



*Ngcwethi*

Her Warrior

# Ngcwethi Her Warrior

## Prologue

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Two dead bodies lie on the bank of Mpofana's river known as Mvumase. The first one is unrecognizable due to severe facial injuries. But the person is wearing the green Mthembu-uniform, he must be one of the farm workers. Next to him lies the head of the Mthembus; Madoda Oscar Mthembu.

They were both attacked by enemies while filling the water-truck in the river. The rivalry between the Mthembus and Ngwanes has been going on for years. One of the main issues is the road that Madoda closed in order to start his farm.

The Ngwanes reside on the other side of the river and have to use the long road that goes behind the

mountain. It is 20 minutes longer and not in very good condition. There are rocks all over, the mechanic never goes to bed on an empty stomach as their vehicles are always breaking down.

The community leaders tried to intervene on the matter but Madoda was a man of people, he won all cases placed against him. He generously contributed to the community development and constantly won people's heart. Over the years he has hired hundreds of Mpofana youth and created higher education funding schemes that produce graduates every year.

It's not jealousy. The Ngwane people have watched the richer getting respect more than the poorer. Slowly, the community leaders have shut down the voices of the poor. Mpofana has been divided into two classes; the first and the second class. If you belong to the second class your voice always fall on deaf ears. You follow the lead and dance to the tune

of the rich.

Eventually they have reached the breaking point. Mazwakhe, the first son of the Ngwanes, armed his brothers and cousins and they made the first strike.

The first person to arrive at the scene is Mthembu's second son, Ngcwethi. He doesn't even park properly, he jumps off the van and runs towards the river. The phone is ringing inside his pocket. His old brother Busikhaya wants to know what happened. Why did he take off so speedily? Ngcwethi has a gift, most of the times he foresees things before they happen. Something must've been terrible wrong for him to just leave the meeting like that.

He sees his father lying on the sand with blood covering his face and loses it.

“Ndaba what happened to you? Who did this to you?” he asks his father who'll never respond or look at him again. The world has crushed before his eyes. Mthembu was a pillar of the family. He thinks of his ill-mother, her fragile heart won't be able to

handle this. She just got discharged from the hospital a few weeks back after her blood pressure skyrocketed.

“Ngcwethi what happened?” -the voice comes behind him.

It is Busikhaya, when his brother didn't answer the phone he hopped inside the truck and drove to the same direction.

His father's dead body meets his eyes before Ngcwethi can say anything.

“No no no...Ndaba!” He goes straight to his father but Ngcwethi blocks his way.

“We have to wait for the police,” -Ngcwethi.

This infuriates Busikhaya even more.

“I want to know who killed my father, and I want to know now!” He blows up. His gun is already swinging around his hand like the enemy is going to hand himself over.

“We will find out and they'll pay for this,” Ngcwethi

says pushing Busikhaya away from the dead bodies. He is angry too, but he knows the police rules and doesn't want to interfere with the evidence they may need.

News travel fast in the village. A train of people follow behind two police vans. Sadness is written in everyone's eyes. Some have lost a brother, some have lost a boss and some have lost a role model.

“Do you know anyone who could've done this?” the sergeant asks.

“Is that a real question?” -Busikhaya says with his forehead furrowed. In his mind another police van should be on its way to arrest the Ngwanes.

Everyone knows that they're the only people who are capable of killing his father.

Ngcwethi clears his throat, he's always by Busikhaya's side to save moments like this.

“We cannot point any fingers at this stage. We will let you do your investigation and proceed with the funeral arrangements. Then after the funeral we will

demand answers.” He has a calm face, his voice is natural scratchy and always low-pitched. There's something in the way he says they will demand answers, like he is giving the police a deadline.

“We will find whoever did this and bring them to justice. Our condolences are with both families,” says the sergeant.

There's only one way to get justice in the country where prisons are sub-hotels, and that is to take matters to your own hands.

“Ndaba won't go down to the grave alone!” Busikhaya swears. He doesn't care about the police's presence. They pretend to have not heard him and continue jotting down on their notepads.

The farm workers put their tools down in mourning and return home with bleeding hearts. The Dladla family come to collect Sfiso's clothes, the farmworker who died along Mthembu. There are just no words appropriate to comfort them. They lost their only son. The hand that fed them, he left

behind a 6-month old baby.

“With all due respect Mam' Dladla, we'd like to cover all the funeral expenses. Sfiso has worked for this family for years, we share the same pain as you.” - Ngcwethi.

The weeping mother nods her head and holds onto her sister tightly. After packing everything Mnotho, the youngest Mthembu son, drives them home.

The neighbours and community members eventually leave the Mthembu homestead. Busikhaya calls his brothers for an emergency meeting while the relatives keep their mother company on the mattress.

“Where is Mndeni?” Busikhaya’s eyes go over his two brothers who're always punctual. It infuriates him that Mndeni never take time seriously, even at situations like this.

“He will catch up. Why are we here?” Ngcwethi asks impatiently.



“We are here to make an immediate decision. Ndaba won't go down to the grave alone AmaNgwane edla amabele!” Busikhaya says tapping his foot down like he'll take on anyone who dares to to go against him.

“Aren't we supposed to be mourning?” Mnotho asks.

“Oh trust me, we are mourning. The Ngwanes will help us do it. Put your jackets on, get your 1s and extras for balance, we will chew impande and lick Ngomane's black powder before we leave,” Busikhaya orders.

Mndeni walks in and looks at them with bloodshot eyes. Somehow they knew that he'll take this worse than anyone. He's been always the most emotional among them, but today his emotions have provoked the other side of him. He is hungry for war.

“Why are we still waiting?” he asks.

“Good question!” Busikhaya looks at Ngcwethi. He's the only one who is still sitting down. Others are on their feet, preparing their guns.

“We don't have any evidence.” -Ngcwethi.

“Do we need stupid evidence? We all know who killed our father, so cut us the level-headed brother crap and get armed. It is war, they killed our father!”

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The clock ticks 7:22pm. The Ngwane yard is quiet, not even their dogs are barking. All the lights are off. The Mthembus enter the yard from different directions. The homestead has about six rondavels and a couple of two-rooms. It's a quite big yard but they're done within five minutes checking the all the houses.

There is no one inside. They start afresh and check thoroughly. The Ngwanes must've suspected something and went into hiding.

“Fuck It!” Busikhaya curses and kicks the buckets of water in front of him. He continues to smash everything on the table.

“So they ran away?” Mndeni hisses angrily.

“Bloody cowards! Sizobathola kodwa, ayikho impunga yehlathi.” -Busikhaya.

They walk out, Mndeni slams the door and clicks his tongue.

A human figure appears out of nowhere and stands in front of them. Mndeni has aimed his gun and is ready to shoot should the person make one more move.

“Please don't kill me,” cries the person.

It's a young lady holding a stack of books. Ngcwethi lifts the torch to her face and takes a good look.

“Who are you?” he asks.

“Zanamuhla..I haven't done anything wrong, please don't shoot.” She is closed to tears. Her voice is trembling and begging. She was advised against coming here, but the thought of missing her final exam was unbearable. She told everyone that she needed a bathroom and secretly ran to fetch her books. The biggest mistake of her life.

“You're Mazwakhe's sister?” Mnotho asks viciously.

Unaware that admitting to being Mazwakhe's sister is like digging her own grave the young girl nods her head in agreement.

“Take her Mndeni,” Busikhaya orders.

Books scatter on the ground, Mndeni grabs the girl's arm and lifts her up like she is a sack of potatoes.

“Maaaaaaa.....” A gun slides inside her wide open mouth as she tries to scream for help.

“One more word and you'll have a bullet for dinner.”  
-Busikhaya.

Ngcwethi throws a petrol bomb on one of the rondavels and fires two bullets in the air to deliver a message.

Isukile!!!

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WELCOME TO A NEW HOME. LIKE, COMMENT &  
SHARE. THIS PAGE HAS A SCHEDULE OF 3 POSTS

PER WEEK, I HAVE TO PUSH TGV AS WELL.

SANIBONANI

[11/19, 09:39] : Chapter 1

Zanamuhla

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I've been locked in this rusty house for days now. My hope runs out with each hour that passes by and I don't see my brothers coming to my rescue.

It's so unlike Mazwakhe not to care about my safety. We laid on the same womb, when our mother died he became all that I have.

Well, I do have a father, but the fact that he is a polygamist and has a brood of children all over the world means that I get just 10% of his attention. He loves his third wife and spends most of his time bonding with children from that side.

The door opens, the cruel one is the first to enter.

Well, they're all cruel but this one takes the cup. I

can't look at him without wanting to throw up on his face. I hate him with every fibre of my body.

He took everything from me. My life, my future!

He chose the only house that contained my future and burnt it down. I don't know why he is not taking the gun and finishing me off.

I couldn't write my final exam because of him...Well all of them are keeping me here, but I want to push all the blame to him. Even if their evil hearts do soften up I will return home to nothing.

The monster burnt all my schoolwork and personal belongings.

“You're still on hunger strike?” asks the older one, Busikhaya, clearly finding this whole situation funny.

They gave me slices of brown bread and cold tea. I'm in prison of some sort and I don't know the charges against me. All I know is that Mazwakhe had a hand on their father's death.

“A typical Ngwane spoilt brat!” Mnotho says.

I know him, we went to the same primary school,

but he's all grown up and cruel, it took me time to recognize him.

Did he say spoilt-brat? I don't know what the word 'spoil' means. I've held myself with my own teeth for the past 12 years. I didn't have a father who own 50 yards of land and rivers. The sea probably belongs to them as well. He is pointing at me, calling me a spoilt brat, but all four fingers are pointing back at him.

“Would you prefer something else Madam Zanamuhla?”-the third toe-nail of Satan, Mndeni, asks in mockery.

He is a smart-mouth, I find him less intimidating than others, probably because he has attractive looks over that cold heart.

“No, thank you,” I say.

He looks at the cruel one and shrugs his shoulders before taking the plate.

“Dankie mpilo, chickens will have a nice dinner today. I tried but some beggars are choosers.” He is sort of giving the cruel one explanation, like the

devil cares.

He walks out happily with my meal.

My stomach keeps rumbling, I haven't eaten anything since the night they kidnapped me. A part of me is scared that they might've poisoned the food, but even so, I wouldn't accept anything coming from them. Mazwakhe was right about this family. They abuse their power and take advantage of the powerless.

“Try your brother again.” Busikhaya throws the phone to my chest.

I don't know how many times I'm expected to do this. Mazwakhe's phone has been off ever since. Him and my half-brothers are nowhere to be found in Mpofana. These idiots keep torturing my family for nothing.

As usual, a white woman kindly tells me that the number I'm calling is not available at present. The look on their faces! It's like I'm the one responsible for everything.

“Maybe he wants to fetch your corpse. The less



Ngwane off-springs in the world, the better.” -  
Mnotho.

To think I once saw him as a good boy and crushed  
on him for a while!

“I hope you have an active funeral policy,”  
Busikhaya says and pulls a gun behind his waist.

It's been some kind of fear factor. Right now the  
sight of a gun and thought of death don't shake me.

I don't beg for my life to be spared, I just look at him  
prepared for anything.

“Bafo.....” The cruel one stops him and pulls his  
hand.

I don't hear what he is saying as they have turned  
their backs on me. But he is stopping him from  
killing me and has taken the gun away from him.

They don't say anything, after their little chat they  
follow each other to the door.

A few minutes later I hear a car driving away.

I wish I can say I'm relieved that they're gone, but  
I'm not. How long am I going to be kept here? Why

is my family not looking for me? I doubt the police even know that there's a missing person in the area.

At least they thought about locking me in a house that has a bathroom. There is no soap, only cold running water and toilet rolls. I only wash the sweaty parts and wipe with a piece of cloth.

I don't even say my night prayer, God is not pray-able. He didn't answer my prayers 12 years ago when I only asked Him to save my mother. She died at the side of the road, waiting for the car to take her to the hospital, but it never came. It broke down behind the mountain and the mechanic only arrived two hours later.

I'm slowly drifting to sleep when I hear the door handle moving. The light turns on causing my eyes to forcefully open.

Urgh! What does he want now?

“I brought you food..proper food,” he says.

It's a full plate of beef. The thing wrapped in a

sarviette must be a spoon. What a courtesy!

He pulls the chair and sits. His attention is occupied by the small screen on his hand for a while. When he looks up I'm still lying on the sponge with a full plate in front of me.

“Why are you not eating?” he asks.

In case he hasn't noticed, I do not speak to him. I don't reply to anything he says.

I hate him.

“Zanamuhla!”

This is my precious name, my mother gave it to me, but he just took the whole meaning of it and its beauty by spitting it out of his mouth.

I hate him even more for spoiling my name.

“You're going to die,” he says.

Like I'm not dead already. He fuckin' killed me the moment he set my mother's rondavel on fire. The day he destroyed her memory and my future.

He takes the plate and covers it.

“When you decide to eat you'll find your food here.”

He places the plate on top of the water bucket.

He puts his phone back inside the pocket and pushes the chair back to its place.

I guess he is done.

“Take your food with you,” I say when he is about to exit the door.

He stops but doesn't turn his head to look at me.

“I hate you!” I say.

Now he turns.

“And you think I care? I don't like you either.”

Anger weighs in, I stand up and look at him.

I wish I had power to strangle him to death.

“That's the difference, you don't like me and you have no reason to do so, and I HATE you. You took everything away from me. My future, my life, my mother! I've never hated a person so much in my life. When I finally get strength to go down on my knees I won't be praying for survival, but I'll be

praying for your life to be miserable,” I say.

He takes a step back and frowns like he is in shock.

“Whaaat?” He sounds more scratchy and low-pitched than usual.

I forgot to mention how much his voice annoys me.

“You heard me, now take your food and leave. You killed me the day you burnt my mother’s rondavel, destroying every single memory I had of her and tearing down my future on the line. You ripped my soul out of my body that night, what you see is just an empty body. If you’re clever as you think you are, you’d know that dead people don’t eat,” I say.

The frown disperses. I can’t say he looks remorseful, it must be his extra devilish face.

“That...I...Zanamuhla your brothers killed my father,” he says in hesitation.

I can’t believe the nerve! There’s no justification for what he did to me.

“My mother died because of the stupid road! I was an orphan at 11 years, I had to grow up and mother

myself. If you're fighting for your father why are you not looking for his killers? Why am I kept here? Why couldn't I write my final exams? Why did you destroy my mother's memories and my school work? What did my mother and I do to you? I don't see you targeting anyone but me and my mother.”

I can't believe I'm crying and giving this dog satisfaction. I was so close to my national N-diploma, now I have to apply for exam admission again.

“I didn't know, that was not my intention at all,” he says, faking sympathy.

If I stand here for another minute God knows I'm going to spit on this guy's face. The bathroom has no door but being a wall away from his sight is better.

He doesn't leave immediately, I don't know what's keeping him. Poisoning my food maybe.

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I don't see them the next day. A strange man came with food earlier and left without saying a word. The menu has improved, today I have grilled meat and pap. I won't lie, I'm tempted to devour the whole plate, but my stubbornness is always dominant.

Today I can hardly stand up. I'm awake only because I've been drinking water. I wish Busikhaya can come with his phone, maybe Mazwakhe's phone is on today. I just want to hear his voice one last time.

My hope lights up when the door opens.

It's Mndeni, urgh!

“Abalambi, abasomi

Sebekuwe khaya lami

Bayeluswa, oh yimvana

Sebekuwe, khaya lami.”

He sings with a smile on his face, looking at two plates that haven't been eaten.

“Uyazi weZano...” He pauses and grabs a chair. He sits like a king with his legs spread out. He is

always dressed smartly, shiny shoes and expensive watches.

“The nicest thing about dying from a gun is that you die while your blood is still warm. What you're doing is a shame, I mean you're going to get thin, have a dry skin and freeze before you die,” he says.

Is this the stuff he actually cares about? There are 1000 ways to die and I don't take my time to choose which one is preferable. Frankly, I don't give a fuck.

“But it's up to you,” he shrugs his shoulders.

I don't have energy for his smart mouth today.

“I only care about my mother's chickens. I need your blessing to take this food to them,” he says.

He will keep going if I don't say anything.

“Take it,” I say.

He smiles.

“Zihlabathi zolwandle!” he puts his hands up in gratitude and takes the plates.

I don't know why I don't hate him. He doesn't get



through me, no matter what he does.

“Mndeni, can I use your phone for a moment?” I ask.

I gave him my food, the least he could do is allow me to make a phone call.

“It's untraceable,” he says cheekily and hands it over.

I don't know what he means by that. I dial Mamncane's number, it doesn't go through. Now I suspect that something is wrong.

“Did you cut our electricity?” I ask .

He pretends to be thinking hard.

“If I'm not mistaken, yes we did.” -Him.

Fuck!!!

“Then how am I supposed to get them to come here?” I can't believe this.

“We caught Nkanyiso, soon he will sing the truth. So we are not worried about keeping you here, your fate lies on your brother Nkanyiso,” he says.

The way Nkanyiso is so stubborn I doubt he'll tell

them anything. I don't have the strength to keep going, I face the other way and shut my eyes.

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I don't know why God is keeping me. I wake up with a pounding headache and a pair of eyes staring at me.

Life can't get any worse. What is he doing here? I thought I made it clear that I hate him.

“Why are you torturing yourself like this?” he asks.

The great torture would be responding to his question, so I keep quiet as if I didn't hear him.

He plays with his bracelets. They're decorated with animal claws and all the creepy stuff.

“You can hate me all you want, but your body needs food,” he says.

I'm trying to understand how this concerns him. I'm here, they brought me here so that I can't have the things that I need.

“I'm going to let you go, please take care of yourself.”

What? Is he pranking me? I thought Mndeni said they'll only let me go if Nkanyiso tells them the truth.

He unzips his jacket and takes it off. I see a gun poking out of his waist. They always have them. The police are their best friends, these are probably unlicensed guns but they walk around with them like toys.

Oh, he carries knives too.

“Is the car ready?” he asks someone over the phone. The person must've said yes, he thanks him or her and ends the call.

“You'll find a car waiting for you behind gumtrees.” He is telling me. This is not a prank.

“You're releasing me?”

Yes I hate him and won't hate him less for any reason, but this is a surprising side of him.

And now? The knife?

“What are you doing?” I ask.

He lifts the knife up, he has his arm stretched. I don't think he is....

Jesus Christ!

He just stabbed himself. He is not even flinching to show that he is human.

“Leave Zanamuhla.” He drops the blood on the floor.

I'm still shocked. Which level of cruelty is this? Who stabs his own arm for no suicidal reasons?

Oh, he brought bandages as well.

“I said go,” he says firmly.

There is no time for hesitations, I gather myself up and dash to the door. It's actually dark outside, but the taste of freedom is so priceless.

Something breaks behind. It sounds like a window.

I don't know what he is playing at, he didn't look psychopathic to me.

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Busikhaya walks into an empty house. The girl is gone. Among the things he hates in life, is losing control. The girl was no use to them but he had control over her. He would've determined when she goes home.

“All of you, in the square house, now!” he yells at his brothers over the phone and continues pacing around the house angrily.

They all come in one car confused about Busikhaya’s sudden anger.

“She escaped,” Mnotho says first.

Mndeni and Ngcwethi look at him with confused faces.

“Look at the window, it's broken, and these trails of blood,” he says.

“Hell no!” They all rush inside the house and find Busikhaya breathing fire. There is a broken glass bowl and a map of blood all over the floor.

“You changed her menu and decided to change her cutlery as well?” he questions Ngcwethi.

“Yeah, so?” -Ngcwethi.

“So she escaped damnit! She broke the window with a fuckin’ bowl and left,” Busikhaya lashes out.

Ngcwethi looks away regretfully.

“And the blood?” – Mndeni.

“Who knows? Maybe she tried to kill herself. “

They all sits down defeated.

“We have to clean this mess. I don't want the police to be sniffing around our home while we are mourning.”

Mndeni looks at his Bell & Rose watch and sighs. Now he has to touch water to clean blood!

“Mnotho clean,” he tries to bully him as usual but Busikhaya hears none of it. He wants all of them to clean since the girl was everyone's responsibility.

“And you?” he asks Ngcwethi who is still on the chair.

“I have dystonia in my left arm, and I'm in no mood of touching blood,” – Ngcwethi.

Well, they all understand him and his special illnesses. They let him be and clean up.

[11/19, 09:39] : Chapter 2

ZANAMUHLA

When I open my eyes there is a heavy figure opposite my bed. It's dark outside, I've been eating and sleeping as much as I can. I don't know what's more exhausted between my body and soul. Sleep helps me not to think about what happened, and I don't deal with the fact that I didn't write my exams.

“Hlahla,”

I can't believe my ears.

My brother!

He is the only person who calls me that way.

“Sit up,” he orders.

I sit up immediately. He takes a lighter out of his pocket and lights the lamp. I asked him to fix my lightbulb two months ago, I guess his Mazwakhe schedule has been too tight.

“You could've just fixed the light for me and I wouldn't have to live like a khoisan,” I snap.

He frowns.

I hate him. He could've fixed my light and saved me from those evil Mthembu brothers. Why did he kill a man if he can't stand up for his shit? Why are men so evil and inconsiderate?

“You are not angry about the light, I know you. Look it's not safe for me to be here, they took Nkanyiso and they're coming after me. But I had to come see you, are you okay?”

“Do I look okay?” I ask.

“Attitude!” He warns.

Sigh! This is my brother, he is way older than me, I shouldn't let anger control me. He is still calm though, the Mazwakhe I know would've



reprimanded me. I guess a part of him admits that he disappointed me.

“I'm okay, they didn't do anything to me,” I say.

“I knew they wouldn't.” He scratches his beard and sighs heavily. He looks like a caveman, I don't know where he hides or if he eats anything. His eyes flickers anger. If I was to put a comb through his hair it would surely break into pieces. I don't know why he isn't friendly with the barbers.

“This is temporary Hlahla, I will settle this out tomorrow. In the morning pack your bag and go to kwaMalume, I'll fetch you once the dust has settled,” he says.

Tomorrow the Mthembus are burying their father, they can't settle anything with him. I doubt he'd disturb the funeral, I mean that's just cruel and inhuman.

“Tomorrow?” I raise my eyebrows.

He nods his head. He's not going to spell this out for me.

“Why are you doing this?” I ask.

Heavy silence.

“Can I get you anything to eat?” I ask.

“No,”

My forehead furrows. He has hunger written all over him.

“I’m on a strict initiation, I can’t eat anything other than what I’m told to eat.”

“I don’t understand,” I say.

“I need to be strengthened for tomorrow. It’s a war Hlahla, I might not come back. The Mthembus only understand one language, blood must be spilt before we get equality in this area. I watched my mother die at the side of the road because they closed the road for the stupid farm.”

He might not come back? I can’t lose him, he knows that he’s all that I have.

“No Mazwakhe, you don’t have to fight. Remember I will get my trade and we’ll move away from here. That’s why you sent me to school, so that we can

have better lives,” I remind him, hoping that it'll put him back to his senses.

He chuckles and gets on his feet.

“You didn't write your final exams, they took that away from you remember?”

He just had to remind me that! Eitherway that's on Ngcwethi, and him alone. He destroyed my future, not the whole Mthembu clan. But he released me, I don't know why he did it but a part of me is grateful.

“I have to leave, don't forget what I said, leave before the sun comes out,” he says.

I guess there is no way to stop this. All I can do is pray for his safe return.

“Please be safe,” I say.

He smiles, but it doesn't reach his eyes. He has only one arm of the overall on, the other sleeve is loose below his arm revealing his muscular arm that has iziphandla around his wrist and a gemstone bracelet that mother made for him. She made me one as well but I can't tell you where it is.

“You take care of yourself and stop being stubborn Hlahla. I mean it, stop being stubborn.” He gives me a stare that usually has me agreeing to everything he says. I just shrug my shoulders, he sighs and walks out.

I blow off the lamp and struggle with the possibility of never seeing him again.

Tomorrow I'm not going to my uncle's house, my brother is going to a war, I should be somewhere around waiting for his return.

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## THE MTHEMBU HOMESTEAD

After a long service the pastor finally reads a verse to accompany Mthembu to his eternal room.

Everyone stand up and allow Busikhaya to lead out the coffin.

He is singing ihubo that calls the attention of his ancestors:

“Indlondlo igobile

Ihlangabezeni, mayine!

Mayin' imvula libalele.”

His brothers sing along with him. The piercing scream of their mother rise above ihubo.

Busikhaya’s eyes have turned red. He is trying not to break, nothing hurts him as seeing his mother in pain. The Ngwanes haven't paid for what they did, and that just infuriates him even more.

They walk slowly, surround the kraal and finally stop at the end of the yard.

“Awushinge Awushinge!” -Mndeni calls out.

They lift the coffin over their shoulders and run to the cemetery like they're just carrying a box of tomatoes.

Others are chanting back: “Uyashinga umsunu kanina, Uyashinga!”

Dust twirls up, women pick up their paces and try to keep up. The whole scene has turned to something else. Everyone's blood is boiling up. It's more than

just a loss of the Mthembus, the whole community lost an important figure.

In the midst of all the commotion and effusion of emotions Ngcwethi is following behind calmly. He keeps sighing heavily and brushing his shoulders.

They have placed the coffin near the grave.

Busikhaya is standing at the top of it, facing a crowd of men that are clapping hands and singing after him.

When the pastor arrives they cut the song and give him his place. One woman start a church song, it's a normal funeral again.

Maybe not for so long.

“Cut the song!” Ngcwethi shouts out of the blue.

Everyone look at him with confusion.

He takes reedmats and throws them to his uncles.

Busikhaya grabs him and pulls him aside.

“And now?” he asks.

“We need to bury him immediately,” -Ngcwethi.

Busikhaya frowns. Now is not the time for his riddles. They're saying goodbye to their father, it should be done with dignity and according to tradition.

“It's not safe, I can feel it on my shoulders.” - Ngcwethi explains.

Busikhaya still doesn't get it, but when it comes to Ngcwethi they go wherever his wind is blowing them. He is always weird and right.

Mthembu's body is taken out of the coffin, placed on the reedmat and covered with a blanket and a cow's skin over. Mndeni grabs a spade and starts breaking the coffin into pieces.

The pastor has to read his verses as fast as he can. Busikhaya digs sand with a shovel and stands next to the grave. All the Mthembus scoops a bit of it and throw it inside the grave as a sign of goodbye.

Women return back home to feast on the refreshments while men struggle to fill up the grave. As soon as they finish they all go down to the river to bath. Ngcwethi asks his brothers that they use a

different river from others.

“I can't believe we had to bury him like that.” -  
Mnotho.

He is unhappy about how quickly the burial was carried out. Surely their father deserved a little show, he was a man amongst men. He could see people whispering behind their hands, again they'll be trending in the whole village, now for burying their father like a cat.

“It makes no difference, he wasn't going to wake up even if we had a funeral scheduled for 12 hours,”  
Busikhaya responds.

Mnotho shoots a look at him. Was it really necessary for him to respond like that? He can be very insensitive.

“I'm just surprised about how women hurried back home. Don't they have food at their homes?”  
Mndeni says, shaking his head in disbelief.

“Really now? It's food, who cares?” -Busikhaya.

Mndeni shares a look with Mnotho; here we go



again.

They get to the river, take their clothes off, scoops a bit of umswani and bath.

“You heard that?” Ngcwethi asks jumping out of the water.

The bush is quiet, only the sound of the birds and running water disturb the peace. His brothers look at him with confusion.

“No, let's leave now!”

They all jump out of the water and put their clothes on and run after him. They didn't hear anything but when Ngcwethi says run you run.

There is a smoke dancing its way to the sky. It's coming right from their home. Gunshots follow. It's a bit steep, they cannot run fast enough.

As Busikhaya requested when the coffin went out, the rain starts pouring. The sun disappears behind a dark cloud, a bright lightning keeps flashing every now and then.

Gunshots stops when they are about to get to their

home. Kids and women are crying and calling out for help. None of them knows where to start. Who is alive? Who is not? Where are the attackers?

Mazwakhe appears behind the tent, he looks straight at them. They don't react, instead they stand grounded on the same spot like they're electric shocked.

“This is for my sister.” He points at Ngcwethi and pulls the trigger. Only then Busikhaya’s senses crawl in. He takes out his gun and shouts orders to his two standing brothers. But Mazwakhe is gone. He just disappeared in front of their eyes.

Ngcwethi is on the ground groaning like a bull. His brothers are running over the hills calling the Ngwanes out.

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ZANAMUHLA

The guns have finally silenced. I have worn my

dress with its inside out. My mother used to say it protects your loved one from going through pain. I have called God with every possible praise.

Oh no there is another one!

“Oh Nkosi!” I hear someone exclaim behind me. I look back, it's Nkanyiso's mother, the third wife. She fell down on her knees with tears running down.

“Leso sihlale enyameni.” -Mamkhulu says. She is the expert of everything, but I didn't know analyzing gunshots was one of them.

After that gunshot it's quiet again. I remember that my ex-classmate lives close to the Mthembus. I scroll down my contacts looking for her number.

Oh fuck! Who's calling me now?

“Please call me later I'm in the middle of.....” I don't finish the sentence, my lecturer's voice comes to the speaker.

“Zanamuhla I hope you're well. I was worried when I found out that you missed all your final examinations.”

I've been trying to forget this. There's so much to deal with at the moment, confronting the fact that I might not have a future is the last thing I need.

“But I just received the most exciting news, you've been chosen for ICEBO FUND. You can write your examination again next year, your fees will be covered as well as accommodation.”

I've never heard of ICEBO FUND before, but who cares? This has made my whole sour day better.

“Oh My God! I don't know what to say.”

“That's not all.....”

There is more? Free transport maybe?

“They'll find a job for you as soon as you obtain your qualification and you won't pay a cent back,” she says.

I'm lost for words. I thought God didn't listen to my prayers whereas He's been waiting for the perfect timing.

Pity I can't share the news with anyone and I can't rejoice as much as I would've loved to.

Oh I was calling Mandisa.

She answers just when I'm about to drop.

“Geliza.” That's how she calls everyone. I don't like it, but I'm a snob anyway and she doesn't care.

