I had no choice.

I feel some sharp pain on my back and I let out a scream. I bite the blanket in order to muffle the scream then quickly wipe my tears.

The pain dies down and I change my sleeping position.

Sigh.

"MaCele..." He says in a hoarse voice. I shut my eyes and grit my teeth. I don't want to talk to him, I don't want to talk at all.

"I know you're not sleeping so please talk to me." He says and I still remain silent. I've been waking up and crying in the middle of the night ever since he got here and I know he knows that I do that.

"I try Sthandwa sami, I try. I'm sorry for whatever it is that I've put you through but please talk to me." Just when I thought I couldn't cry anymore, I burst into more tears.

"Siphephelo..." I push my self up and look at him. "Why didn't you kill me with him? Why didn't you shoot and kill us both?" I ask. He sighs and clicks his tongue.

"You're crying for that fool?" He asks. I shake my head then get out of bed and make my way out of the room. I slowly make my way down the staircase and only come to a halt when that sharp pain returns, its sharper than before.

I scream yet again and try to sit on the stair but it grows sharper. Is it nine months already? Don't tell me I'm going into labor. "Siphephelo!" He shouts as he rushes my way.

He crouches next to me and tries to touch me but I push him off from me. "Don't touch me!" I shout.

"Sthandwa sami, please don't..." I cut him. "Don't touch me!" I yell louder.

"Siphephelo!" He bellows. "She said don't touch her!" Isisa yells from wherever she came from and pushes her father with all the strength in her.

I look at where he landed then let out a scream. I don't know whether its a scream of shock or of my contractions. "Dad? Daddy?" She whispers to her self.

I look back at him and he's just laying there on the floor. His neck looks twisted and he is bleeding. I cover my mouth then let out a sob.

"Did I kill him?" She asks and I shrug. "Go feel his pulse, maybe he's still alive." I order her. She nods then slowly but surely walks down the staircase. She crouches next to him and feel his pulse then let's out a sob.

"Oh god, I killed him! I killed him Siphe, I'm going to jail." She cries.

I manage to stand up then make my way to her. She gets up and wraps her arms around me and lays her head on my shoulder. "I didn't mean to but I heard everything you said and I just got angry." She elaborates.

I break free from her embrace then look at the liquid flowing down my legs. "I think my water just broke."

KWANOBAMBA

CHAPTER TWENTY SIX

BHEKIZIZWE

My cellphone rings and its Phelo. I can't help but to smile. "Phelo wami..." I hear someone screaming in the back. "Uhm hi, its Isisa. Phelo is about to give birth and she asked me to call you." She says.

"What? Where are you guys?" I ask getting up from the couch. Akeelah and Sakhile look at me. "We're at home. Her water broke and we can't drive to the hospital or she'll give birth in the car."

I grab my car keys and hang up. "Uhm, Phelo is about to give birth and I have to go. I'll be back soon." I say then run out. I slide into the car, bring it to life then drive out in immense speed.

I know I'll probably arrive after she has given birth. I wonder where that King and his goons are.

Thirty minutes later, I enter the premises and Isisa is waiting for me out side. I pull up and rush out. "Thanks for coming." She says getting up from the stoep. She looks like she's been crying.

"Has she...?" She nods then walks inside and I follow her. "We need to get her to the hospital as soon as possible." She says closing the door and I nod.

Something catches my eye as we head towards the staircase. Is that...? What the hell happened here. "Please don't ask any questions, we'll tell you on the way to the hospital." She says. I remain quiet and follow her to wherever Phelo is.

They had already cut the umbilical cord, I hope they cut it at the right place.

She's laying on her bed with her baby on her arms and smiling. Isisa disappears to what looks like the bathroom and returns with the baby's bag.

"We can go." She says. I nod then perch up next to Phelo. She looks at me straight in the eye. "Are you okay?" She nods then looks at her baby and starts crying.

"She's beautiful." She says looking at her, caressing her cheek. Its a girl, I bet she'll look like her mother when she grows up. "We have to get you two to the hospital, okay?" She nods then looks at me.