“Who got shot?” I go straight to the point.

“OMG Zanamuhla! Do you see that Mthembu brother with a weird voice and sea-brown eyes?”

What on earth? There is a brown sea?

“No they can't be sea-brown, that doesn't exist. Just tell me if it's Mazwakhe who got shot,” I say impatiently.

“Mazwakhe was there?” Shock and curiosity has her voice rising up. I have to lower the phone's volume.

“Mandisa just tell me,” I say.

“Well I said it's Ngcwethi who died.”

My hands shake, I almost lose the grip of my phone.

“He died?” I ask, silently praying that I didn't hear correctly.

“Obviously, I mean it was gun not a slingshot,” she says.

I drop the call and hold onto the wall.

Ngcwethi died? He was cruel but he saved me. In fact scratch that, he wasn't cruel I made it up in my head. Yes he set my mother's rondavel on fire but destroying my mother's memory was beyond his intentions. He was sorry, I saw it in his eyes.

“Was it Mazwakhe?” Mamkhulu asks very randomly. I can't even trace sympathy in her voice. It sounds like deep down it's what she's hoping for.

“No, it was Ngcwethi,” I say.

She doesn't know who that is but she shows remorse anyway because it wasn't Mazwakhe. We are one family but there is a huge distinction regarding whose child this is. Mazwakhe is not liked because he's the heir of the family, and I guess I'm not liked for just being his sister.

Mazwakhe doesn't come home. It's been four days

since they attacked the Mthembus and everyone has come back except him. But I know that he's okay wherever he is, I just wish I can see him.

We haven't heard anything about Ngcwethi's funeral. I keep thinking about him. My heart is sore. He was different from others. He didn't talk or smile much, but there was a genuine human inside of him.

There is a meeting today. Now that things are tense induna has seen the need to call everyone together. I don't think the Mthembus are ready to talk, neither are my brothers. Things might turn even more ugly in that meeting, which is why I'm packing my bags and leaving as Mazwakhe asked.

I don't know how long I'm going to be at my uncles, hopefully it'll be for a few weeks. I don't say goodbye, nobody cares anyway. I walk through the forest and join the main road that's going to take me over the bridge that serves as a border between Mpofana and Osindisweni where my uncle resides.

“Zolwandleee,”

My ears got to be deceiving me.

I turn around as the car stops a few feet away from me.

“Zihlabathi zolwandle, what a pleasure meeting you again.”

Yes it's Mndeni Mthembu. He is sitting with Mnotho at the front. My eyes nearly pop to the ground when they meet a man who's supposed to be dead.

Ngcwethi is alive? Don't get me wrong I trust Mandisa's gossip skills but this is some twisted, misleading news ever.

“Don't look so scared,” Mnotho says cheekily.

They kidnapped me once, they might do it again. I hug my bag on the chest and take a few steps back.

Mndeni breaks into laughter.

“Running is a habit to you. Come on, get in the car we'll drop you at your uncle's,” he says.

My heart almost stops beating. How did he know where I am going? And Ngcwethi's calm face, isn't he supposed to be in pain or something? He got



shot, it wasn't a slingshot.

The Mndeni idiot hits the hooter. This is drawing me attention of the mountains.

“Come on Hlahla,” -Mndeni.

Him and Mnotho bump fists and laugh.

Even if I run they'll catch me. I swallow my fears and go to the car. Ngcwethi opens the door and shifts to the other seat.

“Who do you like? Rihanna?” -Mndeni.

He always has something to say. I honestly didn't think our paths would cross so soon.

He turns music up before starting the car. It's Beyonce, not Rihanna. I don't care anyway.

Are they really going to drop me at my uncle's? If so, do I still call it a hiding? It seems like they're on the loop about everything.

Indeed the car stops below my uncle's house.

“Sweet home!”

That's Mndeni, obviously.

“Ummm thank you for the lift,” I say.

“You're welcome,” -Him again.

Ngcwethi's arm passes in front of me, his body leans against mine as he reaches to the door to open for me. His cologne fills my nostrils, I try not to be distracted by it.

I feel something dropping inside my jacket pocket. When I turn my head to look at him he has this stone cold face. I can't even ask what he did, his face alone murders me.

The car drives off. I jump up and take the jacket off. Remember he threw a petrol bomb to the house, who knows what he could've slid into my pocket.

A cellphone falls to the ground as the jacket flies in the air.

Why did he give me a cellphone? It looks like a cellphone that has been owned for a while. It's locked and there's a pattern. This is strange. Do I throw it away or keep it?

“Zanamuhla it's you!” Malume says joyfully and

comes to help me with the bag. Now there's no time to decide about the phone, I pick it up and put it back inside the jacket.

“You're grown,” he says what every relative tells you after they haven't seen you in a few months.

“Mazwakhe told us you'd come 5 days ago. Your aunt slaughtered a chicken and rolled dumplings thinking you were coming.”

I force a smile.

“Aunt always blow things out of proportion. Something delayed me,” I say.

“It's okay, you are here now.”

He takes me to the room I'm going to use during my stay. It belonged to my late cousin, she was their only child, when she died everything changed. My aunt was a big-boned woman, but now you can blow her with a hairdryer.

“Pack your stuff inside the cupboard and come to the kitchen to see your aunt,” he says and leaves.

I start packing my clothes and toiletries. I thought

I'd feel safe once I get here, but it's even more unsafe than back home.

The phone rings. I don't recognize the ringing tone. I don't receive calls with a maskandi song.

Oh snap! I have Ngcwethi's phone.

I take it and look at the screen, the number is not saved.

Do I answer?

It keeps ringing, the person won't give up.

I slide the green button and lift the phone to my ear.

"It's Ngcwethi." -the scratchy voice.

Shock me again!

He gives me his phone and then calls it.

"It's Zanamuhla," I say.

"I know," he says and stays quiet for a few seconds.

I can feel the uncomfortableness in his silence.

"Please don't sleep there tonight," he says.

My chest start beating drums.

“Why?” I ask.

“It's not safe for you there. Can you trust me with something?”

I nod my head without thinking. I have no reason to trust any Mthembu, but I've made up Ngcwethi to be different. I'm that person who swims with her own thoughts.

“Zano???”

Oh snap, he can't see me nodding my head, this is not a video call I have to open my mouth.

“Yes..yes I can trust you,” I say.

“When I call later take your bag and sneak out to the road. I will take you to a safer place.”

“Safer place?” I ask.

“You said you can trust me.”

Oh well.

“Aren't you supposed to be dead?” I didn't put much thought to that question. I can be a weirdo as well.

“No.”

Mndeni would've broke it down for me. But I don't question further, we are not friends.

“What if other people call?” I ask. I wouldn't like to pick Busikhaya's call. He's the last person I wish to have a conversation with on earth, despite our families rivalry, he is not my piece of company.

“They won't.” Again he doesn't explain anything, he just gives me that and I should trust his word as promised.

He ends the call.

I look at the packed cupboard. So much work for nothing!

I'm about to run away with a man I hardly know. This makes me question the safety of my family. It's obvious that the meeting won't solve anything. The Mthembu brothers didn't attend, neither did Mazwakhe.

[11/19, 09:40] : Chapter 3

ZANAMUHLA

It was a long drive. I lost direction when we entered a tar road, it might've been a two-hour drive or more. I have no idea where I am, but it's a huge house with a couple of rooms. Maybe not as huge as I make it to be, but it's better than most Mpofana houses. It's built better, a bit modern and well furnished. There is a small screen television and all other electronics that make life easy.

I didn't have someone to show me around, Ngcwethi left after seeing me in. He told me to stay indoors and keep the phone on. I'm going room to room in just my underwears. There is a small taste of freedom in this. I can do anything I want, nobody is watching me.

I'm not in an island, I can hear neighbours yelling at their kids and cars hooting. The road must be nearer, which is such a relief. He didn't throw me on the deserts.

The phone rings just as I step out of the bathroom. I still have his phone, it's locked. I only take calls and watch the time. He instructed that I switch mine off.

“It's Ngcwethi,” he says when I pick up.

As if it could've been someone else.

“I'm here,” I say.

“Please open the door.”

My eyes quickly go to the door. Fuck, I'm half naked. I really thought he was gone, why did he come back.

“Zano?” I swear his voice is the most awful thing I've ever listened to.

“Coming..J ust a few seconds.” I rush to the bedroom where I put my bag and put on the first dress my hands grab.

I unlock the door. It soothes my heart that he doesn't have a spare key. Now I trust him wholeheartedly even though I don't know the reason behind his goodness.

When the door opens his face transforms into awe. He has this frown on his face. I look around to see if there's no alien behind me.

“You....” He stops himself and walks in with a big box. “I brought you this, just in case you want to be



busy with something productive while you're here.” He changes to another subject and pulls his face into place.

I open the box and find books. Civil Technology study guides and Building Science prescribed books. It's my N6 study material, a whole of it, and some fictional books.

“How did you know the course I was studying?” I ask.

He frowns.

I narrow my eyes. I never told him anything related to my school, for him to bring exactly what I'll need for examination next semester baffles me.

“Ummm...I just did,” he says.

This has to be the dumbest answer he has ever given. His weirdness is starting to unsettle me.

“I see, thank you.” I lift the heavy box and go to the bedroom and place it in front of the wardrobe. It's those wardrobes with mirrors on doors, I rise up to the reflection of a stupid girl wearing a dress

backwards.

Lord! This is why he was awestruck when I opened the door for him. On top of that the dress is ugly, I'm just a disturbing sight.

I quickly change to a floral one and put shoes on for decency.

A ghost of a smile flitters across his cold face when he sees me walking back to what I'll call a living room.

“You didn't tell me I was wearing a dress the wrong way,” I say.

“Were you?” He has his left eyebrow lifted.

I don't know why I have to notice the colour of his eyes. Brown eyes are common, but his are earthly brown with a deep soul reflecting in them. His face defaults to normal. But his normal is not so normal. He stares at me until I occupy a seat at the opposite side.

“How did you recover so quickly?” I ask.

He frowns.

I swear if he does this again I'll not repeat myself.

“How did you recover so quickly? I heard that you were shot.” I'm sure he heard me the first time, he just had to frown so that the broken record can keep going.

“I haven't recovered, I have a bandage around my stomach.”

Oh, that's not easy to tell.

“Are you going to avenge yourself?” This sounds stupid, he has 1000 reasons to want Mazwakhe dead, but a part of me expects him to just forgive.

“No, I will defend myself,” he says.

I'm not satisfied with that answer. I have a lot of questions. How did they know that I was going to my uncle's house? Did the meeting solve anything? And mostly, why is he saving me?

“Whose side are you on?” I ask.

“NgikoJ ama kaMnisi wemvula izulu libalele.”

I can't control myself, I roll my eyes. Did he really need to recite his clan names? I only asked whose

side he is on.

“Then why are you saving me?” I ask.

“I’m not saving you.” It sounds more like he's telling himself than he's answering the question.

“Really?” I ask.

He gets up and pick his keys and cellphone. I was just hallucinating when I said he had a cold cruel face. Now I see the real Ngcwethi’s cold face. When his eyes dart to mine they emit fire, he quickly looks away, giving me the sight of his clenched jaws.

He leaves, without saying goodbye.

Maybe I shouldn't have questioned him. He is already doing so much for me, he has gone against his family twice for me.

I cannot call him, the phone is locked, he's the only one who can call me. I don't know why I wait for his call, I stay up with the phone in my hand watching some show.

I might've fallen asleep right there on the couch, when I wake up my whole body is sore. I look

around in realization of where I am and thoughts start trailing in. I hope nothing happened to my uncle, Ngcwethi said I must trust him. And if Mazwakhe doesn't do anything he will be safe.

I stand under the shower and turn on warm water. If we had showers at home I'd bath ten times a day. They shower off all the fatigue and refresh you. I can live this life.

I wonder whose house is this. It doesn't look like a family house nor does it look like anyone ever permanently lived in it.

I wrap my body in a towel and go peek throughout the window, just to have a look at my surroundings.

There are people on the road, the neighbour is a few yards away doing her laundry. And there is a car, right outside the house I'm in.

I don't know how long it's been there, if it was Ngcwethi he would've knocked and came in. Could it be his brothers? What am I going to do? They can't see me here.

I go back to my bedroom and put decent clothes on

and wait by the kitchen for a knock. Time goes, the person isn't coming in.

Three hours later, I haven't eaten anything, I'm in the kitchen holding my breath. Finally the phone rings.

“There is a car here,” I say with my voice kept low. In my eyes the door handle is moving.

“Okay,” -Him.

“You said I'll be safe here.” I lose control of my tone and snap at him. He shouldn't be so calm, my life could be in danger.

“But we are talking, I assume you're still safe,” he says.

He is an idiot of note. Why is my voice kept so low if I'm safe? I'm trembling on this chair and seeing his brother Busikhaya breaking the door any minute in my head.

“You have to eat,” he says.

This guy!

“What?” I ask.

“Eat Zano, people eat to stay alive. You are not Jesus Christ, living by the holy spirit.”

Am I on the call with Mndeni? Because this is something he would say.

“I will eat, I'm just...wait, how did you know that I haven't eaten?”

Silence.

He is frowning where he is and I have to repeat myself. Lord knows how much this annoys me, but it's a part of life I have to accept.

“How did you know that I haven't eaten?” I try not to sound as irritated as I am.

“I assumed,” -Him.

“Do you have cameras here? Are you watching me Ngcwethi Mthembu? Because that's the only way you'd know this!”

Now I don't care about the car outside. I'm shouting, the person can do what he wants.

Who does Ngcwethi think he is? Planting cameras and watching me like a thief.

“No! There isn't anything like that, I promise you.”

That's not how he speaks, he is guilty.

“Zanamuhla?” -Him.

I end the call and start searching for hidden cameras.

The phone keeps ringing, that alone confirms my suspicions.

I don't find anything and that infuriates me even more. He is probably watching me even now.

He finally stops calling.

I leave the phone on the kitchen table and go to the bedroom to lie down a bit.

I ended up napping. When my eyes open it's almost sun set and I haven't eaten. My stomach is groaning and even aching to the emptiness.

When I enter the kitchen a man in black leather jacket and navy pant is occupying the chair. I thought he didn't have a spare key, I even applauded him for that.



He turns his head and looks at me.

“You're finally awake,” he says and climbs off the chair.

How did he know that I was asleep? I remain by the door with my arms folded.

“You still think I planted cameras here?”

“Didn't you?” -Me.

“No, I have no reason to.”

He must be thinking that I'm a fool.

“Oh, you just assumed that I haven't eaten coincidentally?”

He comes closer and stands just a few inches away from me. That cologne again! He smells so good. But it mustn't distract me.

“I felt it and you sound different when you're hungry.” He thinks for a moment. “You sound like an old ocarina.”

What the fuck is ocarina? And I sound like an old one, great!

“You become angry without realizing it. That's you when you're hungry,” he continues.

“And you know this because you once kidnapped me and starved me,” I say.

That must've hit the nerve.

“What else do I sound like? A sick bee?”

He frowns.

God take me now!

“Zano,” he grabs my arm and pulls me back. I nearly bump onto his chest. We are both shocked. I've never been so close to his glare. My heart is pounding, it's like his eyes are digging through my soul. His hand is still on my arm, holding me strongly and safely.

“Are you going to eat?” he asks.

My head involuntary nods. He lets go of my arm, I feel powerless. He goes to the fridge and takes the margarine out.

I sit on the chair and watch him. He sets the plate on the counter and lay bread slices on it. I didn't

know making a sandwich was such a hard job. The margarine is everywhere on the bread.

“Do you know how to make food?” I ask.

Silence.

“Ngcwethi!”

He looks at me with that annoying frown.

“What?” he asks.

“Do you have a hearing problem? I asked if you know how to make food,” I say.

“You are not the only person I listen to, and no I don't know how to make food.”

I'm not the only person he listens to? There is no one else in this house, unless if he has voices in his head.

“Then let me do it.” I take the knife from him and take some margarine off the bread. I'd die if I ate it with so much fat.

I make another sandwich for him and pour juice into glasses. Usually I pour half and drink before I pour

the real one. But I have to bring my manners and not act like I'm not used to juice.

I don't like to have someone watching me while I'm eating, but I'm hungry so I have no choice.

“Are you not going to eat?” I ask halfway with my sandwich. He hasn't touched his plate.

“No,” he says.

Gosh, he hates the sandwich I made.

“I don't really eat wheat,” he says.

His face is full of guilt.

“This is a sandwich, not wheat,” I say.

He doesn't say anything. I really sound stupid, he meant that he doesn't eat food that is produced from wheat and that means he doesn't eat bread.

“Must I make you something else?” Embarrassment is washing all over me. Why didn't he tell me from the start.

“No thank you, I'm not hungry,” he says.

Now this is awkward. I pick my juice and sip.

His phone rings, he stands up and leaves the room. I finish my sandwich quickly and clear the table.

He comes back after a while. I notice that he doesn't look okay. His face is puffed up and he can no longer keep the eye contact.

“Is everything okay?” I ask.

He sighs heavily and stands next to me. His sighs are extraordinarily heavy.

“You're scaring me,” I say.

He is really scaring me. The way his face and eyes have just changed.

“I don't know how to tell you this,” -Him.

Oh no, it's bad news. My mind is on Mazwakhe, maybe his brothers were telling him that they've got him.

“Your father..he was shot,” he says.

“And???” I ask.

His eyes widens.

“He was shot Zanamuhla and he didn't make it.”

That's sad, I mean I'm an orphan now, but I'm still waiting for more bad news.

“Anything else?” I ask.

“No, it's just that.”

I sigh out, I can't say in relief, but there's that sense of relaxation. Mazwakhe is the only person I truly care about. That man haven't seen me in months even though we stay in the same yard. He couldn't even check on me after being kidnapped.

When I remove hands off my face I find him staring at me.

“Do you want to go home?” he asks.

“Is it safe?”

“No.”

“Well then no, just find out when the funeral is and I'll go say my goodbyes.”

I guess this makes us and them even. Mazwakhe killed their father and now they have killed ours. I know deep down Ngcwethi is happy, he is just sorry for me who now doesn't have both parents.

“How are you feeling?”

He sounds really concerned.

“I don't know,” I say.

He goes out and comes back wearing a black beanie. You know beanies make black guys look like hood-thugs. I love it on him, it gives him another look.

“What is it?” he asks.

I give myself a huge internal slap. Why did I stare?

“Nothing...Are you supposed to be here?” I change the subject.

“No, but some things can wait.” He shrugs his shoulders and sits on the chair.

“I don't need a shoulder to cry on, you can leave,” I say.

“What do you need?” he asks.

That caught me off guard. He is staring at me, patiently waiting for an answer.

“My brother's life,” I say.

He looks down. That's not what he expected. It's not something he can promise me.

“I cannot give you that Zano,” he says.

I guess he can't do anything for me then, except keeping me here until God knows when.

There's some long silence. He is not looking at me and that gives me a chance to study him.

“You're looking at me,” he says without lifting up his head and I bite myself in embarrassment.

“How did you know?” I ask.

“Your eyes are piercing me and you have a heavy thing around you.”

He lifts his eyes and finds me with my eyebrows raised. First of all my eyes have never pierce anyone, about the heavy thing around me, he is crazy.

“I'm sorry,” he says.

“Well I'm glad you take account for your offensive words.”



“I’m talking about your parents, especially your mother, I’m sorry,” he says.

I don't like talking about my mother, it revives old wounds for me. Mazwakhe wasn't like this, mother's passing changed him. He was there, making calls and trying to get help. The ambulance wouldn't come, the road was too bad. It was sunny that day, he kept giving her water and wiping her with a wet towel as her temperature was too high.

“Your farm costed us the road, and the road costed us our mother. You don't have to be sorry, it won't bring her back and as long the farm is there the Ngwanes will never live a fair life,” I say.

“The farm is our main source of income.”

Oh wow! He is still a Mthembu, greedy as hell.

“And our source of pain,” I say.

We stare at each other. There is some pity in his eyes. I think he can see things from our perspective, he is not as cruel as I made him to be.

“How old are you?” -Him.

How does that relate to the conversation we are having?

“About to turn 24 years, and you?”

“I’m older,” he says.

Age is a number, other than that we are all older than someone out there.

“Do you ever give clear answers?” I ask

“Yes,” he says undoubtedly.

Great!

“Why are you saving an enemy?”

He owes me a clear answer to this one.

“An enemy?” he asks.

“Yes, me.”

For a moment he doesn't say anything. But this time he isn't angered by the question.

“Because I've never been guided wrongly. I listen to my heart and the guidance of my ancestors,” he says.

“Is it?” -Me.

“One universe, 9 planets, 204 countries, 809 islands and 7 seas.” He must be thinking out loud, but he is looking at me and I don't know where this geography is going.

“And I had a privilege to meet you, even if it was under distasteful circumstances, but you have turned my life upside down.”

My heart melts. I feel a hot rush heating my cheeks and I find myself looking away from him. Nobody wants to be caught blushing over stupid things.

“So don't ever think I'm breaking any rules. I'm doing exactly what I should be doing, it may displease some people, but it is well with me,” he adds.

I swear backstabbing has never sounded so honest and sweet.

“You are good with words,” I say.

“Thank you,” -Him.

“It's not a compliment,” I say

He frowns.

I don't repeat, he heard me.

He laughs for the first time. He doesn't have a good laugh, his voice doesn't do him justice, but the way his pupils dilate makes it cute.

“Little things annoy you. You're so dramatic!” he says.

Oh now I'm dramatic? If he didn't frown instead of answering simple questions I wouldn't be annoyed by ‘little things.’

His phone rings, he drops it and sighs.

I bet he is needed back home.

“I need to leave before Busikhaya tracks me down thinking that I'm dead,” he says.

Tracking down doesn't sit well with me. Can he track Mazwakhe as well? Me?

“Are you going to be alright or you'll starve yourself and search for imaginary cameras?” he asks.

I'm not going to be alright. I've had the strangest

amazing hours of my life in his company. It felt so normal. Now I have to go back to that feeling of being in hiding again.

“I will see you in a few days.” He gathers himself up and walks towards the door.

A few days is too far for me. I'll be all alone here.

“Keep the phone on,” he says before opening the door. I nod my head, he nods his and disappears.

Why is my heart so sore? I lock the door after him and look around with my arms folded.

There is no sign of him. Only his cologne is left, and his scratchy voice in my head.

[11/19, 09:41] : Chapter 4

ZANAMUHILA

“Okay chill Zanamuhla, this man doesn't owe you anything. So what if he hasn't called you for the past 5 days? It's his airtime and you're here living off his resources.” -My subconscious keeps

reminding me.

Damn, I check my phone again, well it's actually his phone. There are no missed calls, my heart sinks. I've been checking every minute hoping it'll ring. It's been 5 days, I get no update about the funeral as agreed, and I get no -hello Zanamuhla are you still okay. I'm just all alone, deserted in an unknown neighborhood.

I try to go through my notes but words just blank out. I haven't fallen in love with TV yet, so there is no escape for me, I keep tossing and feeling sorry for myself.

The screen flashes under the tutorial book. My eyes have deceived me so many times, they could be playing another trick.

Oh yes, it's really ringing.

My heart does a little dance but my mind quickly pulls it into order. So he is finally calling and Zanamuhla should jump up.

I let it ring for a minute before I pick up.

“Zano it's me, please open,” he says.

I drop the call and go to the door and open.

It's a bit cold today but this double-breasted coat he is wearing is an exaggeration. He comes in brushing his hands together and blowing out like he is stepping out of Barrow.

“It's really cold outside,” he breaks the helpful news to me. I'm so shocked, I didn't know that, I haven't been outside in a week remember.

I close the door and lock it as he hurries to the stove. He turns it on and warms his hands on the heat. I never pictured him being scared of anything, especially not cold weather.

He finally stops and switches the stove off. I'm leaning on the wall by the passage looking at him. Yes I'm angry.

“Are you okay?” he asks.

“Yes, why wouldn't I be?” This is the time Mazwakhe would call the attitude out of me. I can be a bit rough around the edges.

“Did I catch you at the wrong time?” he asks.

I really don't know what to say. He doesn't think there's anything wrong by leaving a person in a strange house for 5 days without calling her.

“When is my father’s funeral?” I change the subject. If he doesn't think anything is wrong then it's all good. I'm grateful for what he has done, and I guess he owes me nothing.

“Tomorrow. That’s why I'm here, you have to go home tonight,” he says.

“Let me pack then,” I say.

“Pack?”

My eyes narrow. Why does it sound like he is disapproving.

“I'm going home, aren't I?” I ask.

“But you're coming back.” He has this FINAL look on his face. I never said I'm not coming back, nevertheless I need to pack a few things.

I get to the bedroom and pack a few clothes and my toiletries. I find him in the living room watching a



sport channel.

“I’m ready,” I say.

He seems shocked by the hurry.

“We can stay for a while,” he suggests.

“Okay I’ll be in the bedroom, tell me when it’s time to go.” I leave my bag on the couch and go to the bedroom. Just like he felt my eyes piercing him the other day, I feel his behind me, and I can’t disappear fast enough.

I sit on bed and take a huge breath. Why do I have so many expectations? He must’ve been caught with more important stuff. Maybe he has a girlfriend, I’m sure a guy like him already captured someone’s heart.

“That pillow didn’t do anything,” – The scratchy voice comes from the door causing my heart to beat fast for a few seconds.

He stands a few inches away from me. His eyes are on me like he can read every thought running through my head.

The pillow! Fuck, I've been squeezing the poor pillow like it owes me a R5 with Mandela's head.

“You have a problem with me,” he says and takes out his hand for me to hold. “Stand up, face me and tell me what the problem is.”

I hold onto his hand, I have no other choice. He helps me up and creates space between us. His gaze is fishing the truth out of me.

“Why didn't you check on me? Five days Ngcwethi. No call, no nothing. I'm locked here with no idea of what's going on in the world, in my world,” I say.

“I would've told you if anything was happening. Don't you trust me now?”

He really doesn't get it. I wanted a call, to hear something familiar and just someone caring about how I am.

“Why are you crying?” He steps closer and immediately removes my hands off my face. “Why are you crying Zanamuhla?” He asks again.

Crying on his chest wasn't my intention. I didn't

even want to ask him about this. I just want to go home and see my brother, even if it's for a few hours. I miss having someone who cares about me.

We end up on bed with him leaning on the headboard and me lying on his lap soaked in tears. I think I've been strong for quite some time, and now all the pain and sadness just overwhelmed me.

Eventually my emotions go back into place. I get off his lap and go to the bathroom to breathe. What just happened was awkward. I don't think I'm going to be able to face him.

I step out of the bathroom, silently praying that I'll find him gone. Boom! He is standing right behind the bathroom door.

“Are you okay?” he asks in a voice full of concern.

I nod my head.

His two fingers lift my chin up, forcing me to meet his bloodshot eyes.

“Are you okay?” He is staring at me, waiting for the most honest answer.

“I will be fine.” That's the best I could give him. I'm not okay and he doesn't need me to lie. I can only assure him that in time I'll be fine.

He wraps his arms around me. My head lies on his chest and feels his heart beating against his chest. It's a hug that makes everything feels okay. His head is over my shoulder and I can feel him breathing.

He holds me until all my sorrows fade away. When I untangle myself he looks in my eyes to confirm if there are no more tears left and then he lets go.

The journey back home is filled heavy silence, I even wish for Mndeni's Rihanna. Anything to make this journey a bit light. And today he is really driving slowly, it takes us almost 3 hours to get to Mpofana.

“Drop me here, I will be fine,” I breathe my first words when I realize that he is not stopping the car even though we have drove past the forest. My home is not very far from here. I don't know where my brothers might be, this is their area. It's only

11pm, a normal time for them to be on the streets.

He starts by turning the car and then stops. Worry is painted all over his eyes when he looks at me.

“Things are not going to be smooth for quite some time, I think it'll be better if you bury him and return to Mission after a day.”

“You're going to attack?” I ask.

He is uncomfortable. I shouldn't ask these questions.

“Okay, you'll call me and tell me where you're going to pick me up,” I say.

He opens his door and climbs out of the car. He always opens the car door for me, maybe he thinks I might break it. This time he takes a few minutes before he appears on my side to open.

“I'll make a call, answer and stay on the line until you reach home.” He puts my bag over my shoulder like I'm some rich kid going to school. His request doesn't make sense, but he calls and I answer the call and keep the phone inside my jacket.

When a white tent welcomes me the reality starts to sink in. People are dying, from both sides, and more are still going to die. Tomorrow it might be Mazwakhe or Ngcwethi. Then what will become of my life?

There is a sad melody coming from the tent, I tiptoe around it and sneak inside the rondavel. I have no idea how I'm going to make my first appearance nor how I will explain my whereabouts.

The light turns on.

I look at the door alarmed.

“Where are you coming from?” My brother walks in and closes the door behind him. By the tone of his voice and the look on his face, he is not pleased.

Couldn't I be given a moment to figure that out?

“I asked a question Hlahla,” he says.

“I was somewhere safe.” I've never been creative in my life, this is the best answer I can come up with.

“Places have names, you ran away from Malume and I want to know where you went and why,” he

says.

I need to think carefully before I open my mouth again. In anything I say I cannot bring Ngcwethi up. He'll become his new target and I want nothing bad to happen to him.

“There was a white car that was following me. It followed me until I got to Malume’s house and that scared me. So I called my study mate and asked to crash in with her for a while.”

He curses and sits on bed with his fist folded. I think I'm smart, that was the most solid lie I've ever told in my entire life.

“Are you sure that you're safe at your friend's?” he asks.

“Yes, I'm very safe.” I nod my head while silently praying that he doesn't think about coming to check the place or asks to phone the so-called friend to thank her.

“They have killed father,” he tells me.

I can tell that in his head they've wronged him big

time. He killed theirs, it's not rocket science.

“So what now?” I ask.

He exhales loudly.

“Now I'm not just at war with the Mthembus, I have to watch out for the Ngwanes as well.”

I don't understand why he has to watch our family.

“Don't eat anything they give you. Everything that belonged to father now belongs to me, and that makes us enemies. Be careful around Mamkhulu and other wives.”

Gosh, he is right. We are in deep shit. The inheritance issue is only solved by a will, but we are a family living the 1960 life in 2020.

“What if I'm hungry? What am I going to eat?” I ask. When it comes to him I always bring problems instead of solutions. I expect him to know everything. Aren't what big brothers are for? To solve everything.

He gives me a key of the small cupboard in his rondavel. He stored some food inside it and I'll go



there if I'm hungry. Trust me I will go there after he leaves. I'm not hungry, just curious of what he bought.

“Take this.” He hands me a few R200 notes.

“Contribute to the grocery and thank your friend for me,” he says.

Oh my word! I'm going straight to hell. My brother works hard for his money and now I feel like I'm scamming him. There is no friend's place, what am I going to do with his money.

“And this for your things.” He hands me the monthly R300. It started as R50 when I was 14. He couldn't tell me to buy pads because he is Mazwakhe Ngwane, so he called it money for ‘my things.’ It has increased over the years, now it's R300 and I assume it includes body lotions and all. Even though people always say he doesn't have a heart, to me he is the best in the world.

He doesn't stay for long he has to go to the cemetery. They have to start digging the grave and he has to be there to tell people how to do it. Now

he has a lot of duties as the decision-maker of the family.

I might sleep here on his big bed. It's so damn comfortable.

When he said food I thought of bread and the dry stuff only. But there are goodies; snacks and boxes of biscuits. I shove a piece of chocolate slab in my mouth and snoop around.

There have been females in here? I know very well that my brother doesn't wear g-strings and bras.

Oh Gracious Lord, condoms!

I close the unholy drawer and open the next one.

I like his perfumes. They're not like Ngcwethi's but they smell good as well. I spray from my neck down to my waist. I don't know what I like more between the smell and the chhhhh sound.

“Hlahla seriously?” His voice comes from the door.

I jump up, the perfume bottle hits the floor and breaks. I always have bad lucks, I don't know what I'm not doing right by my ancestors.

“Clean that mess and stay away from my things.”  
He takes something from his wardrobe and leaves.

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## NGWANE'S FUNERAL

There are police everywhere. I don't know who called them, they make this funeral look like a crime zone. Mazwakhe is breathing fire, police have never been useful in this side of Mpofana. They always come when there is a dead person or if they're searching for unlicensed firearms. Call them when your house has been broken into and you will wait until the summer rain comes and wash down the fingerprints.

“Why are they here?” Khethile whispers to me. Just in case you're wondering who she is, I have five half-sisters, she is one of them. We are not close, here you only mingle with children from your mother's house. Other than that it's endless competition of who is better than who.

“I have no idea,” I say shrugging my shoulders.

They start another song and then the priest reads the Bible. They finally wrap the service. Mamncane is the one crying more than other wives. Now she'll sleep alone like other wives. I bet it's the thought of abstaining breaking her heart more than anything.

“Here is some water Nana, it'll be hot in the cemetery,” Mamkhulu says passing a bottle of water to me.

This is so nice of her. Even her own kids don't have water in their hands. Funeral covers cannot cater for black funerals. There are only 25 chairs and almost 100 people. Water isn't enough for everyone, I just pray that food will be enough. People talk here, they gossip about you even when you are dead, laughing about the shortage of food at your funeral.

I thank her with a fake smile and keep the bottle under my arm. Mazwakhe warned me about them and seemingly he was right. They're suddenly too nice.

Four guys wearing mustard suits, that are

undoubtedly expensive, join us in the cemetery. They have sunglasses on and white face-cloths they keep wiping their expensive suits with.

“Leli qhawe ebesihamba nalo

Liwele la, liwele la

Liwele la, liwele la.” -He takes his sunglasses off and continues the song while clapping hands.

Mndeni Mthembu! You got to be kidding me.

This is another level of disrespect. Yes Mazwakhe disturbed their father's funeral as well, but this!

Mazwakhe is going to blow up. I find him with my eyes, he is trembling with anger. I push through people and stand behind him. His hand caresses his waist, he wants his gun. I know that he wouldn't care about the presence of the police and they are here to keep an eye on incidents like this.

I put my hand on his arm, he turns his head and finds me begging him with my eyes. He takes a deep breath and pulls his shirt over the gun.

Seeing that he is calm I return back to my spot.

Mndeni has cut the song, he is now reading through his Bible as the priest announces the verse he's about to read.

My eyes meet Ngcwethi. For a second his eyes run away from me, but I stare until he has nowhere else to look. He doesn't look excited as others. But he is still here, dressed for red carpet, and it angers me.

If there were no police around this burial wouldn't have carried on. Now I'm grateful that they're here.

The coffin goes down, umhlabathi emhlabathini. Mndeni takes a packet of peanuts from his pocket and tears it open. He pours some on Mnotho's hand, Busikhaya reaches out and takes some as well. When he gets to Ngcwethi he just stares at him and doesn't take them. Well, they enjoy their peanuts while we say goodbye to our father.

Everyone is talking about the Mthembus disrespect in the river as we wash away isinyama.

The phone rings, my heart skips a beat, I step away from the crowd to answer.

“Zano,” -His voice is kept very low.

I assume his brothers are nearby.

“Yes.”

“Be over the bridge in an hour.”

An hour? Didn't he says I'll leave a day after the funeral.

“What's the rush?” I ask.

“I don't think it'll be safe for too long.”

Oh great! I will bury my father like a stranger now.

“Yeah and that's because you provoked my brother,” I snap.

He doesn't say anything. I take a deep sigh and drop the call before my nosy relatives start asking questions.

First thing I do when we get home is to look for my brother. I need to tell him that I'm leaving, but he is nowhere in sight.

“Mamkhulu have you seen Mazwakhe?” I ask.

“He put Zwelibanzi in charge and rushed somewhere.”

Why is this not sitting well with me? Mazwakhe has no reason to rush anywhere soon after the funeral, unless if he is planning something.

I get in his house and feast on the biscuits and leave him a handwritten note. I take my bag and leave without anyone noticing.

By 4:30pm I'm waiting by the bridge. There is no sign of Ngcwethi and it's starting to worry me. What if he doesn't come? Where will I go?

The sun sets, still Ngcwethi isn't here. I think about going back home, but it's not safe there and I told Mazwakhe I'm going to a friend's place.

There is a car approaching slowly. My instincts tell me to remain behind the trees until I see it clearly.

Something just had to drop from the tree and make me scream. Well I'm scared of snakes and that what came to my mind.

The car stops and the driver rushes to where I am. He is slim, light in skin and dressed like those model C guys you see in the malls. Tight jean that stays below butt, expensive ugly top and fade cut.



“Sisi are you okay? What are you doing here at this time?” he bombs me with questions. I'm still trying to figure out how someone like him is in this place.

“I'm waiting for someone,” I say.

The fear that was in his eyes wears off. He looks at his wrist-watch, to confirm how late it is I guess.

“Are you not scared that the gun-fight might escalate to this side? This is not a safe area, I have no idea how my aunt lives here.” He rolls his eyes.

“There is a gun fight?” I ask.

“Yes, by that river...what is it called?” While he's trying to recall the river I'm thinking about my brother and Ngcwethi. They are there, God knows if they are still alive.

“I just go back home,” he says.

“I have no where to go.” Words escape my mouth as tears run down my cheeks.

“You are a street..street-adult?”

You know what, fuck him!

“Never mind,” I say and start walking. I’m heading to my uncle’s house, I know he won’t slam the door on my face.

“Let me give you a lift,” he yells after me.

The car runs after me. He rolls down the window and begs me to get in the car.

“I don’t take lifts from strangers,” I say.

“I’m Julani Khumalo. Call me Julia or JJ, not stranger.”

He definitely doesn’t know what stranger means. Telling me his name doesn’t make him less of a stranger. I don’t know him and that’s it.

“Do you know Mandisa Khumalo?” he asks.

I stop and look at him. I do know Mandisa, the next gossip queen of Mpofana on the line.

“I’m her cousin, I won’t do anything to you,” he says.

Well that’s a relief. I put my guards down and get in the car. He rolls his eyes before driving. This is a bit strange for a guy.

I direct him to my uncle's house, indeed he drops me off and doesn't bother me with anything.

I'm not looking forward the interrogation from my aunt.

My mind is with Mazwakhe and Ngcwethi. I pray that nobody gets hurt.

[11/19, 09:41] : Chapter 5

Four brothers rest inside their late father's office. They're tired, coming from a wasted gun-fight that lasted for almost two hours. They undermined Mazwakhe, with all the resources they have they assumed that getting him would be easy. Yet they haven't figured out where he hides himself, he always shows up to attack and disappears unharmed.

Busikhaya keeps rotating on his father's chair, anger is evident on his face, he hasn't put the gun away.

“You're giving me headache,” Mndeni tells him. He

is sitting on the floor, leaning on the bookcase with his knees up. Mnotho is standing next to him. He is on his phone cancelling a flight to Sheffield. It was their father's will for him to graduate and live a different life. Nothing close to farming or running shops. He wanted his youngest son to be something, a doctor or engineer, anything to put the Mthembu name on the map. And that was the agreement between Mnotho and him before he passed on. But now things have changed, Mnotho realises that leaving the country is not an option when his brothers are at war to keep the family legacy alive.

“Give me the phone,” Busikhaya requests.

Mndeni passes him the phone and he makes a call. He wants war, not the hide and seek game that Mazwakhe keeps playing.

When the phone is answered from the other side he gets off the chair with a pleased look on his face.

“Ngwane you won't finish what you started.”

His brothers realise that he's talking to Mazwakhe

and they keep their ears sharpened. Well except for Ngcwethi, he is only inside that office physically. His mind is on Zanamuhla. He didn't get the chance to go pick her up and drive her to Mission. Something is not settling well with his soul. He keeps having flashbacks of a white car, but sees no further than that. His heart is at no rest.

“Ufunanj wena ms unu wenja?” -Mazwakhe on the other side. He is walking to his uncle's house to check if everything is okay. His uncle left the village with his wife after receiving threats from the Mthembus when they came looking for Zanamuhla. He has taken it upon himself to check on their house and goats, just to put his uncle at ease.

“Okanyoko obhejwa uyihlo ezulwini,” Busikhaya responds.

Mndeni breaks into laughter. Mnotho's mouth is agape, he is still 23 years old for goodness' sake.

“So you called to menstruate with your mouth?” Mazwakhe asks. The mention of his parents has him trembling with rage. He is torn between

proceeding to his uncle's and turning back to the Mthembus to end them.

“I'm giving you a message, or should I say a warning?” Busikhaya walks around the table and leans by the corner of it. “When there's nowhere else to run I'm gonna get you boy and you'll regret the day your father got a boner for your mother.”

The second mention of his parents makes Mazwakhe turn back speedily. Anyway it's not that hard to unleash his ruthless side.

“Send your location. No weapons. Just you and me, man to man.” -Mazwakhe.

Busikhaya cracks a smile. This is what he wanted. He tells him that they'll meet by the river and then takes his jacket off revealing his arms that are half-buried in ink. Their beef goes way back, before his father started a farm. It began as just a boys' quarrel but it has turned into infinite grudges.

“What's going on?” Ngcwethi is suddenly paying attention. He already looks uncomfortable about whatever is about to happen.

“This coward wants a physical fight.” Busikhaya is taking out his wrist-watch, clearly pleased by the whole setting.

“Well I don't trust him,” -Mndeni opening the drawer and taking out the guns. “Ngcwethi give him isihlungu,” he says.

Ngcwethi's eyes widen. If he gives Busikhaya isihlungu anything can happen to Mazwakhe. They know how dangerous that powder is, hence he doesn't gives it to anyone randomly.

“No.”

They all frown.

“No?” -Busikhaya.

Ngcwethi sighs.

“I can't give it to you. You have to fight fairly, this thing can hurt him or even worse kill him.” He realises how ridiculous he might sound, he has no business caring about what happens to Mazwakhe or whatsoever.

They all want him dead, aren't they?

“Remember what happened when Mnotho took isihlungu?” he asks and they just keep quiet.

“The poor boy got blind. This thing is dangerous!” He sounds even more ridiculous and he realises it. But he cannot tell them that he doesn't want anything to happen to Mazwakhe because his sister is the love of his life.

“Who cares? The world would be a better place with a blind Mazwakhe,” Mnotho says.

Mndeni nods his head in agreement.

“And he can apply for disability grant. It'll help him take care of his sister, maybe even take her to the salon.”

Something flips in Ngcwethi. He turns to Mndeni and grabs him by his collar. All his face muscles tense, he is seething with anger.

“Do not bring her into this!” His lips are trembling as he says this. Mndeni is confused and fighting to break free from the grip. When Ngcwethi's senses crawl back he releases him and steps back.



It's too late for him to counterpoise the situation, Busikhaya is staring at him with a look they all understand. Shit is still going to get real but now he needs them to focus.

“Mndeni let him be, I don't need a stupid powder to defeat that idiot,” he says and walks out.

Mnotho follows, but Mndeni remains inside with Ngcwethi. They stare at each other. Nobody knows Ngcwethi better than Mndeni. They're only two years apart, people used to call them twins when they were growing up. Mndeni was always following Ngcwethi behind. He would carry him on his back on their way to school. Things started to change when Ngcwethi started being weird, he was around 12 and he would see things that nobody saw. Nevertheless the bond they shared never seems to fade.

“Is it her?” Mndeni asks.

Ngcwethi doesn't say anything. His face is just full of remorse and pain. If only there was something he could do!

“You helped her escape, right?” Mndeni asks what he has never imagined, not even for once. His brother has fallen in love with an enemy. It was there in his eyes when he grabbed him and he knows that their lives are about to change.

Ngcwethi can only love one woman. He has prayed that he'd meet that special woman soon, but he had no idea that his brother would find her in the most hopeless place.

“I did. It was the right thing to do,” -Ngcwethi.

Mndeni brushes his face and breathes out loud.

“Fuck Ngcwethi, fuck!” He is engulfed in frustration.

Why would the universe choose Mazwakhe's sister for his brother? Out of all girls. Oh yes, there's nothing they can do about it. But only him and Ngcwethi know this. The day he felt incomplete without her was the day she became a part of him.

“Life just got great!” Mndeni drags himself to the door. The excitement he had about the fight is all gone.

“There is something else,” – Ngcwethi behind.

Mndeni stops and looks at him hopelessly.

“What?”

“I keep having flashbacks of a white car and I can't reach her on the phone.”

“Oh hell no! This one is beyond me.” Mndeni sighs in defeat.

When they walk out Busikhaya and Mnotho are nowhere in sight. They follow the road that leads down to the river where the fight is going to take place.

Well Mazwakhe brought his brothers as well. When he crosses the river to meet his rival they follow behind and stands a few feet away.

Mndeni keeps throwing shades from the other side, he is standing behind Busikhaya, as well as the other brothers.

“I see you finally grew a pair of balls,” Busikhaya directs to Mazwakhe.

He just chuckles and walks closer. For a minute they just exchange hatred with their eyes.

Busikhaya is a bit taller but they're both of the same age.

Busikhaya knocks the first punch. It lands on Mazwakhe's left chin. He squints his eyes and his chest starts moving visibly under the T-shirt.

Another punch!

He looks at the side and collects his breath. Then he turns with an elbow and strikes against Busikhaya's neck. The fist that follows sends Busikhaya to the ground. The side of his neck gets swollen within seconds.

Ngcwethi is the first one to jump to the scene. The Ngwanes rush to ensure that he doesn't interfere.

“It was supposed to be a fair fight,” Ngcwethi says glaring at Mazwakhe. A part of him is guilty, if he gave his brother isihlungu none of this would've happened.

“What do you know about fairness?” Mazwakhe grabs him by clothes and pulls him to his face. “Or you want to stand in for your brother?”

Ngcwethi sighs.

“Let me go,” he says calmly.

Let him go? After everything they've done to his family! They all deserve bullets between their eyes, but today he just wants to show them that they don't scare him in any form. He aims for Ngcwethi's jaw, but Ngcwethi blocks him and locks his fist in his hand.

“The beast in me is sleeping, not dead. And I don't like people's hands on my face so watch It.” He is still calm but the look on his face has changed. He brushes his left shoulder and turns to his brother.

Mazwakhe doesn't waste time, he strikes again. This time Ngcwethi cannot control a sudden rush of blood that goes into his head. He punches Mazwakhe repeatedly until his blood covers his knuckles.

“GIVE ME MY GUN!” Mazwakhe runs to his brothers with blood dropping from his mouth.

Mndeni takes out his weapons as well.

Another gunfight?

Busikhaya is in no condition to fight, but he drags himself up and grabs his gun from Mndeni.

“We can finish this some other day. Both of you agreed to a fist fight, now stop being poets.”

Ngcwethi stands in the middle of both groups.

Mazwakhe unbelievably listens and steps back.

“They must go home before funeral salads dry up,” Mndeni adds. This infuriates Mazwakhe but he is held back by one of his brothers.

They part ways.

Ngcwethi takes out incweba around his neck and squeeze some black powder out of it and gives Busikhaya to swallow.

“Now you care?” Busikhaya asks but swallows it anyway. They have unfinished business but it can wait. He needs to teach Mazwakhe a lesson he'll never forget even in his grave.

“I didn't think he'd come like that,” Ngcwethi says swallowed in guilt. He's guilty of not giving his

brother is ihlungu and costing him a fight. And he's guilty of what happened at the river. Yes he did tell Zanamuhla that he'll only defend himself against her brother, but the way she loves his brother, she'd be hurt to find out that Ngcwethi beat him up.

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ZANAMUHLA

It's going to sound irresponsible, but I ended up in Jula's place. I was welcomed by locked doors at my uncle's house and I had no where else to go. I couldn't go back to Mpofana in the middle of gunfight. Jula was still smoking inside his car and saw me stranded and offered to help.

Today he'll be helping me look for a shack to rent. The R900 my brother gave me won't last me but it can provide me with shelter for a few days.

“Zanamuhla,”

I turn my head to where the voice came from. An

old man dressed up in shiny tuxedo walks towards me. Yes he called me by name and I'm still trying to recall if we've ever met before.

“You're indeed beautiful.” That's him again, acting casual as if we are new buddies.

“Not to be rude, but who are you?” I ask.

He smiles and takes his hat off. He has grey hair. He must be J ula's grandfather or something.

“Call me Daddy,” he says.

I just need to breathe in and out, collect myself and not disrespect J ula's walking ancestor.

Oh here he comes.

“Daddy,” -J ula.

Oh silly me, it's his father.

‘The father’ spans J ula's butt and does something to his front with the other hand. I swear my eyes are going to pop out.

“You brought a sister-wife?” -the man.

J ula looks at me and sighs.



“We need some cash, she has nowhere to go.”

Yes I have nowhere to go, but ‘WE’ need some cash???

“Why can't you both crash in here together?” He stares in J ula's eyes and then smiles. “J ealousy does not suit you and I always tell you this. You are my first, aren't you?”

That seems to relieve J ula.

“Okay fineee, but I still need some cash.” -Him.

The man takes out his wallet and gives him a bank card. They share a brief kiss...an intimate one. Me being a slow learner I'm still trying to put pieces together.

“Come,” J ula grabs my hand and leads me to the kitchen. I don't know where the old man dis appears to.

“Who is that?” I ask.

He checks behind us and then leans over me.

“Someone who can take care of you. You see the car I was driving? My clothes? This house?” He

points around with a proud look on his face. "It's all him," he says.

Oh Dear Lord! The man is a blesser and J ula is GAY.

"What did he mean by saying I'm your sisterwife?" I ask.

"He meant that he can take care of you as well."

I raise my eyebrows. He needs to explain himself. I've never asked anyone to take care of me.

"You don't need to rent a shack, we can both live here and just please Daddy."

"I just buried my father J ula!"

Is this a joke? I've never even called my own father Daddy to begin with.

He sighs.

"This is not a village Zanamuhla, you are in the city and you're safe here. Life doesn't need to be hard, we give this man what he wants and he gives us the life we deserve."

I've heard about the twisted life of the city but I

didn't imagine anything close to this. Now I'm supposed to share an old man with a guy in order to survive? No I'm better off dodging bullets in Mpofana.

“Can you take me to the rank?” I ask.

His eyes widen.

“For what?”

“I want to leave.”

He bursts into laughter.

“And you think Daddy will just let you go? Aybo girl you slept in his house, ate his food and showered with his water. There is nothing for free here, no girl!”

My heart starts beating like a drum. What have I gotten myself into? I need my phone...

“Did you charge my phone?” I ask.

“No you'll use a new one,” he says.

“Am I kidnapped here? You said you'll not do any harm to me. I trusted you J ulani!”

“You will thank me one day.”

Thank him my foot!

“What are you doing?” He fights my hands off his neck. I knock him with a knee and pin him against the cupboards.

“Give me my phone,” I say.

“Zanamuhla stop.”

I pick a knife from the sink and place it against his neck. I've never used a knife before, I'm just scaring him.

“DADDY!” He yells and pushes me off. I run after him and catch him before he makes it to the door.

But the old man rushes in and pulls me away. He takes me to one of the bedrooms and locks me inside. I scream until I can scream no more.

Jula came in and gave me a drink. My throat was too dry I gulped it down at one go. My eyelids grew heavy as soon as I finished it. I started seeing double of everything and I passed out. I don't know

what he put inside the drink, I have a mother of all headaches when I wake up. My eyes are too heavy I can't even open them. But I realise that I'm in a moving vehicle.

“Please,” I manage to spit the word out. I don't know where they're taking me or what I did to deserve this, but I'll beg if I need to. They'll be my God and I'll pray to them.

“J ula I'll do anything you want, please stop him.” My eyes are still closed. A hand holds me and I inhale a familiar cologne.

“You're safe now,” -the voice is wounded but it's still the same scratchy one that I've longed to hear. I'm convinced that it's the spiked drink playing tricks on me until I open my eyes.

It's him sitting with me at the back.

Mndeni is driving and focused on the road.

“Ngcwethi?” A river of tears cover my face. I had no way out, I really thought it was over.

“Please rest,” he says.

“I can't...my head is pounding.”

Mndeni glances at us through the rear-view mirror. He's not himself otherwise he would've said something by now.

“Is there any doctor you know around here?”

Ngcwethi directs to him.

“I didn't even know we had a house in Mission, how will I know fuckin' doctors?” – Mndeni.

I hear him sigh heavily. He places his hand over my head, to check my temperature I guess, and exhales when he feels how hot I am.

He takes one of his weird bangles out and brings it close to my nose. I'm disgusted by the smell, I don't know whether it was made out of a dead rat or fish.

I shake my head and signal for him to stop the car. He doesn't get it. I try to hold in but it shoots right out of my mouth and goes onto his chest.

The car swerves to the right and skids to a halt. I'm enveloped in embarrassment looking at Ngcwethi's

T-shirt that is soaked in vomit. I don't think he knows what to do. Mndeni passes a towel to him.

“Have some fresh air,” he tells me.

I open the door and stand by the car. Mndeni climbs out as well. He mills around, still too quiet for my understanding.

After a while Ngcwethi leans out the door and tells me to get inside the car. He has taken off his T-shirt. I'm astounded by the number of colourful yarns worn across his chest. He is not normal, and that I've always suspected, but I thought he was just a bit of an oddity.

He has cleaned the seats and that makes me feel guilty.

“How are you feeling?” he asks.

Embarrassed, guilty, anxious and... Oh Lord I had a headache, right? Well it's gone.

“I'm okay.” Well I'm hungry but he is not Mazwakhe, I cannot inconvenience him with my 100 problems.

Mndeni gets inside the car and turns on the aircons.

All the front windows are rolled down, to weary the vomit smell I guess. Ngcwethi is freezing next to me, you know him and cold don't mix. But he's not saying anything to Mndeni, maybe he feels like he contributed to the mishap.

I pull my bag under the seat. I don't know how they got it either. I open it and take out my cardigan and gives it to him.

He frowns.

It doesn't annoy me today, I tell him to put it on.

“It won't fit me.” He chuckles and lift it up and checks the label.

“I bought it from J ET, it has no name.”

He frowns again.

“It's not a brand of any sort,” I clarify.

“But it has a size, and that's what I'm checking.”

Oh, my forward left brain thought he was looking for the brand name. I should look for something a bit larger, maybe my T-shirt.



“Try this one,” I say.

He tries it on. It's small but he can survive a few hours in it. I bought it last year driven by the Mzansi pressure. It's one of those white ones written: SEBENZA GIRL.

Being back in Mission feels like home. I haven't asked Ngcwethi how they found me. I'm just grateful that nothing happened.

I hear the car leaving, Ngcwethi walks in and closes the door. How is he going back to Mpofana if Mndeni is leaving with the car? I hope he's not in trouble, Mndeni didn't look pleased by my presence.

“I'm going to take a quick shower.” He disappears in one of the rooms and walks out after a while carrying some clothes. I hear the shower running and contemplate on what to do.

Make food? Cry and question God? Or just sit here and wait for my turn to freshen up.

He returns from the shower and joins me in the

living room. I have a lot of questions regarding my dilemma and who he is. But I will ask when the time is right.

“Is my brother still alive?” I ask.

He clears his throat. In my head I know him well and this is strange of him.

“Yes.” He nods his head, but his tone doesn't give me the assurance that I need.

“How did you find me?”

“I tracked down the white car, someone knew who drove it and led us to that...that Japanese macaque.”

“I was in Japan?” I sound very stupid. There's no way I was in Japan, I didn't even leave the country to begin with.

“No,” he says and I know that he's not going to explain.

I go to the bathroom and take a shower. I wonder if he's going to sleep here. I have not wanted him to leave but now that there's a possibility of him not

leaving my insides are getting cold.

Oh he went out and bought food takeaways.

“I hope you eat...” Something strikes his mind before he finishes the sentence and he curses.

“Is everything okay?” -Me.

“I bought beef.”

This is not happening when I'm so hungry!

“Don't worry I will change it.” He picks it up and heads to the door.

This sounds so familiar.

“You also assumed that I don't eat beef?” I ask before he exits the door.

“I know a lot of things Zanamuhla and you're a part of my life now,” he says and closes the door behind.

I'm a part of his life? Fine I get how he came up with that, but the part of assuming unerring things about me confuses the hell out of me.

He comes back with chicken curry. I waste no time and dig in. He is eating but I can tell that his

attention is not on the food.

“It used to make me sick as well,” he says. I guess he's referring to the beef.

“Me too, but the allergy waned when I was 15 or 16.”

“16.” He jumps in.

Oh??? I raise my eyebrow.

“I accepted my gift when I was 20, that was eight years ago and you must've been 16.” I think it's supposed to be some of explanation, except that it causes more confusion than the first statement.

“Where is the gift?” I ask.

He frowns, and then bursts into laughter. I cannot get used to his laugh.

“Didn't you say you got a gift when you.....” Oh fuck Zanamuhla. What level of doltishness is this! He doesn't mean a wrapped gift or anything like that.

“You are a sangoma?” I ask.

“No.”

“What are you?”

“A connected individual..Do you drink Coke? They only had it in stock.”

Really now? From connected individual to Coke!

I have more questions but I can see that he's not willing to take it any further. He pours the drink without waiting for my response.

“Thank you,” I say.

“You're welcome.” He thinks that I'm referring to the drink and food.

“I mean for everything you've done for me. I don't know how I'll ever thank you,” I say.

“It's my duty and pleasure.” He sips his drink. He's starting to be normal and comfortable around me.

“So where are you going to sleep?” I ask.

He nearly chokes to death. One of the reasons why I respect Coke, once it chokes you breathe acid with your nose.

“Are you kicking me out?” he asks.

“No, curiosity is just getting better of me.”

“I will sleep on bed with you,” he says and it's my turn to choke. Am I ‘you’?

He's grinning like an idiot.

[11/19, 09:42] : Chapter 6

ZANAMUHLA

Okay now I want to sleep, my eyes are aching from watching this boring movie. He is watching but I doubt he is enjoying it either. I'm still not sure about the sleeping arrangements, that other bedroom is a mess, which makes what he said almost 98% believable.

But I can't imagine it. Me and him on the same bed? The thought alone makes my heart race. I've only shared a bed with a guy twice, and it was horrible. Not because I didn't want to, it just wasn't what I thought it would be. It was nothing close to what we see on porn videos, I expected something mind-blowing. I gave it another try, and well that was it.

Jeez Zanamuhla! He didn't even say that he wants us to go to those lengths. He doesn't have those kind of feelings. What is wrong with me? Since when did I....

He looks at me and raises an eyebrow.

I hope he didn't hear my thoughts, you'd never know with him.

“What?” I ask nervously.

“Nothing.” There is a bit of a smile. Today he looks different, a bit comfortable with a touch of normalcy. The few-seconds smiles and random laughs.

“Go sleep,” he says.

I yawn and get off the couch like I was waiting for his permission. Is he going to follow me? I want to ask but that would be weird. I'll just sleep on one side and leave a pillow for him.

Usually I sleep wearing only underwear, but today I put on my long pant and loose T-shirt. Don't ask me why I don't have pyjamas, they're not a thing where I come from, we sleep with umswenko.

I keep the light on. I don't want to fall asleep just yet, I want to see if he comes to share the bed with me. I want to ensure that he uses a separate blanket and sleeps at least 10cm away from me.

Gosh, what if he wants me to repay him sexually? Men do that all the time. I wonder if his girlfriend, if he has any, knows that he is here.

“Zanamuhla,” – The voice comes from the door. I swear my heart stopped beating for a second. I move the blanket and peek out.

He is standing with his hand on the door handle. He has his serious look back on, the one I once considered as cruel. This time it has me running out of breath. He doesn't fit in magazine-cover kind of look like Mndeni. He looks much like Busikhaya. The African version of men at its purest.

“Ulale kahle.” He reaches up to the light switch and pushes it down. I hear the door closing and feel his absence. I get mixed feelings, a part of me is relieved but there's that worried one.



I'm a morning girl, not that I have a choice, it's an African girly thing to do; wake up early in the morning and your chances of getting married are good.

What do I make for breakfast? I mean for someone who doesn't eat bread. What does he eat in the mornings?

I decide to cook porridge, it's the only breakfast I know other than bread and vetkoeks.

I'm not sure what he eats it with so I just put milk along with margarine and honey. He deserves some special treatment after everything he has done for me. I take it to the bedroom I assume he slept in.