"And Cele, what about him?" She asks, both worry and fear written all over her gorgeous face. "I'll take care of that." I

assure her then help her off the bed. Isisa takes the baby you I carry Phelo all the way to my car.

Isisa had sent everyone home, giving them the night off at my command. I don't know what happened here but I won't let any of them go to jail. That man deserved it and more.

I drive as quickly as I can to the hospital and once we arrive, both Phelo and the baby are taken away. Once admitted
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we silently wait in the waiting room.

"I killed him. I pushed him down the staircase and he died. I was so frustrated and angry at him but I didn't want to kill him. He may have wronged us, abused and molested us but he was still my father.

Bhekizizwe, I don't want to go to jail." She says then bursts into tears. I hesitantly pull her in for a hug and caress her arm while she cries.

I wonder what she meant by "abused and molested". I know that Cele was a rapist and a pedophile but molesting his own daughter, is that what they do? They start with family then hurt others as well? I thought they were very protective of family but what can you expect from him?

"Don't worry, you won't be going to prison under my watch. Are you sure he's dead?" I ask and she nods vigorously. "I

checked his pulse. He was bleeding excessively and his neck was twisted."

I don't even want to think about it. Phelo must be feeling somewhat hurt and traumatized not to mention that she'll have to live with a part of him all her life.

I have to get rid of that body as soon as possible. In a few minutes, she falls asleep on the couch. This is my chance.

I get up from the couch and call Mr Mnyanda. He's the one who'll be able to help me get rid of the body. "We can't get rid of it but we can make it look like an accident. Send me the address so I can do it as soon as possible.

And when I call you, use both the girls' phones to call his to try and make it look like he wasn't at home nor at the hospital."

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Her eyes flutter open and I can't help but to smile. She passed out soon after naming the baby last night. She named her Liyana. Hey, don't ask me why but I guess she knows why.

"Rise and shine..." I say to her. She looks at me then around the room and at Liya. She looks at her belly then back at Liya. She tries to sit up straight but falls back down.

Tears start streaming out of her eyes. "Phelo, what's wrong?" I ask. She shakes her head and wipes her tears. "He's really gone?" She asks and I nod. It must hurt I mean she was married to the guy for five years and I'm a tad jealous, but it is what it is.

"We're now free from him?" She asks again and I nod with a polite smile. Just then, Liyana starts crying. She must be hungry. I hand her to her mom. She stares at her before pecking her forehead and caressing her chubby cheeks.

"You know, Cele was so convinced that I was carrying a boy. I wonder how he would've reacted." She says taking her breast out. I watch as the little one starts sucking on it like she knows what she's doing.

The door gently opens and in walks a doctor followed by Isisa and a man in casual clothing. He's holding a notepad along with what looks like a wallet.

"Good morning Mrs Cele, I hope you slept well." The doctor greets while Isisa perches up next to Phelo on the bed. "Yes I did." Phelo responds. "Right, this is detective Ngcobo." He flashes a quick smile then steps forward.

She gulps then forces a smile as well. I hope she calms down and gets it together. "Mrs Cele, I'm here regarding your husband Mr Cele." She tenses up and I mentally slap my face.

"Mr Cele was found on the highway in a car collision. His car had rolled over and I'm sorry but he didn't make it."

KWANOBAMBA

CHAPTER TWENTY SEVEN

SIPHEPHELO

"You may kiss the bride..." The priest finally utters the words Zizwe has been longing to hear since this day started. My dearest husband is a lover of kisses and cuddling. Him not being able to kiss me for two days has taken a toll on him.

His arms find their way around my waist and his lips, on mine. We hear cheers coming from both our family members and I can't help but to flush. "Haibo!" Someone shouts at the realization that Zizwe won't stop kissing me anytime soon.

He finally breaks free and shies away from the crowd. I pull him closer so I can wipe my lip gloss off from his lips. "I missed this..." He whispers and I giggle, I missed him as well.

He holds both my hands in his and pecks my knuckles. "We're definitely not sleeping tonight." He adds on and I giggle.

I can't believe we're finally here, after all we have been through. My family, the Cele family and the Bhebhe family were against our marriage.