“Can I come in?” I can't knock my hands are occupied.

The door opens.

He frowns when he sees a bowl of porridge.

“Breakfast in bed,” I explain.

He sits on bed. I don't think it has clicked in his mind yet, he just doesn't know what's going on.

“I brought all these so that you can decide on your own. I don't know you pretty well,” I say.

“Am I supposed to eat now?”- Him.

I don't know how to answer his question. Yes he's supposed to eat now, it's breakfast in bed for a reason and nobody eats cold porridge.

“Sorry, I'm just...” He scratches his head, probably thinking of the best way to reject it without offending me. “I had a bad dream, I need to puke and take a bath before I eat anything.”

This is the first time I'm trying to be nice to him and this is the disappointment I get.

“But thank you,” he says.

I fake a smile and leave. I regret the minute I put my thought into this bad idea.

I leave his porridge on the kitchen counter and go back to my bedroom with my plate of food. I wonder how long I'm going to be here. I miss living a normal life, with my brother. I miss going to bed without worrying about his life. I don't know if he woke up

today. Nothing is guaranteed.

I'm sitting on bed counting my problems when his presence drowns me in breathlessness. I don't want to look at him, I keep my eyes fixed on the window.

He stands in front of me and blocks my view. I look up and meet his soul-digging stare.

I'm angry for some reasons and he is one of them, but I don't know what he did exactly.

"I didn't mean to disappoint you," he says and I take a huge breath. He is standing too close and I can't breathe properly.

"Zanamuhla,"

Something about the way he calls me makes my inside freezes. He hasn't taken his eyes off me. His hand comes to the back of my neck, not too strong but firm enough to keep my head up.

"You have a question and I want to answer it honestly today," he says.

I know that question. He has dodged it, sometimes given irrelevant answers. But do I want to ask it now?

“Please ask me again,” he says.

I guess I have no choice, he is persistent.

“Why are you helping me?” I ask.

His eyes are too soft. They're never like this. The answer he is about to give makes my palms sweat.

“Because I've fallen in love with you.” He exhales a deep breath and I see his chest moving rhythmically.

“More than anything. It scares me because I don't know how you feel about it me but I'd catch a grenade for you.”

Yes he would, I have no doubts about that.

“What must I say?” Honestly I have no idea, even though my heart knew what he was going to say, I'm still in shock.

“Don't say anything. Just allow me to....” He closes the space between us and pulls my head to meet his halfway. I don't think I'm still breathing. “To taste the coffee from you,” he adds and locks his lips on me. He places his other knee on top of bed, my head lies on the V of his arm while the other arm

supports my waist. He wants to taste every bit of me, slowly and passionately. He doesn't unlock the eye contact, our worlds connect in this special moment.

He stops, goes up to my forehead and plants a kiss. It completes everything. The parts of me I didn't know were missing reconcile. I look at him like it's the first time I'm setting my eyes on him and I just know that my life will never be the same.

“Do they know?” I ask.

“Mndeni knows.” He doesn't go further so I guess the other two don't know. No matter which angle I look at this from, Busikhaya would never accept me and Mazwakhe would die before he allows a Mthembu to date his sister.

“It won't work, you know that right?” -Me.

“I'm not going to stop loving you Zano.” He holds my hand and the gesture alone makes everything feel okay. “Comes hell, high water or both of them, I will love and protect you like you're the socket of my eye.”

I'm trying not to tear up. What has my heart gotten me into? God knows I put him in my prayers along with my brother. Why a Mthembu out of all people!

We sit in the living room watching soccer. No, he is watching soccer and I'm just sitting in front of the TV. He hasn't said anything about going home, I don't want to spoil things by asking either. But I don't think it's wise for him to be here, they run businesses and have to protect each other just in case something happens.

"I can record and watch it later," – Him.

For a moment I have no idea what he is talking about. He reaches for the remote and I get it.

"No it's fine, I don't care about TV," I say.

"Really, why?" he asks.

I shrug my shoulders. Some things just don't need reasons.

"How do you keep up with what's happening around the world?" The interest grows in his eyes.

“I don't,” -Me.

He looks surprised.

“You are weird.”

I roll my eyes. He is the last person in the world to talk about weird people.

“Jesus!” He is still looking at me like I'm some sort of alien and it's starting to irritate me. I take a cushion and throw it at him. He catches it. I feel cheated on, he was supposed to let it hit him.

“WeZanamahla.” His tone is playful and it reminds me of my father. In his few days of fatherhood he'd call me like that. The only difference is the voice, my father had a deep voice like Mazwakhe, and he didn't come to my face to say something.

“Indoda ayishawa uyezwa?” He is trying to sound serious, but his eyes are displaying something else, and he is stroking my hair while at it.

“Really? I didn't know.” My voice is getting softer. I'm getting lost in his eyes and loving the way he smells.

“Now you know. If I make you angry in any way lock me outside in the cold or don't give me food. That's what my mother did, it's called punishment. But when you hit me you're not just doing it to me, the elders get angry as well.”

This is unexpectedly getting deeper than I thought.

“It was just a pillow,” I say.

“This is not about it. It's about us. The do's and don't's going forward.”

My eyes widen. He is getting carried away. Just because we are here together after a kiss it doesn't mean that I said we can be in a relationship.

“I didn't say I love you,” -Me.

“And that's because you are still collecting points for making me wait.”

WTF! I hate him...I mean he is irritating.

“I hope they help you in the long run, like shopping with a smart card, you earn points and claim later.” He has his Mndeni side. This makes me feel like a dumb 1985 virgin but I'm not confessing my



feelings so soon. I will lose points.

“Go outside!” I say.

“Why?”

Gosh, the smirk on his face!

“Because you're making me angry,” I say.

He laughs really hard and I find myself joining in. It's hard to even think I once hated him and promised to pray for his life to be miserable.

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## THE MTHEMBU HOMESTEAD

Busikhaya is puffing a smoke and watching a Madza CX-5 that belongs to his brother drives in. Ngcwethi hasn't been home for three days. He skipped his shift and Mndeni had to cover for him. None of them has ever left with no word, especially during working days.

There's so much work to do, their father is gone

now, they need to hold each other's hands and keep the legacy growing. On top of that they have enemies. They should be protecting one another and standing together.

“Qophelo,” he calls his son and he comes out of the house running.

“Baba,” -He stands in front of him and looks at him. They are grown. His daughter Sangelihle will be turning 7 in two months and Qophelo is almost 12 years. It's been hard without Nombuso but he knows that she is watching over them and has been giving him strength for the past 7 years.

“Call Ngcwethi, tell him to see me immediately.” - Busikhaya.

His little duplicate runs down to Ngcwethi's three-room house that consists of one bedroom, living room and his privacy room.

He knocks at the door and Ngcwethi permits him to come inside.

“Sawubona baba,” -He looks like his father but he's everything that Busikhaya is not. Qophelo respects

everything that is living. He is a prefect in his class and has been receiving awards for the highest achiever and neatness from the first grade. He took after Nombuso, his mother. She died two weeks away from her graduation while delivering her little duplicate, Sangelihle. That one looks exactly like her mother but Busikhaya dominates in her. Everyone is living under her mercy. She is the only person in the world who can make Busikhaya kiss her feet.

“Jama, are you not supposed to be in school?” Ngcwethi asks, referring to him by the clan-name as usual.

“It's a holiday Baba.”- He chuckles at his uncle's cluelessness.

Ngcwethi was trying to get some rest but he realises that the sooner he deals with Busikhaya the better. He changes his clothes and follows after Qophelo.

It doesn't take much to tell that Busikhaya is breathing fire. This goes back to isihlungu issue, they didn't resolve it and now he'll interrogate him

about his disappearance.

“Where have you been?” He goes straight to the point before Ngcwethi even sit.

“It was a personal visit,” -Ngcwethi.

“So you left without telling anyone?”

“I didn't need anyone's permission.”

Busikhaya stands up and comes to where Ngcwethi is sitting. He is shaking with anger.

“Who is supposed to work for you?” he asks.

“Bafo I know this isn't the problem, you're angry at me for isihlungu and I'm sorry that happened.”

Busikhaya chuckles and shakes his head. Ngcwethi is used to everyone listening to him without questioning. He is used in having his way because he is a ‘special child.’ Well, not anymore. They're all going to work as equals. Nobody's opinion is going to matter above everyone else's.

“The cattle need to be fetched,” he says.

Ngcwethi raises his eyebrow.

“Where are the boys?” He is referring to the herdboys, whose duty is to look after the cattle and make sure that it's home on time.

“They took an early day,” -Busikhaya.

“With whose permission?”

“Mine.”

Ngcwethi grasps where this is going and decides to obey.

“They need to be sprayed as well,” Busikhaya adds before Ngcwethi walks out.

“Anything else?” – Ngcwethi unbothered.

“You're working on deliveries this week, not in the office.” That doesn't seem to bother Ngcwethi a bit. He's never had a problem with working, from time to time he has joined the field workers and lifted a hoe. Managing the trucks and sorting deliveries isn't something he'd consider as a punishment.

“Watch out for your brother-in-law. We are not looking forward to another funeral,” he says and Ngcwethi stops. He looks scared, not by the

mention of Mazwakhe, but because his brother knows.

“Your dick, your rules. But please respect us and keep it there in your skomplazi. I don't even want a Ngwane puppy inside my father's premises,” - Busikhaya.

There is nothing he can say. Busikhaya is now their father's voice and Ngcwethi clearly understands where he comes from. But he's not going to let go of Zanamuhla and she will become his rightful woman.

The little boys see him gathering the cattle and offer to help. 16 cows and 5 calves are no child's play but he would've done it alone if needed to be. He gives them R20 after they helped him close the kraal.

Mndeni is waiting for him inside the house.

Ngcwethi has n't thanked him for covering up for him at work.

“She finally let you go?” He doesn't like what's happening but he cannot control the situation. And his brother is glowing for the first time, maybe

Zanamuhla isn't so bad after all.

“Take your feet off my table,” Ngcwethi says.

“Not after everything I've done for you khanda lakho.”

Ngcwethi chuckles and they shake hands. He is about to repay Mndeni with everything he has. He will always remind him of the favours he did and manipulates his way over.

“Busikhaya knows,” – Mndeni.

Ngcwethi sighs.

“Yeah and he doesn't want her.”

“So what's the plan?” -Mndeni.

Ngcwethi shrugs his shoulders. He has a future with Zanamuhla but he doesn't know how they'll get to it.

“Tell me, how is she? She looks kind of innocent and boring to me.” -Mndeni.

“I'm not sleeping with her bloody swine.” Ngcwethi kicks Mndeni's feet off the table. “She is not

comfortable around me yet, and besides we are not in a rush, we have a whole lifetime together.”

Mndeni yawns and grabs a can of beer and sips. Alcohol is not allowed inside Ngcwethi's house, but Mndeni is his Savior he can't say anything.

“3 days and nights, and you're telling me that you don't know how she feels like?” – Mndeni.

“I'm not you Mndeni and Zanamuhla is not a snack.” Something occurs in his mind and he smiles. “But you should've seen her face when I told her I'm going to share a bed with her the first night. It was priceless!”

“Oh Bawo! That confirms my suspicions. She doesn't know anything and boring when it comes to intimacy.”

Ngcwethi shoots a dead look at him. He is not supposed to think about Zano in that way. What's up with the motherfucker and sizing people's sexual skills?

“You are no expert either, otherwise your sharmouta wouldn't have left,” Ngcwethi says.



That doesn't sit well with Mndeni. You don't talk like that to someone who keeps saving your ass, Ngcwethi is ungrateful.

“Wait until you start your night episodes. She might leave you before you even tap the cookie jar.” He picks his can and walks out. Ngcwethi hisses angrily. Zanamuhla still has a lot to discover about him, the last thing he needs is someone to enfeeble him with negativity.

He takes out his phone and calls.

“I was about to drive there,” he says when Zanamuhla finally answers. He is just teasing her.

“I have things to do Ngcwethi, I don't wait on the phone to jump up when you call,” -Zanamuhla.

Ngcwethi smiles. He likes it when little things annoy her. He'd push all her buttons if he didn't have fears about their future.

“I'm sorry for not calling you as soon as I got home. I had a safe journey, but I have a lot of work to do,” he says.

Zanamuhla sighs out in relief, anger vanishes.

“Did they not interrogate about your whereabouts?”

Ngcwethi exhales. He wishes Zanamuhla would let go of these questions. Why focus on things you have no control over?

“No,” he says.

“That's not how you say your ‘no.’ You are lying Ngcwethi. What did they do?”

Not how he says -his no? He has a way of saying no? But he always talk the same way.

“Don't frown on me!” She yells.

Ngcwethi almost jumps. He pulls his face immediately and exhales.

“Busikhaya did interrogate me but it's nothing for you to worry about,” he says.

The door opens and Busikhaya enters. He doesn't look pleased. Now they're discussing his name!

“Get my name out of your mouth and that sharmouta of yours,” he says.

“Don't call her that!” Ngcwethi removes the phone from his ear and stands up to face his brother.

“Or what Ngcwethi? What are you going to do?”  
Busikhaya throws documents on his chest and they scatter all over the floor.

“Pick that up before it gets dirty. Mother has announced dinner.” He walks out, leaving Ngcwethi in high dudgeon.

Zanamuhla is still on the line. She heard everything and her heart has sunk. Ngcwethi is hiding the truth from her, things are not going well between him and his brothers, and it's all because of her.

Ngcwethi picks the papers from the floor and catches a glimpse of the forgotten ongoing call on the screen of his phone.

“Zano???” His heart skips a beat when he realises that she must've heard everything.

“You don't have to go through all that because of me,” -Zanamuhla.

“What do you mean? I love you and will face any

storm that comes my way. Please don't take what you...Zano...Zanamuhla?"

The call was long dropped.

He tries to call her a number of times but she is no longer answering. He feels the disconnection and his heart wrenches. The pain is sharper than anything he has ever felt before.

"Ngcwethi," -His mother's voice calls outside the door. He drags his empty self up and opens.

She walks in with a plate of food and puts it on top of the coffee-table.

"You don't eat my food now?" She looks better now. Mnotho always make sure that she takes her medication. He was supposed to be a girl, the doctor told her she was having a baby girl but a fourth boy followed. She was a bit disappointed as her wish was to have at least one daughter, but her tears were wiped by the birth of her granddaughter. And Mnotho is everything she thought having a daughter would be like. He is her pillar of strength.

"What's bothering you?" She hasn't seen much of

Ngcwethi lately and she can see through his eyes that something is not right.

“You know you can always take impepho and talk to your grandfathers.” She knows that her son doesn't easily open up to the living. He always turns to abadala for guidance.

“It's matters of the heart, I'm in love MaMbonambi” - Ngcwethi.

The corners of his mother's lips lift up into a smile. She has waited for this day with anticipation. It's a pity that Madoda won't be here to witness his sons finding their other halves. Busikhaya hasn't brought anyone home, he is focused on raising his children and growing the family business. From time to time she has received complaints about Mndeni messing with people's daughters. Mnotho is still young, he hasn't figured out much in life.

“Who is she?”- MaMbonambi.

The question gags Ngcwethi. He cannot tell her that he is in love with the sister of her husband's killer. It's too soon.

“You will know her when the time is right,” he says.

She chooses not to make her son more uncomfortable and let it go. But she asks him to return the plate to the kitchen without a single grain of rice.

Ngcwethi feels the disconnection between him and Zanamuhla. Not the wire communication, but their spirits drift apart and he has the incompleteness he had before her. A heavy burden sit on his shoulders. When his elders have no place in his heart and mind they settle on his shoulders until he clears space for them.

“Nooooooooooooooooo!” The scream fills up the yard and his brothers sprint out of the kitchen followed by their mother who has impepho on the lid.

They find him on his knees, groaning and shaking his shoulders like he's trying to get something off. They have witnessed this in the past, it just doesn't happen frequently and they can never get used to it.

Mndeni starts helping him by hitting his shoulders and that seems to calm him down a bit.

“Don't overthink, breathe.” – Mndeni. He takes the lid from his mother and lights impepho and brings it to Ngcwethi's face. “You have to clear your head and soul. Please bafo yehlis a umoya.”

Busikhaya stands in the shadow of regret. He is slammed by the realization of how truly his brother has fallen in love with a Ngwane girl. If something affects Ngcwethi spiritually it means real business.

[11/19, 09:43] : Chapter 7

Mazwakhe is stopped by a familiar girl. He looks at her carefully as she rushes towards him. He can't remember where he once saw her.

“I'm Mandisa,”- The girl.

He is still not sure which Mandisa it is.

“Can I help you?” The sun is scorching and today is not his day. He is patiently waiting for the sun to set and then he will remind the Mthembus that nobody is going to live a lavish life while they have no road.

“Was Zanamuhla found alive?” She stops in front of

him. Now that she has mentioned his sister he remembers her. She is a girl who used to visit Hlahla and they would do schoolwork together.

“Found alive?” He is confused.

“I hope Ngcwethi didn't kill my cousin. He might've just given her an innocent lift and ended up accommodating her.” She pulls her braids and sighs. “I really hope they didn't harm Julia. The way they broke inside the house with guns!”

Mazwakhe is silent for a moment.

“Are you talking about Hlahla?” None of this makes sense to him.

Mandisa looks a bit confused by the question. Why does Mazwakhe look so clueless? Zanamuhla must've told him about the incident.

“Yes. Ngcwethi claimed that my cousin had kidnapped her after your father's funeral. I don't know where Julia picked her up, but Ngcwethi came to me gun-blazing and demanded Julia's address. I haven't heard from any of them and Julia's phone has been off ever since.”



There is only one Ngcwethi in this area and he is Busikhaya's brother. Why did he look for Hlahla? None of this adds up.

Fear strikes his bones. He doesn't even know the friend Hlahla lives with. He is a bad brother, he has failed to look after Hlahla like promised. What if something bad happened to her? Why did he trust her so much to be on her own during this threatening times.

He takes his phone and try calling her. It goes straight to voicemail. He is trying not to panic but there's a possibility that the Mthembus got Hlahla again.

“Can you please give me your cousin’s address?”

The humble side of him is birthed. Mazwakhe doesn't say ‘please,’ especially to strangers.

Mandisa writes down Jula's address and gives him.

He thanks her, returns home and takes his father's old van.

The security has a lot of questions before they let

him in. A man with grey hair asks who he is before he even reaches the door. He is waiting for him on the door-step, taking frequent sips from the glass in his hand.

It's a modern double-storey house in the suburb of Limehill. The man is indisputable rich.

“I'm Jula's friend,” Mazwakhe says.

He lets him in and leads him to an open room with a fire place and big leather couch. He notices a slim human lying with a fleece blanket covering him.

“My love your friend is here to see you,” -The man says and leaves to give them space. He must be Jula's father, that's how they call their fancy kids, love.

Jula lifts his head up slowly and looks at the strange man who calls himself his friend. His left eye is still swollen, below it there is a stitch and no amount of make-up can bury the scars on his face. He HATES visitors.

“Who are you?” He is irritated.

“I’m the brother of a girl you lifted last week. Are you the ‘friend’ she lived with?”

“You’re here to finish me off? Didn’t her boyfriend punish me enough? I was only trying to help her for fuck’s sake!”

“Her boyfriend???” -Mazwakhe.

“The one driving a white Mazda CX-5.” Talking about this revives traumatic experiences of that day. Jula has been trying to focus on getting better and think less about it.

“His brother was hot though, I wouldn’t mind a make-up session with him.” He still fantasizes about Mndeni though. He is his type of man. Well, Daddy is a provider, not really his other half.

Mazwakhe is still clueless about his sexuality but it’s not something he’d want to dwell on.

“Ngcwethi has my sister?” The question is directed to his inner self but asked loudly, and Jula doesn’t hesitate to jump in with an answer.

“He nearly killed me for her. I guess he is the guy

she was waiting for by the bridge and didn't show up.”

Something fishy is happening. Mazwakhe knows that his sister is not seeing anyone, even if she was seeing someone it wouldn't be a Mthembu. As soon as things go back to normal he is going to do umemulo for her. She has taken care of herself excellently and he's proud of her.

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ZANAMUHLA

There is a knock at the door. I don't know how long I've sat here crying my eyes out. I can't be with Ngcwethi. I didn't know that I loved him this much. The days I spent with him were the best, nobody has ever made me feel special the way he did.

He's been calling non-stop and I couldn't answer. We are better off apart. I still need to figure out where I'll go tomorrow, being here will just remind

me of him and I don't think my heart can handle that.

I open the door, expecting to find him, but to my surprise Mndeni is the one on the step.

“Hi..hello,” I stutter and use my hands to wipe my face. It must be puffed up from all the crying. I can feel the heaviness on my eyelids, they're probably swollen.

“Zolwandle,” -He lets himself inside and leaves the door open. I've grown uncomfortable of opened doors. It makes me feel unsafe, but I don't say anything.

“Is everything okay?” I'm pretty sure that he doesn't like me or approve of the situation between me and his brother. He wouldn't be here if it wasn't important.

“Ummm....yes.” He is hesitant. He keeps glancing at the door like he's expecting someone.

I'm getting nervous.

What if they're planning something? I'm still an enemy to them.

“I brought him over,” he says and I follow his eyes to look at the “him” he's talking about.

Ngcwethi comes in and walks past us, he goes to MY bedroom. No word or eye-contact. He looks tired, physically and emotionally.

He is different, not in a good way.

“What happened?” I'm holding back tears.

Mndeni also looks worried but he's trying not to show it.

“He needs to rest. Just be by his side, please,” he says.

I don't ask further questions, I leave Mndeni right in the middle of the kitchen and follow Ngcwethi.

He is lying on bed with his eyes closed, but I can tell that he's not asleep. I walk closer and stand in front of him. Slowly he opens his eyes, they're bloody-red but not from crying.

The loud sigh fills up the room and I step backwards.

“Zano,” he calls.

I stop, not brave enough to go back to him.

“I love you,” he says.

This destroys all my plans. I'm still not sure why Mndeni brought him here. Maybe they knew that I was planning to leave. Maybe Ngcwethi felt it.

“You're not supposed to say that. I'm not the one for you, you know that,” I say.

He sits up...No, he is coming to me. I walk backwards until the wall blocks my reversed trip, then I have nowhere to go. He comes and stands in front of me, too for me to breathe properly. The sunken eyes are fixed on me.

“You are the one,” he says and the feelings I was trying to shut down have overwhelmed me again.

“At first I thought it was guilt that made me want to take care of you, but then you became all I ever think about. I started seeing life meaningless without you. I had this gap that only the thoughts of being with you filled.” He exhales and places his hand behind my neck. “Then they showed me everything I needed to know about you. A lot made

sense, it made you the piece of a puzzle that had been missing in my life.”

“They???” I ask confused.

“The elders. They approved, there can't be someone else for me, you are the one.”

Butterflies inside my tummy. How charming can one's ancestors be!

“What if I didn't love you?” I ask.

He smiles, even though it's a weak one but my heart warms up at the sight of it.

“You love me?” – Him.

Oh shucks!

“What? No, I didn't say that.” I push him aside and try to sneak my way out, but his arm blocks me again.

“You love me?” he asks again.

“No I don't.” I try to sound as convincing as I can be. But he's smiling like knows the scarcity of truth in that.



“Your spirit is telling me something else.”

I hate that he can read me spiritually, but even so, I'm not going to tell him what he wants to hear yet.

“I heard your brother. What is that thing he called me?” I ask.

His eyes run away from me. I just know it wasn't something pleasant. They have this thing of using strange terms.

“Does he know that you are here?” I ask.

“Yes.”

“And he is okay with it?”

“Not really, but he doesn't have a choice.”

“Why?” I ask and realise that I'm making him uncomfortable with these 21 questions.

“Because I love you.” His gaze is back on me and stuck at my lips. “Can I get a kiss before we go to sleep?”

He didn't really need an answer, he was just letting me know in a question form. His lips brush mine

like a tease. Then he starts being demanding, cupping my face and deepening the kiss. There are low moans he makes when he kisses and they make my knees weak.

He stops and stares at me oddly. It's a battle of glances until tears well up in his eyes. I don't want to see him to cry, whether in joy or pain. I pull him and initiate another kiss.

He is into me, wholeheartedly. I let go of the doubts and fears, and give him my all.

“Thank you.” He is barely whispering, it's almost inaudible given the nature of his voice.

“For what?” I ask.

“For trusting me again.”

I'm snuggled on his chest, feeling his breaths above my head is the best feeling ever. We don't discuss sleeping arrangements, I just know that we'll be sharing a bed.

“Separate blankets?” I untangle myself from his embrace and go to the wardrobe.

I get no answer and look back.

“Why are you quiet?”

“I don't want to sleep in a separate blanket.”

Jesus Christ! What am I supposed to do with a sulky adult?

“But we can't sleep together yet,” I say.

“Why not? I'm not going to smash the axe-wound.”

WTF!!!!

“Axe-wound???” I ask.

I swear he's sleeping on the floor or in that shambolic bedroom. I'm not going to share a bed with someone who refers to my cupcake that way. Axe-wo...Lord I'm going to die!

“I meant the vulvarine.” His eyes are out on stalks. He thinks vulvarine is a better term. Well, it's better than axe-wound.

“You're never going there anyway,” I say climbing on bed. I'm sleeping fully clothed as usual.

“Never?” He asks while taking his T-shirt off. He

takes off his yarns and bangles as well. It's such a relief, I don't think I would've been comfortable if he slept with them on.

“Yes never!” I say.

He laughs and walks out half-naked.

My phone rings, the one he gave it to me. Nobody ever calls it except him. It's not his number, for a moment I stare at the screen confused.

Well let me just pick up.

“Hello,” – The voice is so familiar.

But it can't be him. My heart is pounding, I didn't realise I'm scared of him this much.

“Is my brother there?” he asks.

Breathe Zanamuhla!

“Yes.” My voice is shaky. Why is he calling me? Ngcwethi said nobody would call this phone except him.

“Why are you with him?” – Him.

“I love him,” I say without any hesitation. I'm

surprised at myself. I wasn't confessing my feelings so soon, that's what I said mos.

There's some silence.

“If you love him as much as you claim then you'll do the right thing. Go home, tell your sisters that you are in love and they'll come here to manifest that.”

“Come where?” I ask.

“To your future in-laws, the Mthembus.”

He can't be serious! They'll disown me at home, and my brother will hate me.

“That hanky-panky you're doing over there is not how a future Mthembu empress carries herself,” he adds.

My tongue is tied. I keep the phone on my ear because I can't be rude and drop him.

“That's all, keep well.”

Call ended.

I haven't been able to sleep a wink. All I think about

is my phonecall with Busikhaya. I haven't told Ngcwethi about it, I don't even think I want him to know.

I feel something touching my boobs and almost scream. Fuck, I'm sleeping with a man.

“What's wrong Zano?” He sounds like someone who just woke up from deep sleep, but he's been turning and tossing for the past two hours.

“I just can't sleep,” I lie.

He moves closer. I can feel his manhood jammed firmly against my butt, his arms cradles me warmly.

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Busikhaya's phone has been ringing for a moment. As he steps out of the bathroom Qophelo hands it to him.

“Who is this so early in the morning?” He looks at the screen and sees that it's Mazwakhe calling.

He grins as wonders race his mind.

“Check if Sango is ready.” He tells Qophelo and he runs out to the main house to check his sister.

When the room clears he answers.

“What a bad way to start a day!”

“Busikhaya I want my sister,” -Mazwakhe.

He sounds frustrated. Busikhaya’s lips stretch into a smile.

“I don't remember you hiring me to look after your sister. Not that you could've afforded to.”

“I know that your brother has her. I'm humbly asking that you don't harm her and bring her back. She has nothing to do with this. She is innocent.”

Mazwakhe doesn't have any idea about the arrangements between Zanamuhla and Ngcwethi. He is under the impression that they've kidnapped her again. Julia must've got it all wrong, the boyfriend stuff, it can never be his sister.

Busikhaya pours a shot of whiskey and a dash of lime juice. This calls for a little celebration, even though it's too early for drinks.

“What makes you think I'd care?” he asks.

Mazwakhe is out of options. He's muscular, dangerous and could kill you with just a flick of his wrist. He is dark, not just in skin tone, but his character is even more darker. But he'd minimize himself to any size for his sister. He'd praise any fool for her life. She matters more than anything in his life.

“What do you want?” He's willing to do anything. Even letting go of the road issue, only if he can have his sister back.

“You can't wake my father up. Ungangibuzi amasimba!” Busikhaya says angrily.

“Neither can you wake my parents. Now you want to kill an innocent girl. Why are you not coming for me?”

“Having your sister is more interesting, ngingakwenzani wena namasende akuhlaza?”- Busikhaya.

That drives Mazwakhe crazy. He starts swearing and threatening that if Busikhaya touches his sister



he'll come for everything that's related to him, even the cats and dogs of his family.

“When you're a good boy you'll call me and arrange a proper meeting where you'll come and apologise.” Busikhaya drops the call. He likes the impression Mazwakhe has of the situation. Maybe Ngcwethi keeping the girl is not a bad thing after all, he'll use this to punish Mazwakhe. Now he knows his weakness.

Ngcwethi pitches up for work. He's still not himself. This time he's bothered by the state he left Zano in. She was not okay but it got nothing to do with him. It's a personal battle, and only Zanamuhla can help herself. Ngcwethi has been cracking his mind trying to figure out what it must be. Things were okay before he left the room, they kissed and he felt her spirit that had drifted away reconnecting with him. But when he came back she was different. She hardly slept at night.

“You don't look like someone who had an amazing

night,” -Busikhaya.

He's in a good mood today.

Ngcwethi says nothing, he takes the truck keys and leaves.

Mnotho arrives as Ngcwethi drives out. He looks at Busikhaya with a questioning eye.

“What happened to him?” he asks.

“He must've inherited the Ngwane attitude, he's sleeping with one of them.”

Mnotho takes a seat with a frown on his face.

“So this thing is serious?”

“Sadly yes, but we can use this opportunity to get that dog on his knees. He doesn't know that his sister is fucking an enemy. He thinks we kidnapped her and he's willing to do anything for us to release her.”

“Anything?” Mnotho's lips curve into a smile. Their day just brightened up.

“He'll sign an agreement, to let go of the road issue

and stay away from this family. A failure to obey that agreement will put him behind bars, for a long time.”

“But he killed father, that's not enough.” -Mnotho.

Busikhaya sighs. He'd like to take it further, to punish Mazwakhe severely, but he has kids to think of.

“We had our revenge Mnotho, and I don't want things to get messier. This has taken too much of our time, remember we have clients to deliver to and the community look up to us. Sooner or later we have to respect what Ndaba stood for, helping the community and leading by example.”

Mazwakhe calls again. His world has come crushing before him. He is at the mercy of the Mthembus.

“Busikhaya I'm outside your offices,” he says.

“Oh you're ready to talk like a good boy?”

“Yes,” Mazwakhe sighs heavily.

Busikhaya rise up from the chair with a pleased smile on his face. He informs everyone that their guest has arrived.

There are two police officers feasting on the roasted chicken Mndeni bought for them. Beside them sits Mr Mtambo, the Mthembu family lawyer, he has drafted the contract that binds Mazwakhe into an agreement.

Ngcwethi is not included. He's up and down managing trucks coming in and out of the farm. He didn't even take lunch-break, he's only looking forward to the end of the day so that he can go and see Zanamuhla. He didn't want to be pain in the arse, but he just can't leave her alone, especially when something is not okay.

“What's going on here?” -Mazwakhe looking at the police officers. One of them was in his father's funeral and that makes him hates the Mthembus even more.

“Didn't you say you want your sister unharmed?”  
Busikhaya asks.

“Oh, so you kidnapped her and these floozies know about it?” -Mazwakhe.

“Don't call us floozies, we are still gathering evidence to put you in jail for murder.” The police officer says cracking chicken bones like a cheetah. There is a 2L of cold drink in front of them. The other one cannot even speak, his whole attention is on the meat in front of him.

“You've caused enough havoc, sign this agreement and you'll have your sister.” Busikhaya pushes a piece of paper and pen to him.

“How do I trust that you'll let Hlahla go?”

“They're here for that.” Mnotho points at the police officers. Mazwakhe clicks his tongue in annoyance.

“Ungangits hela ngale msunu ekhotha izinga zenu!”

“Hey watch it!” The police officer warns.

They've just lost all the respect Mazwakhe had for their department.

“So what is it going to be?” -Busikhaya.

Mazwakhe clenches his jaws and picks the pen. He

fills up his names and signs the agreement. He is giving it all up for his mother's only daughter. He vowed to protect her with his everything he has.

“Should you violate this agreement we'll have a right to lock you up,” – The police officer.

Mazwakhe clicks his tongue.

“If my sister is not home by the end of the day you are going to lock me up for violating this piece of paper and wiping out the Mthembu dogs.” He walks out.

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ZANAMUHLA

Ngcwethi has bent every rule to be with me, I have to do the same for him. I know that I'm embarking on a hard journey but lapho kukhona uthando nendlela ikhona.

He walks in and looks at the bag next to me. I like him in that working blue overall. A hard-working

man is everything.

“Zano,” He sits next to me and puts his arms around my shoulders. “What's going on? Why have you packed?”

“I'm leaving Ngcwethi. It's time I go back home and live the reality.”

He frowns.

I have to explain.

“We have to do things the right way, there is no justification for this arrangement. I hate lying to my brother and I want everyone to know the truth.”

“What do you mean?” he asks.

“I'll tell my family about us. I love you and I want us to be together. We have to do things by the book, that way everyone can accept us.”

“You love me?” He is smiling.

Well, it's pointless to keep him waiting.

“Yes I love you Ngcwethi Mthembu.”

He is not convinced about my decision but he's chosen to trust me. In the past few days I've learnt a lot about him. There is more to learn but I don't have any doubts that he's what I need.

We finally reached his returning spot.

“When am I going to see you again?”

“Soon,” I say.

He takes off one of his wrist strings and hands it to me.

“It will protect you against bad spirits,” he says.

“We don't have bad spirits at home.”

“Sometimes I go through amathunzi amnyama, you're a part of me and I don't want anything to affect you.”

If he puts it that way I guess I have no choice. He pulls me for a long tight embrace. I'm going to miss him, a lot.

But the hanky-panky, as Busikhaya puts it, has to end.



Mazwakhe is sitting on the chair. He is caged into some deep thoughts.

“You're home?” I ask.

He looks up, surprised.

“Hlahla they let you go?” He envelopes me in what I'll call the biggest brotherly hug he has ever given me. He looks like he hasn't rested in days.

“I didn't trust them.” He hugs me again, “Oh Hlahla, I'm so sorry I let you down twice.”

Now I'm confused.

“Are you alright?” I ask.

“Now that you're here in one piece.”

He really looks relieved.

“I'm just not looking forward to hearing gunshots,” I say.

“Well it's over, they got me.”

“They got you?” I ask.

“Don't worry about it. Are you not hungry? We will go to a restaurant, if the shops haven't closed you'll do your summer shopping.”

Okay I need to drop this bag inside the house immediately. He has never done shopping with me, my day is about to end on a high note.

Oh and the restaurant food! I didn't know he likes it as well. Did Ngcwethi give me a string of luck?

[11/19, 09:43] : Chapter 8

ZANAMUHLA

I've been home for 3 days and I still haven't figured how I'm going to break the news to Zandile, the eldest sister. A part of me feels like Mazwakhe must know before anyone else. Yes he's a brother and shouldn't be included in my love affairs, but the fact that I've chosen a Mthembu will make it even more disrespectful if he is the last one to find out.

There haven't been any commotion, he's just home and fighting the family battles. I'm trying to exclude

myself from the drama. They say Mamncane is leaving with her children, she's going back to her home. So much for the love she shared with my father! She can't even mourn him properly.

“Hlahla,” -Mazwakhe pushes the door and enters. Him calling my name is equivalent to a knock. He's carrying a pair of shoes and I know what he's about to ask. My brother's hands only work when he's holding guns and fixing pipes; he is a plumber. But they don't work when he's supposed to tie his shoes, that's my duty.

“Please tie these for me.” He hands them to me. I know that he wears these shoes very seldom. He is a boots-person. At least they don't need to be tied every now and then.

“Where are you going?” I ask as I channel one lace through the holes. I'm starting to think this is a skill, like God gifted me with a talent and I deserve to be paid for it.

“None of your business,” – Him.

I stop and look at him. This is a favour, the least he

could do is tell me where he's going.

“I will be back before you sleep,” he says.

I guess that's supposed to make me feel better.

“Do you have a girlfriend?” I'm curious to know. He has never introduced anyone home. I know a few girls from the past, and that's because I'd hear rumours and secretly follow him to his corners. I was that nosy growing up.

“Hlahla if I have something that I need you to know I will tell you,” he says.

“But I saw condoms in your drawers,” I say and he narrows his eyes. “Does she come here?” I ask.

“Hlahla what do you know about condoms?” He looks gobs macked and worked up. I actually can't believe him. I've been around for two decades.

“Don't insult my intelligence, I went to school.”

“That's only?” His eyes are still narrowed.

Well, I've had sex twice but I can't tell him that.

“What is this?” he asks.

I follow his eyes, he's staring at the wrist string that Ngcwethi gave me. The shoe slips and falls on the floor. I didn't think he'd notice it. How do I explain this? I'm yet to tell him about Ngcwethi.

“Talk, what's this thing?” He is a bit firm now.

Deep breathe Zanamuhla and think fast!

“Ummm..a thing for protection.”

Fuck! I'm stuttering.

“From where?” His voice sends shivers down my spine. He's known me his whole life, lying is not one of my strong points.

“From Ngcwethi,” I say.

He frowns.

“Ini???”

Maybe it's time I tell him the truth, the sooner the better. I know he'll be mad but I believe Ngcwethi has good intentions about me and will do the right thing.

“I have to tell you something, please sit,” -Me.

He remains on his feet, glaring at me.

“Sit,” I say more firmer.

He sits after taking a deep breath. It's like he's expecting whatever I'm about to tell him.

“I'm listening,” he says.

I prepare myself mentally. This is it.

“Ngcwethi loves me and I also love him.”

He has no expression. He just looks at me blankly and then lets out a brief chuckle.

“That's what he told you?” He is not angry. I expected him to blow up.

“Yes, and I know that he's genuine,” I say.

“Is he the friend you were talking about?”

“Don't be mad.” His look doesn't give me any promise but permits me to go on. “Yes I've been living with him.”

He exhales and buries his head on his hands for a moment. He is still digesting it, surprisingly very calm. I'm still nervous though, this is a lot for him to

just accept.

He lifts his head up and looks at me. He is sad or disappointed. I don't know, but there's some pity in his eyes.

“He played you Hlahla,” he says and for a second I doubt my hearing skills. Ngcwethi played me? That's not true, he doesn't know him the way I do.

“It was all for me to let go of the road issue. They tied me into an agreement in exchange of you.”

I don't think we are on the same page. And what is this agreement he keeps talking about? This has nothing to do with that.

“You are home because I signed a contract binding me into their terms and conditions. I will go to jail if I ever raise the issue again or harm one of them. They used you to get me. Ngcwethi has never loved you, it was all mind games.”

There must be some misunderstanding. What Ngcwethi and I shared was real. Am I naive? It seemed genuine and felt real.

“But I was with him willingly and he never kept me from coming home. In fact, I'm the one who chose to come home because Busikhaya asked me to do things the right way.”

“Mind games Hlahla! Take that thing off, Ngcwethi and his brothers used you. You'll restart your modules next semester and we will go start life somewhere else.” He takes his shoes and leaves.

He is not angry, but disappointed. Now I understand why there's been peace, why he is home and there haven't been any gun-fights. I feel so stupid.

I let my brother down. I should've known the day they kidnapped me that they don't care about anyone beside themselves. And I hated Ngcwethi, those were my initial feelings. I should've listened to them instead of letting my guards down and falling in love with an enemy. They killed my father but I still found a way to believe that one of them had good intentions about me.

I'm going to trend in these streets, everyone I bump



into stands and watches. I'm running all the way to the Mthembu offices with tears running down my face.

The pain I'm feeling cannot be compared to anything. I was ready to give myself to this man. I was willing to go against my family for him.

I loved him and I thought he loved me as much.

The day is ending, workers are arriving in trucks from the farm. Others have already clocked out and they're rushing home with their backpacks. Women have their faces covered in calamine, black sunscreen, and they're looking forward seeing their children.

I don't know where I'm going to start looking for Ngcwethi. I've never been here, I don't even know which one is his office.

“Lady,” – The voice behind me.

I turn around and see Mnotho coming to me from behind.

Did he really refer to me as lady? He knows my

name, we went to school together. But that's not what I'm here for, the Mthembu spoilt-brat.

“Looking for my brother?” he asks.

He looks well informed. They all played me. My hands are shaking, tears are burning my eyes but I'm trying not to cry in front of this crowd.

I feel his presence and Mnotho's eyes confirm it.

He clears his throat and I turn to him.

I can't hold my tears. How dare he plays me like that? My brother signed stupid agreements because of me.

“Why?” I ask.

He frowns.

“Zanamuhla what's wrong?”

Oh, he is still making me a fool.

“You didn't have to hurt me, there must've been another way. I didn't do anything to you, why did you break my heart like this?”

People are looking at us. I don't care, they can

gossip all they want, I doubt anything can come close to the pain I'm feeling right now.

“I don't understand. What did I do?”

Really? I take off stupid string and throw it to him along with his cellphone.

“You might want to hear this for your ego, I did love you and I'm heartbroken. You should be proud of yourself. You got what you wanted, my brother will never bother any of you again.”

He is still holding the phone I threw on his chest. I don't know what's going on in his mind. I'd say Mnotho looks scared but I don't know much about any of them.

“I'm so dumb!” My eyes are blinded by tears, I reach up and wipe them with my hands. “And you're so clever, I didn't see this one coming. Your resources are helpful and the law will always favour you. A whole contract to let go of what you think is right! You guys are good.”

I make my way through groups of bystanders and walk towards the gate.

“Zanamuhla please wait.” He is running behind me and the groups step nearer to witness everything. He catches me by arm. Being plainly nosy like these people must be a certain disorder.

“I don't know what you're talking about. Explain to me, what is all this about? Ngenzeni?”

He really wants us to go there? To feed these people what their ears are sharpened to hear?

Alright then, so be it.

“You lied to me, you said you love me and promised me heavens. You kept me in your house in some place I don't know and said you are protecting me. You made me fall in love with you, only to make my brother sign some stupid agreement that could put him in jail.” I'm yelling for everyone to hear, and yes they love it. There isn't much distance between them and us.

Busikhaya and Mndeni climb out of the car and walk towards the crowd.

“Our side of the village will never have a good road, enough water and good services. You know why?”

Because we don't deserve all that, we are not citizens enough to qualify for those services. My mother died because she wasn't a citizen enough to be taken by an ambulance to the hospital. We walk miles to the clinic because our road is not good enough for mobile clinics.”

No I'm not crying again! I wipe my nose and look straight into Busikhaya's eyes.

“You have won, congratulations.” I turn to Ngcwethi. His eyes are bloodshot, Mndeni is now standing next to him. “You are a beautiful liar, but thank you for teaching me an important lesson. I have learnt and next time I'll be wiser.”

I got everything off my chest but I'm still heavy-hearted. I guess it'll get better with time.

“I love you Zanamuhla Ngwane.” His words follow me and I try to block them out of my heart. It's going to be hard for these lies not to affect me. I don't know what he is trying to achieve because he already got what he wanted.

I look back at him. His hand is holding the phone on

his chest, he hasn't shifted an inch from where he was standing.

In time I will forget the eyes that had carried a message I thought was incredibly deep. The scratchy voice that had annoyed me yet I could hear the sound of it in my deepest sleep.

Even the habitual frowns, I will miss them but eventually I'll get over them.

He says something and I'm too far to hear what it is. Mndeni pulls him away from the crowd and they disappear between the maze of cars.

I run back home.

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\*\*\*MTHEMBU OFFICES\*\*\*

“What did you do?”

Silence.

“Mnotho?” He turns his eyes to Mnotho and Mnotho

looks at Busikhaya. He didn't think that their actions will come back to bite his brother. He was just excited about bringing Mazwakhe to his knees and never considered the damage it would cause on his brother's new relationship.

“It's what she said but we didn't mean to cause problems for your fling. Our focus was on Mazwakhe and toning him down. It's unfortunate that you got caught on the firing line,” -Busikhaya.

He is very chilled. He was not hoping for Ngcwethi and Zanamuhla to last anyway. It's one stone-two birds situation.

“You made Mazwakhe sign a contract?” Ngcwethi asks.

“Agreement. He agreed to let go of the war he started and we promised that we wouldn't hurt his sister.”

“You were never going to hurt her anyway,” - Ngcwethi.

He is still trying to understand how he got here. Zanamuhla was happy in the morning when they

spoke over the phone, they were planning their future and very much in love. And out of the blue her feelings have changed.

“Yeah, but he didn't know that,” Busikhaya says.

“So you used me?”

“No, you're a part of this family, it was for your benefit as well.”

“Zanamuhla is my happiness. Why would you destroy that knowing how much I love her?”

Busikhaya sighs. Why can't his brother think like a normal human being? They don't have a father because of the Ngwanes. It's too soon for Ngcwethi to forget that.

“You will find someone else.” He looks at the other two. “We have to wrap things up and go before MaMbonambi look for us.” He packs his laptop inside the bag.

“Just like you've found ‘someone else’ after Nombuso?” Ngcwethi asks.

Busikhaya puts the bag on the desk and goes to



him. Ngcwethi shouldn't have mentioned his late fiancée, nobody does it unless it's important. You just don't argue and drag her name into it.

“Repeat that.” He holds Ngcwethi's collar and lifts him up. Mnotho stands by the door with his eyes bulging out. If these two fight it's going to be nasty. It will be a bloody scene.

“Come on guys,” -Mndeni gets between the two of them.

“Don't mention the mother of my children, ugcine ngalesiya skhekhe sakho boy!”

Ngcwethi doesn't say anything. He doesn't have the energy, and if he does put his hands on Busikhaya he'd hurt him and won't be able to control himself.

Busikhaya lets go of him and picks his bag and leaves.

“Are you okay?” Mndeni asks.

“Okay???” Ngcwethi narrows his eyes.

He feels betrayed by all of them.

“I had no part in this,” Mndeni says.

Ngcwethi looks at Mnotho. He has guilt written all over him.

“When are you leaving? Are you not supposed to be in Sheffield?” he asks.

“I pulled out, I’m not going anymore.”

“What???” -Mndeni.

He is shocked just as Ngcwethi. Everyone had high hopes about Mnotho. He has done so well academically and was given an opportunity of a lifetime when their father decided to apply for him at University of Sheffield.

“I’m not going,” Mnotho’s mind has been made up. He’s not leaving the country, he is okay where he is.

“You know ever since you started smoking cigarettes you think you are a man. Listen to me very carefully, you are going to book a flight again and you’ll go study,” -Ngcwethi.

“Sorry bro, but I’m not going there.” He opens the door and leaves his two brothers stunned.

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Ngcwethi

Funny how I've grown so dependant on someone I just met 5 weeks ago. I don't remember much about my joy and dreams before that 5 weeks. I remember my life with my parents, accepting the elders and completing college. After that it's gray, I don't know what had made me happy before her.

At first I didn't notice her, I'm always occupied with something. It was only until she talked to me directly, with just the two of us in the house, that something about her struck me differently. Her voice was very modulated, as if to compensate my not- so pleasant one. Her thin eyelashes would incline everytime she was about to press her buttons of stubbornness.

Then I started thinking about her. I became obsessed with protecting her and contributing to the future I believed I had destroyed for her. One night I was shown her in my dreams, the real her,

and my destiny was confirmed. I was given everything I needed to know about her and the future was left for me to figure out.

“So what are you going to do?”

I don't know how many times Mndeni is going to ask me this. He's keeping me company, more like babysitting me, because in his mind I'm going to overdose impepho or something.

“I don't know.” I'm trying to be strong, to pretend as if nothing happened, for the sake of keeping my head clear.

“Can't the elders show you something?”

“No Mndeni, your brother did this, they don't have to jump in with solutions. That's not what they stand for, I'm a full human being with brains.”

He puts his hands up in surrender.

“J ust don't overthink, Zolwandle will come back, give her time.” He finally leaves and I release a long breath. I don't have time to give her, I need her now.

Coming here was a risk. It's late, almost 8pm, and I have no idea how I'm going to get her. I just parked on our usual spot, waiting for anyone who will pass by.

A couple come from behind with their hands linked. I wait until they pass near the window and roll it down.

I exchange greetings with the guy and ask if I can get some help from his lady. He is hesitant, I have to use my name to convince him. I hate doing that.

“Oh Mvelase, I didn't see you.” He chuckles and reaches out for a handshake. His lady is watching silently. I greet her and get no response.

“Ngamla is greeting you.” He pokes her. She doesn't budge. There is a way she's looking at me, like she'd strangle my soul out and send it to hell.

“I need a girl named Zanamuhla. Can you go ask her to come see me?” I ignore her look and ask humbly.

“I'm Zandile, her sister.” She says and folds her arms. She is brewing war. It's about her father.

“Unesbindi yazi!” She is disgusted.

“It's important that I see her.” I have no choice but to beg. I just need her to know the truth. She needs to know that I had nothing to do with the contracts. I can't close my eyes and sleep if she stays awake with a bleeding heart because of me.

“Let me talk to her.” He pulls her away from the car. They talk for a while with him holding both her hands. A moment later they come back.

“We will be here as well. I don't trust you after everything you've done to my family,” she says.

That's fair enough. The guy stays behind with me and I'm subjected into small talks. He puts his job application right here, vocally. I don't hire but after what he has done for me it's the least I could do for him.

Two figures are approaching the car. I feel a chill and despair overwhelms me. This won't go well.

Zandile and Nsimbi, her boyfriend, gives us a bit space but they're watching me. Zano stands next to the door and she feels nothing but hatred towards

me.

“I know you hate me...”

“Damn right I do.” She doesn't even wait for me to finish. “What do you want?” She sounds like a complete stranger. Every word I had slips out of my mind. This is not the Zanamuhla I knew how to speak to. This one has built walls around her. She has protected herself against me, and whatever I say to her won't move her one inch. There's only one way into her and it's through her brother. I have to do things right by him.

“I admit that I was wrong,” I say. Proving my innocence in this will not change anything. I'm a Mthembu and that means I'm accountable for whatever my brothers do. If it wasn't supposed to happen I would've been given power to stop them. I guess this is one of the storms I have to go through.

“Why are you here Ngcwethi?” She's so cold and my mind just blanks out.

She exhales and takes one step away. I know that I don't want her to leave but I don't know how to say

it.

“You have to go home, tomorrow you need to go make millions.” She knows just what to say and where to strike.

“Done?” -Zandile.

This lady hates me.

“Yes,” Zanamuhla responds and turns to leave.

I hold her and her sister quickly jumps to her side. I don't want to cause a scene. I respect Zano, even though she doesn't believe me but I hold her so dearly in my heart.

“I love you Zanamuhla,” I say.

She gasps and tries to take my hand off her. I bring her close to my chest, the spark is gone but she's still what I want. Before she pulls away and smacks my cheek I taste her lips. It doesn't last thirty seconds, it was the quickest kiss and the most memorable I ever had.

“I asked you not to hit me,” I say.

“Sure. And I asked you to break my heart and make



a fool out of me? Go to hell. Set your foot here again and I'll personally blow your brains out.”

“I love you,” I say.

“And I just threatened you.”

Zandile grabs her hand and pulls her away.

“Leave!” She directs to me and I can't miss the hatred in her voice. This is not going to be an easy road. I don't just need Zanamuhla and Mazwakhe to forgive me, I need the Ngwane ancestors to approve of me. That puts me under the mercy of the Ngwanes as a whole.

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\*\*\*\*THE MTHEMBU HOMESTEAD\*\*\*\*

Halfway through breakfast Ngcwethi joins the table. MaMbonambi dishes his plate and asks how he's been. Ngcwethi just shrugs his shoulders and scans the room. Well the kids are out of sight, he might as well make the announcement.

“So I was thinking.” His eyes roam all over the table.  
“We are going to make peace with the Ngwanes. Closing the farm will not only affect us but the community at large. It's the best thing that has ever happened in Mpofana.”

Busikhaya is staring at him with a raised eyebrow. Who died and made Ngcwethi a decision-maker?

“So we will meet with Ndabezitha and talk about building a bridge over Mvumase. We will give them the road.”

Busikhaya's chuckle breaks the moment of shock around the table.

“We will go through all that just for you to get under the skirt of the Ngwane girl?” he asks.

Ngcwethi shrugs his shoulders and sips his drink.  
“If that's how you want to look at it.”

“Ok. It's not happening Jama, forget it.” -Busikhaya.

Ngcwethi looks up and frowns.

“Did I say I'm asking for permission?”

MaMbonambi realizes that the conversation is

taking another direction and asks for both them to calm down.

“These people just killed your father Mabandla. Have you forgotten that?” -MaMbonambi.

If your mother calls you by the second name it's never good. It may be too soon for all this and that makes Ngcwethi feels a little guilty. Their mother hasn't healed from their father's death, but sadly life can't be put on hold.

“It goes way back MaMbonambi. Ndaba didn't deserve to die but their pleas shouldn't have been ignored either. What they want is within their rights,” he says.

“Nxaaa!” Busikhaya stops eating and throws his fork on the table.

Mndeni and Mnotho are silently eating their food. It's such a shame that the family is breaking apart so soon after their father's death. He was a good father and had taught them respect and how to treat each other.

“Have you ever heard of schadenfreude?” –

Ngcwethi.

Nobody says anything. Mnotho has his phone but he's too drained to google it.

“I think you're suffering from it.” He's looking at Busikhaya. Even though Busikhaya doesn't know what that is, it angers him.

“Ungangidakelwa mina!” he says.

“Oh J es us Christ! Kwenzenjani kuleli khaya? Myeni wami wahamba wangifulathela,” MaMbonambi breaks down. Her sons have fought before, but not in front of her. She has never witnessed so much disrespect on her table when her husband was still alive.

“Both of you get out!” Mnotho orders both his old brothers. This is not how he speaks to them. Here everyone knows his place, well except Ngcwethi.

“Excuse you?” -Busikhaya.

“Get the fuck out Busikhaya.” He means business. Nobody messes with his mother. “You too Ngcwethi.”

They stand up and leave. Mnotho comforts MaMbonambi and asks her to calm down.

“Who needs a cinema!” Says Mndeni getting off the chair, boiling with anger.

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ZANAMUHLA

As soon as I woke up I took a broom and swept the yard. The sun came out and I started on the laundry. I've cleaned the houses, cooked breakfast for Mazwakhe and scrubbed the pots.

Now I'm down to the windows. Mazwakhe walks in and takes a bucket of water from my hands.

What is wrong with him? Can't he see that I'm trying to make this home spotless? We need to live in a clean place.

“Please come and have a seat,” he says.

“I'm busy, can't you see that?” I snap and he

narrows his eyes. I exhale and drag myself to the bench.

“I hate to see you like this,” he says.

I'm totally lost. See me in summer dress and flip-flops?

“See me like what?” I lift up my eyebrow.

“Hurting.” He puts his arm around my shoulders. He is reviving something I have buried in the depths of my heart. I don't want to think about it. It's not on my mind.

“I'm going to be fine. I just really thought he loved me and I feel stupid,” I say.

“I hope you learnt your lesson. Don't trust a man so easily. You even lived with him Hlahla and lied to me. You acted so cheap,” he says.

I didn't act cheap. I didn't give him the ‘vulvarine’ as he put it. Memories just flock my mind as I remember that word. Oh and the axe-wound one. That one nearly made me slap the stupidity out of him.

I still feel guilty about hitting him yesterday after he kissed me. I shouldn't have done it.

“His hugs made me feel safe. Everything thing about him gave me comfort, his words, his stare...and frowns. He made it look legit.” I'm trying to hold back tears but I'm failing dismally. “His kiss was just out of this world. I'd melt into him, he had magic with his lips, it was like our souls were tied together. Well, if I knew it was all an....”

Hawu! Where's my therapist now? I didn't feel his arm leaving my shoulders. I look around and see him checking his clothes on the washing line. They're not dry, I just washed them an hour ago.

Who leaves his sister while she's opening up? I thought we were having a therapy session. He said he hates seeing me like this and I was opening up so that I stop being 'like this.'

“Mazwakhe I was still opening up,” I yell.

“I'm not listening to that bulls hit.”

Oh wow, great! It's nice having a shoulder to cry on!

[11/19, 09:43] : Chapter 9

“Building such a complex road will take a year, and there’s a bridge to be made, the cutting of trees and-----”

“The plan was made about 5 years ago, the delays came due to the changes in the mayoral committee. I just need you to get the Minister’s approval, he owes us a favour anyway,” Ngcwethi cuts him short and passes a document over to the engineer. He looks at it and passes it to Ngwenya.

“I’ve never seen this before. Madoda and Counsellor Mbele signed it?” he looks at the document with a frown. So there was a plan to build another road? What happened, this plan was designed 5 years back. There were contractors involved, the budget was drawn up.

“It was cancelled. They decided it would be better to invest the money somewhere where it would be more beneficial, and then Ndaba died before the plans blossomed.”



“What are you saying Ngcwethi? That your father and Mbele misused the government funds?” - Ngwenya shocked.

“I only said one important thing and that was you need to get Minister’s approval, make sure he brings his people to check everything and speed up the paperwork,” he says.

“Since it concerns Jama Ranch House, shouldn't we discuss it with Busikhaya as well?”

Ngcwethi clenches his jaws angrily.

“He is in charge of the farm, this doesn't concern him.”

Ngwenya nods his head and collects his documents before the mood gets thicker.

“I will wait for your call before the end of this week,” Ngcwethi says before Ngwenya walks out. He promises to try his best to speed things up.

“I'm looking forward to working with you.” Ngcwethi reaches out to an engineer and shakes his hand. The meeting is over, he also picks up his files and

Ngcwethi walks him out.

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Everything went according to plan and today is the day of the community meeting. Ngwenya will be announcing the construction of the new road and bridge.

“I wonder what this meeting is all about?”

Busikhaya says as he puts his belt on.

MaMbonambi cannot attend the meeting and her sons will go on her behalf.

“Elections are around the corner, they're recruiting and selling people dreams,” Mnotho says.

“Waste of time, people will always vote ANC,” -

Busikhaya goes inside the house and comes back followed by Sango who's demanding spaghetti and milkshake.

“Are we ever going to leave?” -Mndeni.

“Baba!” Sango, almost crying.

Busikhaya sighs.

“Look here princess, Baba has to rush to a meeting, Gogo will give you a sandwich and when Baba comes back he'll take you to McDonald's.” He has his hands on her shoulders, his fingers are crossed. This is one hell of a child but he'd do anything for his daughter, even if she requested a shark's liver for lunch he'd dive into the sea and hunt for it.

“And a gardening gear for Jojo,” she says ecstatic.

Jojo is a plastic doll, she gets everything that Sango gets, Busikhaya is practically taking care of 3 children and one is a plastic.

“Definitely, we'll get a gardening gear for our little Jojo. Now run to Gogo.” He pushes her and watches until she disappears inside the kitchen where MaMbonambi is sitting with a neighbour.

They all get in the car and head to the community hall where the meeting is held.

“I've been thinking, if we do the cleansing ceremony this coming week we can start preparing for Isihlangu ceremony,” Busikhaya says.

“What's the rush?” Mndeni asks.

“We don't need to mourn for months to show that we loved Ndaba. I know he'd want us to move on and focus on growing the business.”

“I second that, but we need to get mother's approval first,” Mnotho says.

Busikhaya turns to Ngcwethi who's been staring outside the window the whole time.

“Bafo, what do you say?”

“It haven't been a year, we can't do it.”

“Why do you have to oppose everything that I say?”

Ngcwethi sighs. He takes his eyes off the window and lends them to Busikhaya who's desperately seeking for his attention.