The Cele family wanted to get me married with a distant cousin who was going to take over the throne and my family actually supported that idea because of my mother's hatred for the Bhebhe family.

The Bhebhe family however was afraid of the Cele family and didn't want to find themselves on the wrong side of the royal laws.

Giving birth to Liyana made this far worse. No, I love my baby so much and I don't regret keeping her but she didn't make things any better for me. The Cele family used her as a scapegoat. They claimed no Cele child will be raised by another name nor family.

How this wedding finally happened? I had to threaten everyone. We had already done all the necessities for Liyana and so I threatened them that I'd run away with her and elope with Zizwe.

While they finally gave in and agreed, the dowry negotiations were disastrous. A lot happened and it was nowhere near fun. There were arguments, fights and blood spilling. Yes, the families would fight until someone bled.

As disastrous as it was, there was nothing I wanted more than becoming Zizwe's wife. The last five years I spent with him proved that he was the man I had been looking for.

He knew me like the back of his hand. He knew what to do and to say at a particular time. We spent a lot of time together and we both healed from our tragic past.

Liyana loves him to death. Since her father passed, Zizwe had been there for her. He would spend a lot of time with her and forget all about me at times until she fell asleep.

I would be sad but happy at the same time that he's making efforts to get along with her and get used to her. He sees her like his own daughter, his own flesh and blood.

I just hope things don't change after the wedding. I still want those late night massages, those date nights once every week. The family game nights and movie nights.

I still want to fuck everywhere in the house while Liyana is at her grandparents' house. "I'm planting a little me in here tonight

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" I try to hold myself but I fail. I swear my face will be crimson by the time we get to the reception.

I don't know why he's caressing my belly but he is. "Or a little you. But I'd really like a mini me cause we already have Liyana then maybe we can have another girl." My eyes pop open. He's really not kidding.



All the sad and crazy as well as embarrassing speeches are out of the way and now all the family members and friends are gathered on the dance floor along with their partners.

He has his forehead lightly pressed against mine with our fingers intertwined and our eyes locked. I'm staring right into his ablaze soul. He's so happy, its shocking.

We've been longing for this day for the long time and now that its here, I still don't know what or how to feel. "Why are you crying?" He asks pulling me closer to him.

"These are tears of joy. I never thought I'd found happiness again and now that I've found it, its hard to believe. I just hope no one will steal it from me." He wipes my tears with his thumbs and pecks my forehead.

"You deserve all the happiness you can get and I can guarantee you that you're not making a mistake. I love you so much, okay?" I nod vigorously. "I love you..."

I rest my head on his chest while we continue to slow dance. I feel a tap on my shoulder and quickly lift my head. I'm shook to find Samukelisiwe along with her "husband" standing behind me with polite smiles on their faces.

"Congratulations you two." She says pulling me away from my husband. She wraps her arms around me and squeezes the life

out of me. "Thank you, I didn't think you would come." I say breaking free from her hold.

I went on and secretly invited her which might be a problem to Zizwe. "I wouldn't miss it for the world. You and Zizwe are meant to be and no one can dispute that.

Zizwe was never this happy with me but as soon as you got back into his life, he changed for the best. He's an optimistic person, he has a good heart, he's always happy and its all thanks to you," she takes my hands into hers.

"You deserve each other, you were made for each other. I wish you nothing but the best in your marriage." She says hugging me once again before disappearing into the crowd.

I turn to Zizwe with my brow raised and he just shrugs. I don't know what that was but hopefully it wasn't pretense.

He glues himself to me yet again, this time around his hold is tighter.

The Marvin Gaye song comes to an end and our favorite song tunes in. The smile on his face turns into a grin as well as mine. "Let's show everyone what we can do." He whispers into my ear then holds my hand.

We move to the center of the dance floor and dance the night away with both our families as jolly as ever.

Isisa had scored herself a man in one of Zizwe's colleagues and they disappeared from the celebration.

The night ended in tears of joy, loud screams and a lot of sweat cascading down our bodies. I swear he did plant a mini him inside me after what he just did to me.

.....**THE END**.....

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