“MaMbonambi is still going to be in that black dress for a year. That's how long a married wife mourns for her husband, only after she's taken off that dress we can do Isihlangu for Ndaba.”

Busikhaya cringes to his own ignorance. He's older, he should know these things, maybe he does need

to make peace with Ngcwethi.

When they arrive in the venue he asks Ngcwethi aside. The meeting has already started but this is a black community, half of them are still on their way.

“Ngcwethi I don't like this tension between us,” he says after clearing his throat.

“I don't have a problem with you, I'm just going through a personal journey,” -Ngcwethi.

“I'm sorry about the girl but I had to protect our legacy. Mazwakhe shot you once, if he wasn't stopped he would've done it again and maybe it would've been fatal the second time. I've already lost a father because of him. I'm not losing a brother, sorry your love life had to suffer, I did what I did for all of you.”

Ngcwethi exhales. Maybe he's been selfish as well, he didn't consider the pain his family was going through because of the Ngwanes.

“I know,” he says guilty. Busikhaya is not going to take the road thing very well and it's going to be worse if he finds out from the ward counsellor.

“We need to hold each other’s hand and make Ndaba proud.” Busikhaya taps Ngcwethi’s shoulder, happy to fix things with his brother.

“I did something,” Ngcwethi says sheepishly.

“Okay?” Busikhaya lifts his eyebrow.

“Today they're announcing the road construction and Jama Ranch House sponsored the clearcutting.”

“Jama Ranch House???”

“Yes, I signed.”

Busikhaya drags him back to the car. When Mndeni checks what's keeping them he sees the car speeding off and runs back to call Mnotho.

“And now?” -Mnotho.

“They will kill each other, I don't even know what happened now.” He dials and tells the person on the phone to fetch them from the hall.

Busikhaya and Ngcwethi wouldn't disrespect

MaMbonambi by fighting in front of her, so Mndeni asks the driver to take them to the farm storage where he suspects they might've headed.

Indeed Busikhaya's car is parked outside, they jump out of the taxi and rush inside.

And then???

Busikhaya is just sitting on top of the table puffing a cigarette and Ngcwethi is sitting on the floor looking at the newspaper.

“And then you two? Are you not supposed to be in the meeting?” Busikhaya asks, glaring at them.

They look at each other confused.

“We followed you, just in case you were coming here to kill each other” Mndeni says.

“No, one of you must be in that meeting, MaMbonambi will demand to know everything that was addressed.”

Well.....

“Mnotho you're going back,” Mndeni says.

“Urgh!” Mnotho drags himself to the door, Busikhaya stops him before he walks out.

“We are sponsoring the clearcutting, they're building a bridge over Mvumase and constructing a new road.”

“What???” Mnotho and Mndeni ask in unison.

“Yeah, and we might have a Ngwane makoti.”

Their jaws drop on the floor. Just a week ago Busikhaya was against the relationship and road construction, and now he's excited about the possibility of Ngcwethi marrying Zanamuhla?

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ZANAMUHLA

A lot has happened and I can't say I've healed from the heartbreak, but I'm ready to move on. The new semester began and I decided to be full-time. I, along with other students who are funded by a bursary, have been placed in a building that's just



10 minutes away from the college. I'm used to having my personal space and here I'm sharing the kitchen with 2 other girls. As if that's not uncomfortable enough the floor below us is occupied by guys.

“Ladieees,” Vuyiswa's voice bursts in. She is back from wherever she's been and we are about to listen to Gqomu music and her endless stories.

“Classes are starting Monday, we should live this weekend like there's no tomorrow.” She pulls out a bottle of wine from the shopping bag and orders me to take glasses.

“Are we even supposed to drink here?” Bontle asks what I was about to ask. It's needless to say her and I relate in many ways, she comes from the village as well.

“Where did they find you two?” She throws her hands up and drinks straight from the bottle.

“By the way I invited our neighbors for pizza.”

It's barely been two days of living together and she's already breaking boundaries.

“Here?” Bontle asks, eyes widen.

“Yes, we are just getting to know each other and this is the time to find study mates.”

Bontle stands up and picks her phone.

“I’m going out and coming back when they’re gone. What’s the curfew?” She directs to me.

“6am to 6pm,” I say.

“Please be done before 6,” she tells Vuyiswa. I hope she’s listening because I’m also going to my bedroom and I want to cook uphuthu later. I’ve been craving amasi for days, and now that I have a refrigerator and a monthly allowance I’m blessing myself with everything.

It’s been almost 2 hours of loud music, high-pitched voices and laughter. I forgot to take one thing, a bottle of water, and now I have to see all those people.

I was going to greet them, take water and disappear. But guess what? Julani Khumalo is among the guys

sitting on the couch, drinking ciders. Rules are being broken here.

“You're fuckin' kidding me!” He gets up and comes to me.

I didn't think our paths would cross again. I have so many questions for him. This guy sold me out.

“You must be disappointed to see me alive,” he says with his hands on the waist. Today he's wearing the skinniest jean, it makes him look very petite. I don't know whether to give him something to eat or listen to his cry.

“What's going on Zanamuhla? Is he troubling you?” Vuyiswa asks. I give her a look to say I got everything under control and turn back to Julia.

“Is it a nerve or you undermine people?” I ask.

“Your man nearly killed me. Do you see this?” He points to a scar under his eye. “I woke up from ICU all because I tried to help a struggling girl out!”

Is this guy serious? He's turning this whole thing and making it look like my fault. And I'm a

struggling girl???

“But I forgive you. How is his brother?”

He forgives me???

Jesus Christ, I burst into laughter.

“You need to have your brains checked,” I say and proceed to the kitchen to get what I came for.

The idiot follows me.

“Are you studying here?”

“No, I'm a waitress,” I say.

He sighs.

“Fine. I'm sorry but I was only trying to help you. We don't have to be poor while there are people who have floating millions.”

“Julani get out of my way before I send you back to ICU,” I say.

“Zana-----”

I push him aside and leave. I can't believe him. I don't know whether to call him a bully or brainless

idiot.

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Mazwakhe called earlier, he's leaving for Johannesburg. He says someone who knows someone who knew our father has a business opportunity for him.

It's a lot to process. I'm used to him being at home, taking piece jobs and returning home when the sun sets. Yes I'm also far away from home, but I was comfortable knowing that he's back home and I can see him anytime I want.

My whole day just turned sour and I'm wrapped on bed counting my bad lucks.

“Congrats Barbey, your village finally has a bridge and a good road. Come, it's all over the news.”

That's Jula letting himself inside my bedroom and dragging me out. Don't ask what happened, he's not the type you can be angry at and ignore. I guess we are now FRIENDS again.

“We don't care anymore,” I say.

Three months ago I would've screamed on top of my voice happily and thanked the community leaders for their efforts. But now I don't care, Mazwakhe has moved on from the issue, so have I.

“Owemji! Is that your man?” He's still watching the news. I lift my eyes to the screen. There he is with his brothers standing next to him, he looks good I must say.

“There he is, Jesus Christ!” His tongue is swaying out. It turns out he has a huge crush on Mndeni and thinks I'm the bridge between them. I'm tired of explaining that I'm not in a relationship with Ngcwethi. It's all in the past and the less I get reminded about him, the better.

Busikhaya briefly speaks to the reporter about how excited he is about the community development.

It's all just a public stunt.

Vuyiswa believes shopping is some sort of therapy

and we are all here in the mall because I've been sulking the whole day. I don't want to eat noodles the whole month, I'm just window-shopping and telling them what is cute to buy and what's not. The only thing I'm willing to spend my money on is Chicken Licken double slyder box.

“I love these,” J ula half-screaming in front of an ugly tracksuit. Vuyiswa is on another section, the expensive one, looking at the sneakers. I don't know where Bontle is, she's probably somewhere looking for a pair of pumps that costs less than R100.

“Are you sure?” I ask J ula.

“Are you insane? Look at the design, the colour and and and...I'm so paying for this.”

Well, he never take people's opinions seriously. This is the ugliest thing a person can ever wear.

“You won't believe this,” he's whispering.

“What?” I ask.

“Don't look at the entrance.”

Well, I have a terrible impulse control. I turn my

head exactly to the entrance and look.

Ngcwethi.

Flowers???

WTF?!

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\*\*\*\*\*EARLIER IN THE MTHEMBU OFFICES\*\*\*\*\*

“It's done!” Busikhaya said walking inside Ngcwethi's office. They shook hands happily and sat side to side.

“I'm scared,” Ngcwethi said and Busikhaya laughed. At least there's something he's scared of, he thought to himself.

“She is lucky to have you,” he told him. They'd gone through a lot after their father's passing. They killed, fought each other and learnt the importance of standing together.

“I haven't seen her in months, I don't know what to



expect, we lost each other,” Ngcwethi said. He’s done it all for her but nothing is guaranteed. They say she never talk about him and whenever his name is mentioned she shows no emotions.

“You're J ama kaMnisi, I know you'll get her back,” Busikhaya motivated him but the fear and restlessness didn't leave him.

“UMAKOTI UNGOWETHU SIYAVUMA,” -Mndeni walked in singing and dancing. The mood brightened up as Mnotho also followed in with a bunch of flowers.

“And the trees?” Busikhaya asked and they all laughed.

“Brother, this is a love rose bouquet,” Mnotho said and passed the bouquet to Ngcwethi who looked stunned.

“Mndeni dress him up,” -Mnotho.

“What? I'm dressed,” Ngcwethi said checking the tidiness of his African printed T-shirt. He didn't see anything wrong with how he looked and Zanamuhla had loved him like this.

“Not today, you'll embarrass her in front of her friends.” – Mndeni walked out and came back with a crispy white shirt in a hanger and a box of shoes.

Ngcwethi was forced in a shirt he believed was too tight for him and wore black pointy shoes that made him feel apostolic.

When he came out of the bathroom Mndeni took pictures while singing praises.

“She's going to give IT to you,” he said.

Ngcwethi sent a warning look and they all laughed at him.

“I'm ready to call oBabomncane to a meeting,” Busikhaya said before getting in his car and driving to Sango's school.

\*\*\*\*\*AN HOUR LATER\*\*\*\*\*

Ngcwethi takes another breath as he's about to enter the shop where Zanamuhla and her friends got in.

It took months of hard work, backstabbing, blackmailing, asking for favours, and finally he's here to get the love of his life back.

She sees him before he could see her and his eyes involuntarily follow her strong presence.

There she is, with Julani next to her, she looks frozen.

He makes his way to her, ignoring the curiosity his presence has sparked on the store workers.

“Zano,” he stands in front of her and cracks a nervous smile.

“I will check on Vuyiswa,” says Julani giving them space. He disappears with his tracksuit.

Zanamuhla has not said anything. Ngcwethi hands her the flowers, Mnotho didn't tell him when he's supposed to give them, right now seems like a good time because he doesn't know where to start.

She just looks at the flowers, still showing no emotions at all and Ngcwethi's fears are on the roll again.

“We built the road,” he says.

“Oh, congratulations.”

Well, this is exactly how he saw it but Busikhaya promised him it was all going to be okay.

He swallows,

“I missed you Zanamuhla.”

“Ngcwethi,” she takes a loud breath, “I told you that the lesson you taught me will make me wise in future. You built the road for your own benefit and reputation. We don't care about it anymore, we'll continue using the old one.”

“Please, let's try again.” He keeps it together, he can't let all these people see him cry even though the disappointment is too much to handle.

“I'm busy as you can see, so if you have nothing else to say please leave.”

“I verified my mistakes,” he says.

“Really? If I go home I will find my parents?” She fakes excitement.

“That's not what I meant.” He firmly shuts his eyes to push back tears, when he opens them they're bloodshot and wet.

“Please don't do this to me,” he whispers.

Zanamuhla ignores the wrench in her heart as she sees the pain in Ngcwethi's eyes and pushes her purse under the arm.

“I'm not doing this again Ngcwethi, good luck with everything.” She turns and leaves him standing in the passage. She doesn't look for her friends, she rushes to the bathrooms in the taxi rank where she sinks on the toilet seat and lets tears flood out.

She had forgotten about it. These feelings were buried, why did he come back to her? How is her heart still loving this man after everything him and his brothers have done.

Ngcwethi drives home with the last drop of his strength. When his brothers hear the car driving in, they all go out to meet him.

The car parks in but he doesn't get out. A moment passes and Mndeni decides to go check on him.

He finds him with his head buried on the steering wheel and he knows that it didn't go well.

After knocking on the car window for more than 5 minutes he gives up and fetches Busikhaya.

“What happened?” Busikhaya.

“He's not talking, I don't know.”

It takes a while for him to open the car. He's holding all his wrist-bands, yarns and iziphandla.

“Ngcwethi!!!” His brothers exclaim.

What he's doing is dangerous for him.

“I'm tired,” he says faintly before he throws it all on the ground and heads to his house.

“He's going to die,” Mndeni says frightened.

“Bafo do something,” -Mnotho.

Busikhaya is still in disbelief. What has gotten into Ngcwethi's head? Whatever happens, painful or not, you don't turn your back on the elders, especially if

you're someone like Ngcwethi.

When he gets inside Ngcwethi's bedroom to knock some sense into his head he's fast asleep on bed. He lets him be, maybe sleeping will cool him down. He places his things next to his pillow and leaves.

It's getting late and Ngcwethi is still sleeping. MaMbonambi announces dinner and Mndeni goes to check on him.

There's no sign of Ngcwethi in the bedroom.

He checks the bathroom, nothing. He goes outside, the car is still parked where it was. Ngcwethi always tell him when he's going somewhere, this is so unlike him.

On his way back inside Ngcwethi's house he stumbles on isiphandla lying on the doorstep. So Ngcwethi didn't put them back on? He picks it up. It's very old, hard and dry. But when he places it on top of Ngcwethi's bed he notices that it has blood dropping from it.

An old goat skin! Where is the blood coming from? He looks carefully, there's a crack and the blood is indeed coming from it.

It's bad!!!

[11/19, 09:44] : Chapter 10

ZANAMUHLA

I've been restless for days. My attendance in classes are futile, there's a lot on my mind, I cannot concentrate on anything else. After my last class I walk back to the residence. Usually I ride a bus with other students, but today I need to exercise my legs and get some air. I need to breathe and put my finger on what's really bothering me.

Mazwakhe? I haven't talked to him in days. Maybe it's that, I worry about my brother a lot.

“Hlahla,” he answers the phone.

“Are you okay?” My voice is shaky. I have an extreme terror and my chest has been pounding the last few days. It's like something bad happened or



scared me, and my mind refuses to remember what it was.

“Yes I'm okay. What's wrong?”

“I was worried about you,” I say.

He chuckles. He's really okay and I'm supposed to be relieved, but I'm not.

“I'm an old man Hlahla, I can look after myself. How is everything that side?”

“Well, school is great and I'm getting used to the new living arrangements.”

“Well, I'm not saying milk me dry but things are looking good. I've been meeting with people and securing business deals. They respect plumbing this side.”

This is what I needed to hear. Our ancestors are making things that made the pots to be done. First, the bursary and now Mazwakhe is getting business deals.

“Do you have R300?” -Me.

“Money doesn't grow on trees Hlahla.”

“Is it not made out of paper? Use my Capitec account please.” I end the call and walk with some stance of happiness.

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\*\*\*\*\*THE MTHEMBU HOMESTEAD\*\*\*\*\*

They've been to hospitals, holding cells, mortuaries and everywhere a person could be. Today they're exhausting the last option, that is consulting.

A well-known sangoma walks inside the Mthembu premises followed by Busikhaya.

“Where are the people of this home?” the sangoma asks.

“Mama is waiting for us inside. I think my brothers are with her and the kids are in their rooms,” Busikhaya.

“No, I mean the elders of this home. It's so empty, where did they go?” It doesn't seem like he's expecting an answer. Busikhaya wouldn't know it

anyway.

They proceed to Ngcwethi's house where the whole family is waiting.

“Makhosi please tell me that my son is okay,”  
MaMbonambi cries before they can even sit down.

“Mother, calm down,” -Mnotho rubs her back.

Busikhaya fetches iscephu, a small reedmat, and lays it before the man to kneel on. He starts hitting his bones and calling out both his ancestors and the missing- Mthembu ones.

“He insulted his elders,” he says while groaning loudly. Mnotho gets uncomfortable and moves back a little bit.

“Is he safe though?” Mndeni asks.

“The elders are not with him. There's blood and a white car. The elders are not with him. He has no light and you cannot find him if there's no light. No matter how hard you try.”

He's not making any sense. They expected him to give straightforward answers, that's why they paid

him to come here, took care of his travelling costs and all his demands.

“We want to know where he is,” Mndeni says impatiently.

“You're not going to find him. It's not your place,” the sangoma looks at them one by one and shakes his head. “There's a woman, why did you chase her away?”

They look at each other with confusion.

“She can find him,” he says.

Mndeni exhales, it just clicked who he's referring to. Where are they even going to start asking help from her after everything they've done?

“She needs to come here, inside this house and reconnect with him. She'll know where to find him.”

Well, it gets more complicated. Not only do they need to find Zanamuhla and ask help from her, they need to bring her to the Mthembu premises as well.

“Baba,” -Qophelo walks in holding a notebook.

Busikhaya draws in a breath and looks up. The sangoma just left, things are more complicated than he thought. Even though he believes what he did was right, he's starting to wish he had done things differently.

“Can you help me with these Zulu idioms?” Qophelo asks.

Busikhaya sighs. Only if they understood what everyone is going through.

“Ibele le ndlela.....?” -Qophelo.

“What about it?” Busikhaya.

“Baba I'm also asking, our teacher told us to complete the sentences.”

“Ummm..alidliwa,” Busikhaya says hesitantly.

“Are you sure Baba?” he asks with a frown on his face.

“Can't you find those things on your computer?”  
Busikhaya.

Qophelo sighs. Why isn't his Bab' Ngcwethi home? He always help him with IsiZulu homeworks.

“Umkhumisi ulingene.....?” He asks the next one.

“I was not born in the 60’s Qophelo. Why don't you ask Gogo? Or even better ask Google.”

“The teacher said we must ask our parents to help us and you're the only parent that I have.” He snatches his notebook and storms out. Busikhaya knows that his son is highly disappointed, he's not the type that walks out on him like that.

“What happened?” Mndeni asks walking in.

“Homework and fuckin' idioms.” Busikhaya.

“Oh!” Mndeni takes a seat in front of him and looks at him with curiosity. He must've decided now. “So what going to happen?”

“I have to find Zanamuhla.” He sighs.

“You think she will listen to you?”-Mndeni.

“We need her, I have to try my best. If she ever loved him she'll feel some sympathy.”

They all know that it'll be difficult to talk to Zanamuhla. She thinks Ngcwethi played her, and both her parents died because of the Mthembus.

Mndeni walks out and finds Qophelo sitting behind the house. He looks angry and he has tears in his eyes.

“Where is that homework, maybe I can help?”

“Don't worry Baba, I will use Google.”

Mndeni realizes that something is wrong and sits next to him.

“What happened son?”

“Nothing.” He keeps his eyes away from Mndeni. He is a boy and boys don't cry, that's what his father always tell him.

“You can talk to me,” Mndeni begs.

“I got an A on the Mother's Day presentation I did.”

Mndeni squeezes his arm in joy. He couldn't be more proud of his nephew.

“That's great, you did well J ama.”

“I lied. It was all creativity, nothing genuine. I don't know anything about mothers and what they do.”

Mndeni exhales when everything finally clicks. He puts his arm around Qophelo and says nothing. He doesn't know how to comfort him. For 26 years he's always had a mother, he cannot relate to the pain Qophelo must be feeling.

“Everything happens for a reason Qophelo. Your mother is watching over you and she's happy because you and Sango are so clever. And me, your father and the other monkeys will always be here for you.”

Qophelo chuckles.

“Bab' Mnotho doesn't like being called a monkey.”

“You think monkeys like being called monkeys?”

Qophelo laughs loudly.

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ZANAMUHLA

I've been a mess this whole week. I'm even thinking



of going home for the weekend, maybe I'm homesick. Last night we cooked rice and a tin of fish. Vuyiswa didn't eat, she wants to live on meat with R1500 monthly budget. I dish up and warm it while boiling water for tea.

There's a knock, I leave Bontle attending to it and go to the bedroom with my food. I thought the person was Julani, but that one would've made noise by now, he treats this whole apartment as his. He goes in and out of every room.

“Zanamuhla,” Bontle letting herself inside my room with her eyes widened. “There's a man looking for you.”

A man looking for me? Who could it be? I hate men.

“Do I know him?” I ask.

“I don't know but he knows you.”

I put the plate away, Bontle sits on my bed, she is freaked out by whoever it is. Mazwakhe does that to people, but it can't be him, I spoke to him earlier and he was in Johannesburg.

Busikhaya???

The same terror I've had for days creeps back in. Something is wrong, it's written all over his face.

“Hello MaNgwane.”

Whooh! That's too nice of him.

“Hi.” I sound very cold and I can't even control myself.

I hate that we have only one couch and I have to sit besides him.

“Ngcwethi is missing.”

There it is, the thing that's been haunting me for days, I should've known it had something to do with him.

God, why is he still have an effect on me?

“We've looked everywhere and we can't find him,” he says.

“That's sad, your connections in high places don't always help you. It must be hard to deal with that

reality.” That's me being the Zanamuhla everyone knows.

“Yes it is.” He doesn't get the sarcasm. “We need your help MaNgwane.”

Oh the day has come! Busikhaya Mthembu is asking help from me, a nobody.

“You're asking help from me?” I ask just to confirm that I heard him correctly.

“Ngcwethi loved you. You may not believe it but he did, with his whole heart,” he says.

“That's why he betrayed me. It was because he loved me?” I'm tired of this lie. They think they can do anything they like and walk over people.

“He didn't betray you. He played no part in the contract-making, he had no idea. The day your brother signed away the road issue Ngcwethi was working on the trucks as a punishment for loving you.”

“I confronted him and he confessed his sins. Don't think you can come here and lie to me.”

“He didn't defend himself because he thought making things right by your brother will prove his love to you.” He sounds genuine, he's not the cocky brother I know, but a part of me doesn't want to believe him.

“We fought, he went behind our backs, sealed the road construction deal, risked our mother's health and now he has given up on who he is because of you.”

My heart starts breathing fast.

“What do you mean he has given up on who he is?” I'm getting strange feelings about this.

“He threw everything away. Everything that connected him to the elders is left at home and he's gone.” I can't miss the fear in his voice. He keeps playing with his wrist-watch and pressing his fingers.

“What does that mean?” My stomach turns into a knot instantly.

“One of his wrist-bands bled the day he left. I don't know what it means but it's not a good sign.”

Alright, breathe Zanamuhla. Nothing happened to him, you'll find him. He is alive and okay.

He is alive and okay. Just keep breathing.

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NONTOBEKO

“Are there any changes?” I ask and his face gives me the answer I was not hoping for. It's the same face I've seen the last 4 days. The hopeless sympathetic one.

I still can't narrate what really happened. He came out of nowhere, he didn't even look at the sides, he just crossed and it was too late for me to stop the car. I ran over him and I had to put fear aside and take responsibility for my mistake.

“Do you think he's ever going to wake up?” Tears are blinding my vision. I'm a wreck of emotions. I've been crying for solid 4 days. I blame Thulani, if he didn't break my heart like that I would've been home

and not driving around just to clear my head.

A whole 5 freakin' years! That's half a decade and I've given that man my all. I helped him start his business, I was the first client who invested in his company and earned him the reputation he has. I clothed him, fed him and put shelter above his head. But now there's a better woman than me. Yes, he found someone and he brutally told me that I wasn't a woman for him. He told me there must be someone out there who deserves me. How so? When he was struggling he deserved me, and now that he is on top of the world there's someone else deserving me. What am I? A ball to be passed over.

I'm in a mess. As soon as this man wakes up the police will take the statement and I'll probably go to jail. Nevertheless I want him to wake up. He's someone's son, maybe even a father. I've never been someone who inflicts pain on others.

I grew up without parents so I know how it's like.

I can't do that to anyone, he has to wake up.

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## ZANAMUHLA

My phone rings. It's Mazwakhe again.

Guilt washes over me, I can't answer his calls, he'd want to know where I am. I cannot tell him I'm at the Mthembus, betraying him again.

“You need to relax,” the man says. Everyone is looking at me, I'm their last hope. The man puts Ngcwethi's yarn on my neck and asks me to go lie in his bedroom.

MaMbonambi comes with me. She's a warm, humble woman. I don't know how she gave birth to such hot-headed sons, I heard their father was humble as well, just that he was corrupt.

“I won't keep you here without your parent's knowledge,” she says.

I don't have parents, I think she means my family and I don't know how she plans to let them know.

“My son loved you, we have to do things right.”

Why is she speaking of him like he's dead?

“He still loves me. He is alive,” I say.

“Of course.” She flashes a smile and gets a fleece blanket from the wardrobe, “Lie on bed and rest.”

A weird smell of izinyamazane fills up the room and my eyelids grow heavier.

~ ~ There's a woman, she's crying painfully next to the hospital bed. She keeps begging the person on bed to forgive her and wake up. She asks him to do it for his family.

A man walks in, he has a stethoscope so I assume he is a doctor, he goes to the person on bed.

“We are transferring him to King Edward Memorial Hospital. He will be fine,” he tells her.

She cries even more louder. He takes off the oxygen mask on the patient's face and everything zooms in.

My Ngcwethi!!! ~ ~ ~



“Zanamuhla..Zanamuhla....Zanamuhla,” the voice keeps calling. I'm crying and asking what happened to Ngcwethi.

My body shakes and I open my eyes to MaMbonambi calling my name.

“They are transferring him to King Edward Memorial Hospital. He's not waking up, I don't know what happened to him.” My whole body is shaking. He looked half-dead, there was a bandage wrapped around his head.

“Mnotho bring water!” she yells.

Mnotho rushes in with a glass of water followed by Busikhaya and Mndeni.

“He is being taken to King Edward. Busikhaya please find my son, bring him home alive,” she says and Busikhaya nods his head.

“MaNgwane are you coming?” He looks at me. School is the last thing on my mind, I drink water and gather myself up.

Mndeni gets me a brown ugly sweater. We are

ready to leave. I blame myself, I should've trusted him, he asked me to do that for him. I should've know he wouldn't hurt me like that.

“Who are you?” asks a little girl blocking my way at the door.

“Sangelihle!” Busikhaya's voice comes behind and the girl's attention jumps to him.

“Baba where are you going?” she asks.

I didn't even know he had a daughter. She's a spoilt brat, doesn't he teach her manners?

“I'm going to a meeting, don't trouble your grandmother okay?” He picks her up and disappears inside.

Are we ever going to leave? A young boy comes out of one of the houses. He's around 10 or 11 if I judge by his looks. He comes to me and greets humbly before proceeding to another house.

“You have kids?” I ask, putting the seatbelt on. We are not friends, I don't think I'll ever like him but sometimes curiosity gets better of me.

“Yes, I have a son and a daughter.”

Oh, nice mix. I wonder where the mother is. He doesn't look like someone who has a woman in his life.

“Things got out of control,” – Him.

I keep quiet and wait for him to continue.

“An apology will never bring your parents back nor will it get our father back. But you and my brother are destined to be together and he loves you more than anything in this world, peace should be made. Both families wronged each other, an eye for an eye makes the world blind.”

I don't know what's going to happen. I don't see Mazwakhe forgiving the Mthembus or asking for forgiveness from them, and I don't see myself letting go of Ngcwethi again.

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NONTOBEKO

They took him for another surgery. I still don't know who he is, I've been checking the news hoping that someone would report a missing person. It's been quiet and I've taken full responsibility of him.

I'm living on energy drinks. The canteen lady gives me an eye when I buy the third can of Red Bull. I hate people who put their claws on things they have no business with.

“And two sachets of Bioplus.” If she dares to say anything I swear there will be a scene. Luckily she doesn't say anything, she keeps it at the side eyes.

He should be out of surgery any minute now. I walk to the waiting area and find two other visitors.

“You?” says the lady I've never met in my life. She's looking at me like she's seen me before and we have unfinished business.

“What happened to him?” She's angry. She must be related to the man, my palms start sweating. How do I explain this?

“I didn't mean to...He came out of nowhere and it was too late for me to hold the brakes.”

“Car accident? You ran over him?” She didn't know, it's all a shock to her and she's crying. “You ran over him?” She repeats and charges towards me.

The man she's with jumps up and holds her back. He calls her by name, Zanamuhla, and begs her to calm down.

“You know it wasn't her fault,” he says and that seems to knock some sense into the lady's head.

I think I heard her saying sorry before she sat down and buried her face on her hands.

I'm left with a man. He is dark and deadly. When our eyes meet for the first time a chill runs down my spine. Whilst there's darkness in his eyes, there is still loneliness in them and that calls to me. I hate seeing people in pain of any sort, and that has been taken advantage of a million times.

“Busikhaya Mthembu, his brother,” he says in a low deep voice. Something about the mystery around him has piqued my interest, and now he talks like this, with so much command.

“Nontobeko Maseko, the driver who ran over him.”

It's the weirdest introduction I've ever made.

“You've been with him?” His hands are tucked inside the pockets of his trouser. He doesn't look like someone who cares too much about things, or anyone. The confidence he has is too much, it feels like he's the only man breathing in this place, and that kind of aura is sexy.

“Yes, I wanted to be there when he wakes up,” I say. He nods his head and briefly turns his head to the lady I suppose is related to them.

“She's here now, he'll be alright. You can go home and rest.”

The lady must be.....I still don't know the man's name.

“Who is your brother?” I ask.

I've never seen a smile so short. He shows his teeth, it breaks into a smile and one second later it's gone like nothing ever happened.

“Ngcwethi Mthembu and that is Zanamuhla Ngwane, his future wife.”

I'm still puzzled about the way he does things, but I nod my head.

“You really should go home and rest,” he says.

They need space as his family. I can come back tomorrow to check on him, maybe the lady will be ready to talk as well.

“And stop drinking those things,” his voice stops me short, and I turn around. He's referring to the energy drink in my hand, the look on his face tells me giving orders is a part of who he is and he doesn't look like the type that is used into being disobeyed.

I throw the can inside the bin on my way out. Why does his opinion matter to me? We just know each other's names and nothing more.

[11/19, 09:44] : Chapter 11

ZANAMUHLA

The door opens and Busikhaya walks in. I don't

understand why he doesn't knock, what if I was naked? He looks better than the past few days. We don't talk that much, but he has my number and frequently checks on me. I don't know the name of the hotel but we're near the beach.

“We have to go to the hospital,” he says.

I'm jumpy, always expecting bad news, Ngcwethi's unchanging condition is putting me on edge. The doctors have done everything in their power, they say now it's up to him to fight.

“Is everything alright?” I jump off bed and grab my sweater. My hands are shaking, I haven't been taking care of myself very well. The last time I ate properly was before I found out that Ngcwethi had gone missing. I don't even know when last did I have a peaceful sleep, and there are endless trips to the hospital, on the other hand I'm ignoring Mazwakhe.

“Yes, let's go.” His tone softens to put me off edge. I follow him out, inside the lift there's that woman who ran over Ngcwethi. She is a classy woman,



financial stable as well if I may guess. But there's something missing from her, and that's Miss-Has-It-All glow. She doesn't have the glow that ladies of her kind have. She's sad and I think it's beyond the car accident.

She acknowledges me with a smile. I didn't even know we were in the same hotel. I respond with a nod, I'm too weak to smile back.

“Did he bother you again?” Busikhaya asks her.

“No.”

“I'm glad he got the message.”

“Well, I can't be too sure, he's very arrogant and the fact that he lost a million rands deal and will probably lose more, makes me think this is far from over.”

There's a certain look that he gives her, the assuring one that Ngcwethi used to give me.

“Nothing is going to happen Ntobe,” he says.

I didn't even know Nontobeko is shortened as Ntobe, this is interesting. It sounds like she's in danger of

some sort and Busikhaya is playing a guardian angel. I'm curious to know why. Shouldn't we be angry at this woman? It was a mistake but she still hurt our Ngcwethi.

“So you're friends with her now?” I ask harsher than I intended. I have mood swings these days.

He focuses on the road and says nothing for a couple of minutes.

“Huh?”-Me.

“No Zanamuhla, we are not friends.”

It surely didn't look that way to me, he's making me a fool.

“The chit-chat? And why is she in the same hotel as me? Why is she still even around?” I ask.

“She's sorry about what happened, and Ngcwethi was the one who caused the accident.”

Unbelievable! I plug headsets into my phone and play the first song on my playlist. I cannot listen to him any further, it'll turn ugly.

The doctor welcomes us with a smile. There might be some improvements, he's never smiled before, instead he'd look at us with pity and plug us with hope.

“This way,” he leads us into a different ward, not the cold one Ngcwethi had been in. We pass a few doors and turn to the left passage.

There he is, wide awake and staring at the entrance. I stand still with tears running down. He doesn't shift or say anything, he's still weak but he keeps the stare.

“I'm sorry,” I say between the sobs. He wouldn't be here if I had trusted him. He risked everything for me and I embarrassed him in front of people.

“I knew that you'll pull through. You've always been a fighter.” -Busikhaya.

He takes his eyes off me and looks at his brother. I'm not sure if he's able to speak, his reaction is a bit weird.

“In just a few days we'll go home and sort everything out,” Busikhaya again, still Ngcwethi doesn't say anything.

“Can he speak?” I ask the doctor nervously.

“He's suffering from single incident trauma, he'll be himself soon, we are giving him necessary counselling.”

“So he can't speak?” I ask.

“He's not mentally.....”

“It's not scientific Zanamuhla,” Busikhaya cuts him short. Him and the doctor share a look. I don't think the doctor is happy about the interference, he's white and won't understand what Ngcwethi really needs.

“Please excuse us, we want to have a private moment with him,” Busikhaya directs to the doctor.

“Don't feed him anything, allow my patient to recover Mr Mthembu.” He picks his files and leaves.

I stand in front of him and touch his cheek. We stare at each other, his soul is lost, Ngcwethi is not

there in his eyes.

“How soon can we take him home?” I ask Busikhaya.

“As soon as the doctors approve.” This is not the answer I was hoping for, I want to talk to him and tell him how sorry I am. I want to tell him how much I love him.

“I’ll give you two some space.” He brushes Ngcwethi’s shoulder and walks out.

I pull the guest’s chair and sit. He hasn’t taken his eyes off me, I wonder what’s going on in his mind.

“Ngcwethi, I’ll never leave your side again. This has been the most stressful week of my life, I thought you’d never look at me again. I was scared you’d die and leave me,” I say holding his cheek. His face is hollow, the emptiness in his eyes matches my own.

“You’re going to be fine, just hold on a few more days and we’ll go home,” I say.

“I can actually talk Zanamuhla. Why haven’t you been eating?”

If I wasn’t sitting on the chair I would’ve fainted and

dropped on the floor. What's the fuck bazalwane?  
He can talk!!!

“But the doctor said you're going through a trauma thing.” I'm beyond shocked. Even Busikhaya thinks he cannot talk, what's up with waking up with silent treatments?

“No, I'm going through a disappointment. You look so bad, like you haven't eaten in ages.”

Oh, and he looks great? Eyebags, dry mouth and hollow face.

“That's very rich coming from you. They should put mirrors in this ward so that you can look at yourself.”

He laughs silently, if he was okay I'm sure he would've cracked one his loud, ugly laughs.

“You have forgiven me?” He's serious again.

“You're the one who's supposed to forgive me.”

“For what?” he asks.

“I didn't trust you. You risked everything for me and I let you down.”

“I really love you Zanamuhla, this is not going to be an easy road but I need you to hold onto me. We need to fight for us, the world will adjust.”

Mazwakhe is not a part of the world that's going to adjust. I don't know what's going to happen when he finds out, you cannot predict that one, all I know is that it's still going to be ugly.

“I love you,” he says again.

“I love you too.”

Busikhaya walks in followed by that woman. He gives me an apologetic look before he takes out a chair for her.

I'm not mad anymore. That was me having a ‘tired girlfriend’ moment, now that my man is actually awake I think this woman is one of a kind. She could've hit him and ran. Nobody would've known it was her and Ngcwethi would've probably died.

“This is Nontobeko Maseko,” Busikhaya does the introduction to Ngcwethi who still has his eyes on

me.

“I’m really sorry, it happened too quickly, before I knew it you were lying on the road.....”

“Where’s the car? Is it damaged?” Ngcwethi interjects.

Nontobeko is just shocked as I am. He cares about the car? It doesn’t breathe. He could’ve died and no insurance could’ve replaced him.

“No, just a few dings and dents,” she says.

“Busikhaya fix it,” -Ngcwethi.

Okaaaaaaay. I need to step aside and see what lies I’m going to tell Mazwakhe. It’s been a week and I’m sure he’s worried sick where he is.

He answers the phone and keeps quiet.

He’s angry.

“Mbuyazi,” I soften my tone.

“Ndlovukazi, to what do I owe this pleasure of receiving a royal call?”



That's sarcasm buried in anger.

“My phone fell and cracked the screen. I just fixed it now,” I say.

“Don't lie Hlahla, just tell me what's going on.”

No, I cannot tell him. It's not a good time yet.

“How are you?” I change the subject.

“Not that you care, but I'm homesick.”

He cannot be homesick, it's barely been 3 weeks since he left home.

“And I'm on my way home,” he adds.

I need a right spot to faint on. He's going home, that means he'll want to come to my residence to see me and I'm not there.

“Are you serious?” I ask.

“Yes, should I bring you anything?”

“No....Yes...J ust bring anything nice.”

Fuck, the situation just thickened. How am I going to get out of this? Mazwakhe will come here with

his guns blazing and drag me back home. Will Ngcwethi survive that? He needs me next to him.

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Today we are taking Ngcwethi home. Busikhaya managed to convince the doctor that he'll be in good hands at home, he's hired a nurse that's going to look after him.

I haven't come clean to Mazwakhe, he thinks I'm busy with assignments and he hasn't made any visit requests.

Nontobeko had bought everything for him to use when he wakes up. Cosmetics, packed food and sleeping blankets.

I pack all of it and take it to the car. I'm not sure Ngcwethi will ever use it, these aren't his brands and I don't think he's the type that randomly take stuff from people, but we need to clean the cupboard for the next patient.

Busikhaya signs the papers, fetches medication

from the hospital pharmacy and we are good to go. A call comes through as soon as we settle inside the car.

Mazwakhe!

“Who is it?” Busikhaya asks.

I can't believe he's boldly enquiring about my personal calls, and he's seriously waiting for an answer.

“My brother,” I say.

“Mmmmm.” He starts the car and says nothing further. I put my arm around Ngcwethi's shoulder, he looks at me weirdly. He doesn't know how desperate I am to show him love. I want to pamper him and treat him like an egg. He deserves that and more.

Well, there's a goat thing he needs to do before entering his home. I'm a known girlfriend now, I make my way to his house to prepare for his arrival. Busikhaya's spoilt-brat comes to question

everything I do. I have no doubt that she gets away with everything she does.

“When are you going to your home?” she asks and the question stabs straight into my heart. When am I really going home? When Ngcwethi is okay? What about school?

“Has anyone ever told you to shut up?” I ask her.

“No,” she says very bold.

“Okay I’ll be the first one then, sit on the couch and shut up.”

“What if I don’t?”

Oh wow!

“Then nothing, you’re a bad kid,” I say.

Honestly I would love to whip her ass just a little bit. This is God’s earth, not hers.

She goes to the couch and sit. She doesn’t say anything and I nearly ask why she’s quiet, but I remember it’s what I asked and I love this peacefulness.

Mndeni walks in with a lid burning with impepho and disappears in that private room. The whole family follows and I feel like an intruder.

“Sango let's go to the kitchen,” I turn to the spoil-brat. She jumps off the couch and runs to the door.

It's a fancy kitchen with tall cupboards and gigantic electric stove, but it's still built rurally. There's a fireplace at the centre and lots of water buckets lined by the wall.

After a while Mnotho walks in and tells me everything is sorted. I bump into MaMbonambi on my way back and she smiles.

“Thank you,” she says.

I'm not sure what she's thanking me for, I just smile and proceed to the house.

Busikhaya, Mndeni, Ngcwethi and an old man I don't know are gathered around the table.

“MaNgwane please sit,” Busikhaya says. If he calls me like this I know it's serious.

“Mntanami,” – the old man.

“Yebo Baba,” I say.

“Tomorrow we have to go and let your family know that you've been here. I know we haven't been seeing eye to eye with them, but this is the only way.”

I look at Busikhaya. He was there when Mazwakhe called, he knows that I'm not ready to break the news to him.

“You being here changes everything. We don't randomly bring girls here and introduce them to our kids. You and Ngcwethi have to face your reality,” he says.

Why is everything happening so fast???

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Ngcwethi slept in his private room and I slept in his bedroom with Sango. She's a spoilt-brat that attaches people. I've fallen in love with her as handful as she is.

It was a struggle when Busikhaya woke her up for

school. He had to promise her everything there is on earth before she agreed.

“Good morning.”

He's finally awake.

I hug him and peck his lips. It's weird to me as well, but I nearly lost this man.

“How was your night?” I ask.

“Besides bad dreams, it was okay.”

“I missed you,” I say.

“Zano,” he pulls me with his left arm and stares down on me leaning on his chest. “I'm going to be fine for you. They'll pay whatever your family wants for you and then.....” He pulls me up for a kiss, it doesn't last long he's still in pain. “And then I'm going to make you happy in everyway,” he says.

“Everyway?” I ask.

“You don't know how much I love you Zanamuhla.”

“Actually, I know.”

He smiles.

“You do?”

“There's nothing more to prove.....”

The door shifts and Mndeni's voice fills up the house.

“At least close the door, we are kids.” He's carrying a tray of breakfast.

“We did and you pushed it,” -Ngcwethi.

“Of course you didn't get the point because you're suffering from single incident trauma. Zolwandle this is breakfast, I cooked it with love.”

I can't believe he's already joking about Ngcwethi's condition. Anyway, breakfast looks too good to have been cooked by him.

My phone rings halfway through breakfast. It's Mazwakhe.

I draw a huge breath before answering.

“Hlahla you haven't been attending classes the whole week. Where the fuck are you?” He roars



through the phone's speaker sending a chill down my spine.

“You will get an explanation later,” I say.

“No, answer me now. Your roommates said you left with a man.”

Vuyiswa! It's only her who could've disclosed so much information.

“I'm on my way home,” I say and Ngcwethi frowns. I could've come up with a better lie, I guess.

“I need a good explanation when you get here.” He ends the call.

“You'll leave with my uncles,” Ngcwethi says as soon as I put the phone off my ear.

“He wants me home now.”

“Then let me tell Busikhaya to call them.”

This happens, if a girl visits a man without any consent she is accompanied by abakhongi back home in the morning and they apologise with a goat and set the date for negotiations. But I don't think this will be a case here, I'm not just any girl, I'm

Mazwakhe's sister and the Mthembus are the last people he'd marry his sister to.

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### \*\*\*THE NGWANE HOMESTEAD\*\*\*

Zandile is the first one to see four men standing below her father's yard with a white goat. She rushes into the kitchen where her two mothers are cooking.

“We have guests,” she announces and rushes to the rondavel where her brothers are gathered.

“There are people waiting outside with a goat.”

They follow at her tail, Mazwakhe leading the trio. When he sees his sister standing next to Busikhaya and two other Mthembu men his heart sinks. He had ignored these suspicions, he thought he knew his sister better but he was wrong.

“Mnqobokazi! Mas engasileke!” one man recites their clan names and kneels in front of them.

“We are here to seek forgiveness on behalf of our son for keeping your daughter, uMaNgwane omuhle njengezihlabathi zolwandle.” Mndeni pushes the goat forward and the man holds it down with its horns.

“Sizogeza amagceke akoNgwane.”

Heavy silence.

“And we are here to ask her hand in marriage,” Busikhaya adds and Zanamuhla gasps in shock. She knew what her and Ngcwethi have is serious, but she had hoped that she would have a moment to let Mazwakhe digest everything. It's too much to just drop it all at once.

“Zanamuhla!” Mazwakhe breaks his silence.

She cannot look at him in the eyes. He steps towards her and grabs her by arm.

“Benzani laba ozavolo la?”

Mndeni pushes Busikhaya back before he reacts. They promised Ngcwethi that they will behave and humble themselves.

“There was a misunderstanding, Ngcwethi loves me,” – Zanamuhla. His grip tightens around her wrist and he shoots a dead stare at Busikhaya.

“Please don't start me Busikhaya.” He drags his sister inside the yard and disappears with her inside the house. Everyone follow behind them, leaving the Mthembus unattended.

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ZANAMUHLA

He throws me on bed and shuts the door. He can't hit me, I'm too old for that type of discipline.

“Are you out of your mind Zanamuhla?”

“It's the truth, he loves me,” I say.

“To hell with that. You don't know what love is and I'm not going to allow those idiots to turn you into a wife.”

“What if I want to be one?” I ask.

“You'd have to work with them and kill me first.” He looks at my hand, I have the string back on, he shakes his head.

“You never grew up Hlahla. Listen, you'll go back to college Monday and complete your qualification. After that you'll find a job and afford to buy anything you want. You won't be deceived with cheap cellphones and crazy thin goats.” He snatches the phone from my hand, walks out and locks me inside.

I expected him to be angry, but to lock me in the house like a prisoner! He's losing it.

I look on top of the cupboard and see a box of new Samsung cellphone and a bag of goodies. I know he bought all these for me but I can't bring myself to touch any of it because I know he hates me right now.

I have no phone, I don't know what happened outside but I don't think they allowed the Mthembus in. That will break Ngcwethi, I hope he will be strong for me, I'm going to find my way back to him soon.

I'm woken up by the door shifting, I don't even know when I fell asleep. Mazwakhe walks in and sits with his back turned on me. The door is not closed, I have a chance to leave but his state breaks me.

“Why are you doing this?” He's calm, his voice is rough and seasoned with hurt.

“He loves me Mazwakhe, he sacrificed everything for me, he even sealed the road contract behind his brothers back to prove his love for me,” I say.

“What about our parents? Why didn't he prove his love for you by not killing our father?”

I could remind him that he killed theirs first but he will remind me of our mother's death and I'll have no comeback.

He turns to face me. My heart sinks down to my feet, he's been crying. My brother never cries no matter how bad things are.

“I want nothing to do with that family. Not their stupid apology, not their money and not their cows. But you're an adult now, I can't keep you here because you don't share my sentiments.”

I raise my eyebrows. Is he saying what I think he's saying?

“I bought you that phone, you said the old one was damaged. Tomorrow you'll decide which journey you want to take. You can go live the life you think you have with Ngcwethi. We won't be involved in that, if you want to marry him you can go to Home Affairs and pay R75 for the certificate. Or you can go back to college, carry on with your studies and drop this whole Ngcwethi thing as I humbly ask you.”

I can't believe he's making me choose between Ngcwethi and my family.

“You're disowning me?” I ask with tears running down my cheeks.

“I won't involve myself with the Mthembus under any circumstances, if you become one of them I'll have to let you go as well. Good luck in whatever you decide on Hlahla.” He walks out and leaves.

How do I choose between my blood brother and the man I love?

[11/19, 09:45] : Chapter 12

ZANAMUHLA

Busikhaya is standing above the kraal, I didn't expect anyone to be up so early in the morning, it's just 5:10 am. He sees me and stops whatever he was doing. He looks shocked or frightened, I don't know.

I make my way to Ngcwethi's house, accompanied by Busikhaya's heavy stare. I knock at the door, it's a very cold morning and I hope he opens immediately.

I have left everything behind. Mazwakhe might never speak to me again, I have chosen an enemy over my family. I know I've made the right decision but there's a huge empty space in my heart. I want to break down and cry, but then again my heart has chosen him, me and my brother are destined to different lives. One day he'll find a wife and make his own family, we are siblings, not life partners.



The door opens. He's shocked to find me standing with my bags on the doorstep.

“Zano.” He pushes the door wider to let me in.

I drop my bag on top of the bed and stand with my arms crossed. I look around. This is what I choose. All this, private rooms, a man whose life depends on the ancestors and impepho, my father's killers. I choose it.

“I didn't expect you.” He pulls an extra pillow and throws it on bed then stands in front of me. He's staring at me, searching for something. I think he finds it because he exhales in deep frustration and asks me to get on bed.

“What happened?” he asks.

“I was made to choose between my family and you.”

He doesn't say anything, his arm is around me but he's staring at the ceiling with his jaws clenched.

“Mazwakhe wants nothing to with you. He said we can only get married in court, there'll never be any

solid relationship between the two families.”

“That's not possible Zano, you know I have to do everything right. It's important that I rightfully make you a part of my life,” he says.

“He won't change his mind, that's my brother, I know him.”

I can feel his breaths deepening, his chest is bouncing up and down, the arm he had around me leaves.

I look at his eyes, they have transformed into a monster's.

“Ngcwethi,” I call and hit his chest lightly.

“Please go to the main house.”

What? I just got here, the least he could do is cuddle me up and comforts me. I just left my family for.....

He sneezes loudly and almost hits his injured head on the headboard.

“Hhaaaaaaayi!” The scream follows another sneeze. This time he nearly rolls off bed and drops on the

floor. It takes only five steps for me to reach the door, I dash out with my heart pounding like a drum.

What did I get myself into? Out of all times his "abadala" could've visited him they chose the time I needed him the most. I just got here for crying out loud, and I'm already waking people up with knocks.

"Who is that?" MaMbonambi's voice answers the knock.

"It's Zanamuhla."

The door swings open within a minute. She sees the scared look on my face and pulls me into the living room.

Five minutes later she's back with a cup of hot tea, staring at me.

"It's his normal life," she says after hearing what freaked me out. The fact that she mentioned the word 'normal' to describe what I witnessed puzzles me. That can't be normal, the look on his face and the transformation of his eyes, he became something I don't know.

“Will it ever stop?” I ask.

She chuckles and shakes her head.

“See, Mabandla is gifted, he can connect and communicate with the ancestors. They have no timing, if they have a message for him they'll come even at midnight.”

I knew that, but the process of it scares the shit out of me. What if it's really at midnight and I'm asleep? He looked demonic and I doubt I'd survive that presence at night.

“I heard you're in college.” It sounds like she wants more information about it and I'm just not in the state to narrate my life story.

“You'll have to go back and continue with your studies. Your brother would love that.”

Urgh! She doesn't understand, Mazwakhe means every word he spits out of his mouth.

“We'll do everything in our power to win his heart. You're not here by mistake, soon he'll understand that.”

I focus on the tea. I don't want to cry in front of her. I left my normal life for this.

Breakfast is cooked by Mndeni. Yes, he can cook. I underestimated him. Mnotho sets the table. I'm quite surprised, maybe it's because their mother doesn't have a girl child, my own brothers don't even know how to boil an egg.

Ngcwethi walks in and the atmosphere changes immediately. I didn't go back in his house, I don't know when his episodes ended and I have no courage to be around him anytime soon.

Mnotho moves to another chair, Ngcwethi takes the one next to me and I sit with my breath held up.

"I don't want tea," the little voice hails in from a distance causing everyone on the table to smile.

"It's okay MaJ ama you'll have your juice," -Mnotho.

I can't believe she had to scream that before she got to the table. Busikhaya pulls the chair for her and sits next to her. His humble son joins quietly

and sits next to MaMbonambi.

“God bless our food, Amen.” Mndeni says with his mouth full of bread.

“Amen!” Mnotho reaches for the teapot and pours hot water into his cup. I don't pray but I know that when people do they close their eyes and eat only when the prayer finishes.

They don't dish, you take the plate and serve yourself. Surprisingly I feel at home, I grab the plate and fill it with bread slices and a piece of everything.

Everyone is eating, except the person next to me. I hope he's not expecting me to serve him, I mean everyone, even the kids, served themselves.

“Why are you not eating?” I ask, still not looking at him.

He doesn't respond. I have to turn my head, he's staring at me, I don't know how long he's been at it.

“Why are you not eating?” I repeat.

He slowly opens a metal bowl, dishes out porridge and mixes it with brown sugar and milk. I like that

this family actually mind their own business and I can study what's bothering this man without grabbing unnecessary attention.

“What's wrong?” I keep my voice low.

“Ngiyakuthanda Zanamuhla.” He doesn't match my tone, he says that so freakin' loud everyone's attention turns to us.

I try to put my focus on the food but I can feel their eyes piercing my forehead.

“Uyezwa?” Lord! He doesn't get it, I'm shy okay.

I know that he loves me, why does he need to tell me in front of all these people.

“Uyezwa yini? Uthi uyakuthanda,” Mndeni sees it fit to jump in. Tell me, why didn't polony kill him?

“Okay,” I say after clearing my throat. Of course it's not a weird situation enough, Mndeni actually wants a full response to that.

“Tell him you love him too,” he says.

Someone giggles. I want to die.

I force my face up and look at Ngcwethi. I don't think he wanted a response as Mndeni puts it, he's now focused on his porridge like he didn't bring awkwardness to the table a minute ago.

“You'll pay for this,” I whisper, he smirks. Idiot! Then I loudly conform to Mndeni's order, “I love you too.”

Applause? Really!

“I'm so happy for you my son, you chose very well.”

“Thanks MaMbonambi, I tried.”

I don't understand why he always calls her so formally, it should be ‘Ma’....and he tried? What does that mean? He went all the way out.

Everyone leaves. Kids go to school, the brothers leave for work and MaMbonambi has to go somewhere. So it's just me and him. Something is bothering him, he hasn't been himself since I arrived.

He walks in and sits at the edge of bed. I wait for him to speak, I've asked what's wrong a number of times and he isn't opening up.



“I need to ask you something Zano,” he says after a moment.

I push the pillow and lean on it against the headboard.

“Have you been sexually involved with a man before?”

Okay this makes me uncomfortable, it's not the question I expected. I'm 23 years old for crying out loud, he should put pieces together.

“Why are you asking me this Ngcwethi? Were you looking for a virgin?” I'm angry, should I really be? It's not a sin that I slept with a guy....I mean, according to the new testament. I'm sure editors have done their jobs accurately this time.

“Just answer me, it's a simple yes or no.” He's worked up but his voice remains under supervision.

“Yes, I'm not a virgin. Sorry.”

Silence.

This is unbelievable. He should've waited for the yearly reed dance and go pick a virgin of his liking.

“I'm going to ask you to do something, please don't be offended,” he says.

Well, I'm already offended.

“I'm listening,” I say.

“In the bathroom there's a dish of water, please go take a bath.”

I burst into a laugh. I've never been insulted like this in my life. I must bath because I slept with a guy five years ago. I've been bathing everyday, that's over 1800 days.

“Am I smelling?” My ego is bruised beyond recognition, I will need a new one.

“No Zano,” he says regretfully.

Deep breath Zano, big girls don't cry. I take out my toiletry bag and head to the bathroom.

And then? What kind of water is this? It's blue in colour, there's impepho soaked inside it. God knows what else was mixed here.

“I want normal bath water.” I walk back inside the bedroom with my bag clutched under the arm.

“Zano you've been sexually involved with someone. I understand sex as a spiritual deed, that's why it results into a soul. I'm not doing this for fun, you need to be clean before you and I....” He stops. He's taken it too far. I walk back to the bathroom with tears running down. It can't be that he has never slept with a woman before, did he bath everytime? Nothing could've prepared me for this judgmental side of him.

I want to go back to college. I have no one to turn to here. I've been crying silently the whole day and I have nobody to talk to.

It's late, MaMbonambi sent dinner message and I told Sango to tell her that I'm not hungry. I can hear joyful loud conversations and for the first time I feel lost. I'm not home, I don't have one anymore, and the man I came to has turned to be something else.

“Zolwandle,” the voice snaps me out of my thoughts. He walks in and stands by the window.

“What happened?” His voice is tender, it soothes my

bleeding heart and I almost spill everything out. But I remember that he is Ngcwethi's brother and I can't open up about what really happened.

“I don't know what he did but my brother loves you Zolwandle. Some things may be a little bit strange for you to understand, we all feel like that at times, he's just who he is.”

I nod my head. That's all I can give him.

“Thank you.” He walks out.

I don't know what he's thanking me for, maybe it's the family verse.

He puts something on the stand next to bed, there's some movements before he slides onto bed. He keeps space between us which is a relief, if it was up to me he would've gone to sleep in his private room.

“Please get up and eat Zano.”

I remain quiet. Why didn't I just fall asleep once and for all?

The mattress moves, after a minute he's in front of me with a plate of food and spoon.

“Please open your mouth.” He puts the full spoon below my lips and I turn to the other side.

I hear him sigh heavily.

He puts the plate away and gets back on bed. I wish he can turn off the lights but I'm too proud to ask. I close my eyes and try to draw sleep under the light.

“Do I have to go under ECG machine for you to see how different you make my heart beats?”

I ignore him and keep my eyes shut.

“If I wronged you in any way please forgive me,” he says.

Once it starts with ‘If’ that's no longer an apology to me. Apologizing is acknowledging your wrongs and taking full responsibility for them. ‘If’ doesn't do that for me.

I feel his arms wrapping around me, it's too late for me to shift away he has pinned me on his chest, he's breathing heavily over my head.

“Are you disappointed?” I had no intentions of asking this, words just slipped out before I could control my tongue.

“No Zano. It was never about your body, what it’s been through is not what defines you to me. I thought you knew how much you mean to me, how deep is my love for you and that I’d never do something to intentionally hurt you.”

“But you did. You made me bath with salts and fuckin’ herbs because I’ve been sexually involved with someone in the past. You’re so judgmental Ngcwethi, get off that holy horse,” I say.

“That’s not what I was.....”

“Just stop, your voice irritates me.”

The lights turn off. Heavy silence falls into the room. Did I go too far? I can feel him trying to control his breath in the dark.

Now I want the lights to be on. I need to see his face. This is not me typically not trusting his explanation, I was insulted by his action and he needs to understand things from my perspective.

“You could've at least waited for me to settle in this new life before you imposed your beliefs on me,” I say hoping to cool things down a bit.

“Okay Zanamuhla, I'm sorry.” He's putting the conversation to an end. I know that he doesn't like defending himself very much.

I snuggle myself on his chest and put my arms around his waist. He doesn't hold me back, I guess we just had our hundredth fight.

“I chose you Ngcwethi, I love you,” I say.

Silence.

I have to try harder, men are such big babies.

“I wanted you to hold me, to tell me that things are going to be okay, but instead you had your MOMENT and soon after that you made me bath for....okay let's leave it. I love you and I'm sorry for the tone I used to address the issue.”

I win, his arms wrap around me and his body relaxes on mine.

“I'm sorry I wasn't so welcoming, unfortunately my

MOMENTS don't have a timetable.” It doesn't sound like he likes the name I used to define whatever it is that happens to him.

“But you could've waited for another time to cleanse whatever spirits you think I carried,” I say.

“You chose me Zano and you're here living with me. I had to prepare just in case something happens between us.”

Really? He's travelling on high speed now.

“Nothing is going to happen between us, I'm returning to college in a few days,” I say.

“What do you mean nothing is going to happen?” His lips softly press on my back. I feel his tongue sweeping behind my earlobe and whimper.

“The sexual stuff.”

“You sound so sure. Why?” He does the tongue thing again while his hands break my top open. I adjust my body but his leg pins my lower part on bed.

“Because I don't like sex,” I whisper through tingles



his tongue gives my neck.

“What do you like?” His thumb is rubbing against my nipple. I don't know why my body is reacting this way. Every part of me just craves for his touch. I want him to touch me all over.

“Mmm???” Before I can think of an answer he has my lips fully inside his mouth. His hand has lowered to my panty, he's searching for the way in. He fails to do it one handedly and breaks the kiss. He undresses me, leaving me completely naked and then he switches the lights on.

I pull up the covers but he's too quick. He takes them away and throws them on the floor. I have nowhere to hide, nothing to cover my naked body with, and he's staring at my body which makes me even more uncomfortable.

“You're beautiful Zano.” He leans over, plants a quick kiss on my thigh and takes his clothes off.

No, I don't like seeing a naked man.

“Why are you not looking at your man? How would you identify my body if I die?”

He knows how to kill one's mood. I'm lying here, with moisture between my thighs and he's bringing death into the cozy atmosphere.

He kisses me again, this time his hands are running all over my body. The moment is heated up, he's getting needy with the kiss, his fingers are now focused on my cookie, rubbing all over it. I'm wet and I've mentally prepared myself for whatever comes next.

“Zano,” he's whispering on my ear, and that alone steams my body. “I won't be long, please open MaNgwane for me.”

There's a vein pulsating on his forehead, his eyes are almost shut and teary. Just like that I open my legs for him. I don't know where he grabbed the condom, it's in within a minute and he's positioning himself between my thighs.

He mumbles something when his shaft finally slides in fully. I don't know what I like more between his passionate, powerful strokes and his low moans that rumble out of his chest helplessly.

“Zanamuhla,” he whispers in a cry voice. I'm moving up my waist to meet his thrusts. We're just partners made from sexland.

“I cannot handle the pain of being left by you. Please don't ever leave me,” he says.

Insecurities really sound nice during sex. In fact they're such a turn-on. He manages to change my views about sex. Now I understand why half of South Africa is not going anywhere near the pearly gates. I just needed someone to hit the right spots, that's all it took for me to join the black book of sinners who never verified their sexual sins.

“Why are you smiling?” he asks sliding on bed after cleaning up.

“Nothing, I love you.” I dig another full spoon and throw it inside my mouth. Whoever cooked this dinner deserves an appearance on cook channels.

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MaMbonambi is on her endless trips again. They

say she's sorting something with Mr Mthembu's lawyer in one of the insurance companies.

I don't know who cooked breakfast today. It looks great as usual, but a part of me feels bad even though I know I'm not allowed in the kitchen yet.

It looks like Ngcwethi and I needed a steamy session to reconnect again. He's very clingy this morning, his hand never leaves mine and he's on my tail everywhere I go.

The car comes to fetch the kids for school. Everyone else get ready for work while me and Ngcwethi cuddle on the couch.

There's an angry voice outside. They're tough guys I didn't expect to see this fear on their faces. Even Ngcwethi has taken his arms off me, he's now standing next to his brothers, their eyes are all out.

“I have nothing! Your cattle left my garden white and dry.” It's a woman and she's spitting fire. They look even more scared when she pushes the door and enters.

“My children’s food! What did I do to deserve neighbours like you? This is the third time.”

They stand together like rained chickens.

“What are my children going to eat?”

They turn and look at me.

They got to be kidding me! I'm not getting involved in this.

“I'm asking!” Her voice goes up. Mnotho jumps a bit.

“Ma we didn't.....” He doesn't know what to say, he stops and looks at me with his eyes begging me to make a miracle.

“All my crops are gone.” Now she's looking at me. They have showed her that I'm the one who have answers.

I don't live inside the cows’ heads, I don't know why they ate her crops. I'm not a cattle’s spokes person and I'm technically not a family member.

I let out a deep breath before I apologize to her.

“We are very sorry Ma, it won't happen again.”

“Yes it won't because now I have nothing.” She throws her hands up and turns to the door.

I hear sighs as the door closes after her.

[11/19, 09:45] : Chapter Thirteen

ZANAMUHLA

I'm not ready to leave, neither is he, but my education comes first. I have to go back to college, at least I'll leave knowing that he's okay.

“Why are you leaving?” Just a few days back she was asking when I was going back to my home, and today she's swallowed in misery because of my departure. It's needless to say I'll miss her and all the drama she comes with. Growing up I was lonely, I always wished there was a girl younger than me to play with, a little sister from my mother's womb. But that didn't happen, my father was hardly in my mother's room, I don't think they were still intimate. Being with Sango, reprimanding her and listening to

her childish stories made me feel like a big sister I had wanted to be, except that here I'm Mam' Zano. It's time to accept growing up as a part of life, I'm already being referred to as Mama!

“I'm not leaving forever, I will be visiting you every chance I get,” I say.

“No you won't,” she snaps angrily. I look at her and see tears glittering in her eyes. My heart wrenches, I zip the bag and hurry over her.

“Please don't cry, your fathers and granny are here, and I will be calling you everyday.”

She snuggles on me and weeps softly. My hand brushes her silk relaxed hair, she's a beautiful girl and my heart breaks when I think that her mother never met her. Imagine carrying a baby for nine months, feeding cravings and preparing for her arrival and then take your last breath the minute she's born.

“Sangelihle,” Busikhaya standing by the door looking at us. She hears her father and lifts her head up. Pain coats Busikhaya's face, he walks in

and scoops her in his arms.

“Ngcwethi is waiting,” he tells me and walks out.

I draw a huge breath and scan around to check if I'm not leaving anything behind. I've been home, even though nothing can fill the void my brother left, but I still felt welcomed and loved.

My mind is roaming, my face is dismally failing to coat the sadness I'm feeling. He keeps stealing glances at me as he drives silently.

Being back here isn't as exciting as it was the first time. Ngcwethi loads off my luggage and locks the car. I expected him to leave me at the entrance and go back. I mean this whole building is a students' residence, visitors are only allowed on certain days for particular hours.

“Mthembu,” the security guard acknowledges him. It looks like he knows and respects him. His father was well known, it isn't a surprise, most people respect the Mthembus.

Ngcwethi has this thing of selecting who he interacts with, I wouldn't call it pride because I know



he's a very humble person, but it's irritating AF. He passes the guard like he didn't hear his greeting and goes straight to the elevators.

He's too familiar with the place for someone who is here for the first time. He even knows which floor we are heading to.

“Have you come here before?” I ask.

“Yes.” He's not paying any attention. We will talk about this some other time.

Vuyiswa is standing in the kitchen wearing lacy sleeping shorts, she almost faints when she sees the man walking in. It takes less than five steps for her to disappear in her room.

“Hello,” Ngcwethi greets Bontle whose eyes are about to pop out on the couch.

“Hi..Hello,” she stutters and quickly stands up for Ngcwethi to sit. Instead of sitting he walks towards my bedroom with the bags. This is getting on my nerves, Busikhaya couldn't have told him all this, there's something I don't know.

He comes back, envelopes me in his arms and deeply kisses me. Bontle clears her throat, I break the kiss and send a warning to Ngcwethi with my eyes. He doesn't seem to care, he pulls me towards my bedroom and closes the door after us.

“What are you doing?” I ask.

The only response I get is a passionate kiss that warms the secret parts of my body. My hands wrap around his neck as I deepen the kiss. We've been intimate only two times but my body already knows its owner.

He breaks the kiss out of breath and stares at me with lustful eyes. Gosh, it's so immoral that I want to strip him naked and claim his body as mine.

“I'm going to miss you so badly,” he says. I trace my fingers along his jawline and watch as his eyes light up with affection.

“I miss you already,” I say.

“Sthandwa sami!” His tone is agonized.

“But I understand that I have to study, our time to be

together all the time is yet to come.”

“And we will be happily together with your family's blessing.”

Urgh! He's such a moment spoiler. I'm trying not to think about my family. Mazwakhe has blocked me everywhere, not knowing if he is okay drives me crazy more than anything.

“I will make things right Zanamuhla. I will do whatever it takes for your brother to forgive us,” he says.

“I trust you.” I flash a fake smile just to put him at ease.

His phone rings, he sighs and takes it out. He calls the person J ama, it must be one of his brothers. They talk for a minute and then he gives the phone to me.

My frown is ironed by a deep voice calling me MaNgwane.

“Are you okay?” he asks.

“Yes.” I clear my throat.

“I believe in you two,” he says like it's something he just realized recently.

“If I knew what I know now I would've done things differently. But we are going to sort things out, your relationship with my brother shouldn't be a barrier between you and your family,” he says.

I stay quiet. If it was up to me they'd stop bringing up my family every second.

“Your few days here changed everything. You may have not noticed it because you did it naturally but you were the figure that had been missing. I don't blame Sangelihle for crying, there's a void you filled in her heart and we are all going to miss your presence.”

My heart is beating like a drum. Not in a million years had I thought I'd ever hear Busikhaya saying these words to me.

“Thank you.” I'm almost whispering.

“Don't let him distract you, give him his phone and kick him out.”

I give the phone back to Ngcwethi. They chat and laugh for a while. He pushes the phone back inside the pocket and sits on bed. I was told to kick him out and I think it's the right decision. I don't want to get in trouble by keeping unregistered visitors in my bedroom.

“You need to leave,” I say.

He frowns.

“No, I don't.”

Lord!!!

“Ngcwethi I don't want to get in trouble and I'm sure my roommates are not comfortable with you here.”

He doesn't care, he lies on the pillows and stares at me. I let out a sigh of defeat and unpack the bags.

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LATER THAT DAY

“OMG! I thought they wedded you, put you in

isidwaba and pointed you at the fields to plough spinach and mealies,” -J ula walking in wearing a tight jean and loose pink Tee. I didn't realize how much I missed them until now.

“Was that him leaving a few minutes ago?”

“Yes,” I say.

Interest grows in his eyes, he pushes Bontle and squeezes himself between us on the couch.

“Where is his brother?” he asks.

“Which one? He has three.” I know very well who he's asking and my friend doesn't stand a chance. I don't know Mndeni's sexuality but he doesn't look like someone who'd be interested in J ula.

“The handsome bae,” he says.

“Ngcwethi?” -Me.

He clicks his tongue, we all laugh.

“Mndeni idiot. You need to give me his contacts.”

My eyes widen. He's not joking, he wants Mndeni for real.

“Where's Daddy?” I ask.

Vuyiswa and Bontle frown, their eyes sparked with curiosity. I'm not going into details and this is none of their business. I don't want Vuyiswa to hunt down Daddy and bankrupt him.

“You know my story, I want Mndeni to be my main guy.”

Jesus Christ! This is going to be fun to witness. Tomorrow I will ask Mndeni's permission to give away his number and we'll see how this goes.

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Mazwakhe has made a habit of coming home after every two weeks to check if things are still going the way they should be. He doesn't trust his father's wives, especially with the live stock. Soon he'll be sending lobola to Nandi's home. It's not something he planned to do so quickly but his sister's

departure caused him to speed up everything. He believes having Nandi close will fill the void his sister left.

“Have you talked to Zanamuhle since she left?” Nkanyiso asks, even though he never got close to Zanamuhla they still share the same blood and he worries about her.

“Why would I talk to a Mthembu?” His focus stays on the shoe he's trying to lace up.

“I just think we should check on her, maybe they're not even treating her right,” -Nkanyiso.

“That's none of my business and please stop mentioning her name here.”

Nkanyiso puts his hands up in surrender and walks out. As soon as he disappears Mazwakhe clucks and throws the shoe across the wall angrily. They share blood, all of them in the homestead, but none of these people are his family at heart.

His phone rings, Busikhaya's number pops on the screen causing Mazwakhe's anger to reach its maximum. Why can't this family leave him alone?



They have taken away everyone he loved.

“What do you want Busikhaya?” he bursts through the phone's speaker.

“I want us to talk,” Busikhaya.

“I don't have time,” Mazwakhe.

“I'm sorry about Nombuso.”

Silence follows. Only their thudding heartbeats are audible. Busikhaya is waiting for Mazwakhe to say something and Mazwakhe is waiting for Busikhaya to specify what exactly he is sorry for. Why has it taken him years to realize his mistakes? And mostly, what is his sorry going to achieve now?

“But know that I loved her too,” -Busikhaya.

“You fuckin' killed her!” If they were having this conversation in person one of them would've been dead by now.

“You know that's not the truth,” Busikhaya says.

“You were trying to keep her away from me. You knew how much I loved her and you took advantage of my financial situation.”

Busikhaya holds himself back. He's doing this for Ngcwethi and Zanamuhla. This isn't the conversation he ever thought he'd confront, but to hatch down the beef between two families he has to pay the past a visit.

“You didn't treat her right and that was beyond being financial unstable. I may have taken advantage of her vulnerability at the time, but our love was real.”

“Is Qophelo really your son?” -Mazwakhe.

All the switches drop. Busikhaya loses it.

“You won't fuckin' mention my son's name!”

“Why not? This is one thing standing between me and Nombuso. Allow the DNA to happen and we'll never talk about this again.”

“No!” - Busikhaya.

“Then why did you call?” Mazwakhe asks.

“Your sister misses you. It's sad that you had to disown her because her heart chose someone related to me. Even if Qophelo was your son, you

wouldn't know how to put someone's happiness before your own," – the call ends.

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Busikhaya watches as his kids do their homework. Qophelo is the splitting image of him, from head to toe, there's no doubt that he's a Mthembu. His eyes travel to his daughter, Sangelihle, she unapologetically looks like her mother. He has never had any doubt that Qophelo was his, he was there when he was born, he heard his first cry, watched him take his first step, he even remembers his first word, he's been there every step of the way. If there's something he cannot stand, it's Mazwakhe planting doubts in his head.

Yes, Nombuso didn't break up with Mazwakhe immediately, they were still together when he started sleeping with her. But everything had corresponded, their last day of intimacy and the day Qophelo was born.

They welcomed him into the family, slaughtered the

goat and reported him to the ancestors. Something would've happened, right?

Ngcwethi walks in and briefly glances at his brother who's swallowed in grimace.

“What's up?” he asks.

Busikhaya shrugs his shoulders, stands up and leaves.

“Who needs help?” Ngcwethi asks the kids.

Qophelo is occupied on his books and can't hear anything. Sangelihle jumps into the opportunity, she asks that Ngcwethi reads the book and summarizes it for her.

After a session with the kids Ngcwethi searches for Busikhaya and finds him sitting in his bedroom with his head buried in his hands.

“I thought I was the only person with problems in this home. What's eating you ndoda?” He sits on bed next to him.

Busikhaya lifts his head up, his eyes are bloodshot and every part of his face is drenched in sorrow.

“Bafo what's wrong?” Ngcwethi alarmed.

“How do I tell my son that we have to do DNA test?  
How do I reason with him?”

Ngcwethi frowns.

“Why would you do that?”

“Mazwakhe won't stop claiming that Qophelo might be his son. It irritates me to the core, but at the same time I also want to get closure and get over this rubbish.”

“But Qophelo is your son, we all know that.”

“You don't get it, if I can do this it's 75% off hatred. Maybe he'll let you and Zanamuhla be.”

Ngcwethi realizes that he's being a special son again. Everyone's world has to accommodate him. This time even the kids are getting involved.

“I understand why I irritate you most of the time. Everyone has gone through lengths for me. I appreciate every sacrifice you've made for me,” he says.

“We are family Ngcwethi. You have done more for

us.”

“Bafo I'm not letting a child go through tests for my benefit. He's growing up, the void of his mother is deepening, and now we have to give him doubts about having a father too? No J ama, we are not putting him through that.”

Busikhaya stays silent. He's thinking of a way he can conduct the test without Qophelo knowing. He's not just doing this for Ngcwethi and Zanamuhla, he's sickened by the constant reminder of it and wants bury Mazwakhe's suspicions once and for all.

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ZANAMUHLA

I swear if I look at this book one more minute my eyes are going to burst. I've been trying to catch up, submitting assignments and preparing for next week's test. I have a lot of work to do but overworking myself is only slaving my brain. I need

to take a break.

Phone rings!

I pick it up with a smile, the scratchy voice is exactly what I needed to here.

“You need to eat Zano.”

There goes my excitement!

“Ngcwethi I'm on my way to the kitchen.” I cannot hide the irritation in my voice.

“You know I don't like it when you don't look after yourself. Now smile and stop rolling your eyes.”

Well I can also tell if he's frowning at me, but I give him a breather. He's creepy, that's it.

“I've been thinking here. When are you really taking me out on a date? Vuyiswa thinks it's boring that you haven't, she says life is about experiencing things together.”

He laughs out really loud. Most comedians don't laugh at their jokes, I guess that's the case with me as well.

“What else did Vuyiswa put in your beautiful head?”

He thinks this is a joke! I want to go out on a date.

“I’m serious Ngcwethi,” I say.

“Alright sthandwa sami.” He doesn’t stop laughing.

He really knows where to push to annoy me.

“Ngcwethi!” I half yell over the phone.

“How about Saturday? I’ll book a table at the restaurant, buy you flowers and.....” There’s someone talking at his background, it sounds like Mndeni. “And fuck you to sleep,” he adds.

“Who put that in your head? Mndeni?” Now it’s my turn to question.

“I DIDN’T SAY ANYTHING,” Mndeni’s voice yells over.

He’s such an idiot. Oh wait.....

“Give Mndeni the phone,” I instruct.

“Why?” -Ngcwethi.

“I have a message for him.”



Five sec...eight...ten...eleven.

“Zolwandle.” He's on the phone.

“Hi, someone has a huge crush on you.”

“Say what? Give her my number and ask her to text me on WhatsApp.” He's beaming with joy.

“I will, thank you,” I say.

“How big is her butt?”

Really now? I don't go around with a tape to measure people's butt.

“I don't know how to answer your question,” I say and that doesn't seem to faze him.

“Wadla Jama! Can we tag along to your date on Saturday and make it a double-date?”

Whooh! He's on 180 now.

“If you're going to pay for everything,” Ngcwethi says behind.

“I have six figures in my account.” Trust him to brag about his bank balance. Only if he knew what Saturday would bring.

J ulani is on cloud nine. When I first told him that we are going on a double date he didn't believe me, now he does and I wish I had kept it a secret. It's still two days away but he has shopped a pile that could fit half of my wardrobe.

Oh, he dyed his hair as well. Now he's blonde, it suits him and he's smoking hot.

“You need to leave space for disappointment, remember he doesn't know the gender of his date, he thinks you're a she,” I say.

“Girl relax, I only need two minutes with him and then I'll have him wrapped around here.” He shows me his pink finger. I'm not undermining his seducing skills, but hey that's Mndeni Mthembu.

“Can you find out what they will be wearing?”

Really now? They're not even on stage 1 of dating and he already wants matching clothes.

“Don't count your chickens before they hatch,” I say.

He rolls his eyes and walks away swaying her tiny

hips to the sides.

“We need to order booze for when he comes back disappointed.” Trust Vuyiswa to use any excuse to buy alcohol. But I can support this one, Jula will need a bottle or two after Saturday.

My phone rings somewhere. I push Jula's shopping bags aside and fish it in the couch.

Zandile? What did I bath with to deserve this one's call?

“Hi Zano are you well?” She can't even fake concern in her question.

“Yes,” I say flatly.

“Who made your dress for Mamncane's wedding? I need a dress for next week, Mazwakhe is sending lobola and we have to accompany him to his in-laws with some gifts.”

I need to replay what she just said in my head. My own brother is sending lobola and I know nothing about it? Of course it shouldn't come as a surprise since he disowned me. I'm just confused about the

pace of it all. He's never brought anyone home, even the girls he's been with stayed a secret, not even once did I hear him talking about making someone his wife.

“Who is the lady?” I ask.

“Nandi Dladla, they've been together for a couple of months and she's beautiful.”

I don't care about her beauty. Why is my brother sending lobola to her all of a sudden?

My hands are shaking. Does Mazwakhe hate me so much? I understand that I betrayed his trust, but we still share the same blood and I have a position in his life.

“Vuyiswa please borrow me your phone,” I say.

“Don't finish my airtime ya.” She has this thing of faking American accent. I don't know if it's watching too many movies or in her head she thinks she's Nicki Minaj.

The phone rings unanswered. I'm very patient, I keep trying until he finally answers.

“It’s Zanamuhla.”

Silence.

“You're sending lobola and you didn't even tell me. Do you hate me that much for falling in love Mazwakhe?”

I hear him drawing a huge breath. He's annoyed.

“I'm sending lobola Princess Zanamuhla.”

Oh, this is a game to him.

“You are my brother Mazwakhe. You cannot be an option nor compete with someone in my life. I have Ngcwethi and he loves me, but he cannot replace you.”

“You're not invited Zanamuhla,” he says.

“And I don't care, I don't like that Nandi girl before I even meet her, the only invite I need is to be back in your life.”

“I don't like Ngcwethi either and I never will,” he says.

“I guess we are even, make sure that Nandi person

doesn't touch my things at home, especially the set of spoons I bought last year.”

“Oh stop being a brat Hlahla, everything you have was bought using my money.”

My heart jumps in excitement as I hear my name changing from Zanamuhla to Hlahla.

“This is Vuyiswa’s number by the way, if you block it I will use a different one,” I say.

I hear a chuckle.

“Byo,” I end the call.

[11/19, 09:46] : Chapter Fourteen

## ZANAMUHLA

I have disrespected the culture of going on a date, Vuyiswa says. I should've worn high heel shoes, she forced me on them and I didn't even make it to the door, force of gravity kept holding my knees down. Now I'm wearing my gold sandals and white

body-hugging dress that she picked up.

“You look amazing,” Bontle says. God bless her good heart, I desperately needed a compliment.

“But she needs a lipstick,” -Vuyiswa.

I let out a sigh and wait as she digs inside her cosmetic bag and comes out with three similar lipsticks.

“Which colour?” she asks.

“Are they not the same?” -Me.

She sighs and mentally choose the one on her left hand. I look at the mirror after she's done, it's not too bright so I like it. Now I'm waiting for Julani, he's still not done editing himself in Bontle's room.

“Call the Uber so long,” Vuyiswa suggests.

It's a good idea, I also need to let Ngcwethi know that we are about to leave the apartment.

Oh gosh! Who's this goddess? Our jaws are on the floor.

“Who are you?” Vuyiswa screams.

“I’m Julani, call me JJ or Mndeni's plus one.”

This is getting out of hand. He has gone all the way out, he's dressed up to kill and now this thing is more than just a crush. He has fallen in love with Mndeni and he's getting carried away with this date thing.

The idea of it was funny and interesting up until this minute. Ngcwethi is waiting at the entrance with a bunch of flowers in his hands. He kept his first promise, I kiss his lips and link my hand into his.

“Where is Mndeni's date?” he asks.

Julia clears his throat behind us.

“Hello there,” - Ngcwethi.

Julia smiles in response. We all walk in and head to the table at the empty side of a restaurant. It's too quiet for a Saturday evening, maybe people are broke.

Mndeni stands up when he sees us.

“Don't tell me I did all this for nothing.” He's glaring at me.



They still don't see who the date is, they're slow I must say.

“Meet Julani, the person I told you about,” I say.

Julia steps forward and gives Mndeni a mother of all hugs.

“What's the heck!” Ngcwethi next to me, I pinch his arm to keep him in order. A part of me is hoping that things will go well between the two of them. Even if they don't date, I'm hoping that at least Mndeni will be nice.

“You have a crush on me?” He is now thousand feet away with his eyes bulging out.

“A huge one, I just think you're hot.” My friend is very bold and that's what must be scaring Mndeni the most.

“Ngcwethi shouldn't you sense things like this?” Mndeni.

He's blaming the wrong person. He's the one who wanted to go on a date with someone he's never met.

“Can we sit?” I ask.

He picks his phone on top of the table and puts it inside the pocket of his jacket.

“I just remembered that I forgot an important file at the office. I hope you guys will enjoy yours.....”

Ngcwethi stops him, he blocks his way with an arm.

“I'm sure he won't bite, keep your promises ndoda, we are in this together.”

Mndeni's chest bounces as he consumes a huge breath. His forehead is all moistened up, he keeps glancing at Jula and frowning.

“So where's the other boyfriend?” Ngcwethi.

Are we not supposed to focus on each other and give the other couple time to know each other?

“He is not in the picture anymore,” -Jula.

I give him a look, is he really going to start this date on lies.

“So I'm your rebound?” Mndeni asks.

Jula shifts closer, Mndeni moves his chair to the far

end of the table with his eyes widened. Ngcwethi's body is bouncing next to me, he's caught up in a good inside joke.

“No babe, I'm legit into you,” J ula says.

Ngcwethi is really going to annoy me. He should be concentrating on me, not laughing at other people's business.

The waiter brings the drinks. Mndeni downs a whole glass at one go and requests another one.

“Excuse my ignorance, I heard your...your people had two kinds. So are you a top or bottom?” - Ngcwethi again.

Does he know my favourite weather? Those are the things he should be worried about.

“I'm a bottom,” J ula replies.

Mndeni irons his frown and looks at his brother.

“What does that even mean?”

“Top. Bottom.” Ngcwethi joyfully shows with his hands. Mndeni swallows and looks at J ula like he's seeing a ghost.

“What's going to happen when my brother wants children?” This is it. We are getting another table. Vuyiswa will want details of this whole date, and what will I tell her? That the whole date was about Jula and she wasted her time glamouring me up?

“I don't understand why we had to change the table.” His eyes keep jumping to Mndeni's table at the other side.

My eyes roll till they touch my brain.

“You're on a date with me. We should be getting to know each other better,” I say.

“I know everything about you.”

He does???

“What's my favourite weather?” I ask.

“A cold one, because you like seeing me unhappy.”

He's right and wrong. I don't like seeing him unhappy, he just shouldn't meddle on people's dates.

“My favourite colour?” I ask.

“It's the colour of my eyes.”

I melt like a butter on a toast. His finger lifts up my chin, there's a wide smile on his face, I'm blushing.

“I annoy you but you still love me so much,” he says.

“Not really, you're a bully. You bullied me into it.”

The corner of his upper lip curves up. I fail to hold myself, I lean over and kiss him.

“And you seduced me,” he says.

I playfully pinch his cheek. Someone clears his throat, breaking our stare. He lets go of my chin and looks up annoyed.

“What?” he bites the waiter's head off.

The waiter hands him the note. My eyes rush to it as he unfolds it.

**\*\*\*GET YOUR FILTHY HANDS OFF MY SISTER BOY\*\*\***

Wtf! We both lift our eyes and search around the restaurant. Who could be.....Oh hell no! What is

Mazwakhe doing here and who is that thin yellow person next to him?

Ngcwethi adjusts himself on the chair and pulls his plate. A note has turned our date sour, Ngcwethi looks uncomfortable.

“What is he doing here?” I whisper.

“It seems like he's on a date as well.”

So this whole day is a waste for the Mthembu brothers. Mndeni has been drinking non-stop opposite us, here Ngcwethi is now scared to even touch my hand. The only person having the time of his life here is Mazwakhe.

“I should go say hello,” I tell Ngcwethi.

“Don't put us in an awkward situation, you know your brother hates me.”

I give him an assuring look, gather myself up and head to Mazwakhe's table. The girl is the newest version of Barbie. Even Vuyiswa doesn't put on so much make-up, her long eyelashes move rhythmically as she studies me with her eyes. Her

hand is gripping on a glass of wine. If she's Nandi then she's definitely not what I had in mind.

“Mbuyazi.” I look at Mazwakhe whose face is closed up and unreadable.

“Is this where you study?” he asks after a moment.

Is this where he works? Is this Barbie his boss?

“No, it's Saturday,” I say.

“So what? You have to embarrass our name and shove your tongue down a man's throat in public?”

Keeping quiet is a good move right now. The last time I checked he wanted nothing to do with me and didn't care what I do with my life. But he's Mazwakhe Ngwane, the world stops and moves after his command.

“You couldn't even choose a better looking man, I don't know what you see in that baboon.” He clicks his tongue.

“There's beauty that can be wiped with a wet towel,” I say and the lady turns red immediately.

“Tell this bitch to watch her mouth,” she says.

I've never been called a bitch by someone I hardly know. The conversation was between me and my brother, I didn't even mention her name.

“I came to say hello.” I turn around and leave. Unlike him, I won't fight his girlfriend, instead I'll keep my distance. I'm glad he decided not to include me in his wedding processes.

“Are you okay Zano?” he asks.

I nod my head, grab my drink and down a huge sip.

Jula rises up and leaves his table. He must be going to the bathrooms.

Mndeni rushes towards our table out of breath.

“I'm leaving, you'll see how you get home,” he tells Ngcwethi.

“What are we supposed to tell her?” -Ngcwethi.

“HIM,” I say.

Jula's sexual preference doesn't make him a woman, he's still a man.

“Tell him that I fainted or died.” He literally speeds



out of the restaurant. Ngcwethi forgets about his problems for a minute and laughs at his brother's pain.

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Mndeni changed his number and instructed that nobody gives the new one to Julia. Now he understands how it feels like being pestered by a guy for love, hopefully he'll go easy on ladies from now on.

Vuyiswa walks in carrying yet another shopping bag. I don't think she's still doing it for fun, someone casted a spell on her, this shopping addiction is some sort of spiritual illness.

"Mazwi called." She drops the bag on the counter.

"Who is that?" I ask.

"Your brother. His voice is tall, dark and handsome."  
Really now? She mustn't come anywhere near my brother, she will bankrupt him.

“Lord Vuyiswa! His girlfriend got an attitude for days. What did he want?” I fight the urge to roll my eyes.

“He wanted to know if you're okay,” she says.

“And what did you tell him?” I ask.

“I said you're out of toiletries and food.”

Wtf! The security guard walks in just as I ready myself to confront her for lies.

“Zanamuhla Ngwane?” His eyes are searching. I step forward with my heart thudding hard. What did I do now?

“Someone is here for you,” he says.

Relief dawns. At least I'm not in trouble, but who's looking for me? Ngcwethi treats this building as his castle, he wouldn't wait and ask permission from the security guard.

Busikhaya's car? What is he doing here? Ngcwethi didn't tell me he was going to come this side. And I have walk out of the building and cross the road for

him?!

The door opens, I climb in and close it after me. It doesn't take a second for me to realize that something is not right.

“I'm sorry to just come,” he says.

He has let his beard grow and at this moment his unshaved face has aged him twice. He's worn out.

“Is everything alright?” I ask.

“I need to ask you a favour.” He draws a huge breath.

I hate doing favours, but because he shared a womb with my man I'm going to do whatever he asks.

“There's a DNA test, I want you to come with me and Qophelo, I really don't want to scare him with strangers.”

I need to process this slowly in order to understand.

“Is he not your son?” I ask.

“He is, but your brother doesn't think so.”

Mazwakhe is all things but he never put his nose in other people's business. He wouldn't even care about Busikhaya's children unless.....

“You need to explain.” I lift up my eyebrows.

“We shared a girl, Qophelo's mother. It's a long story and I don't like talking about it. He wants DNA test, I want to give it to him and bury this thing past me.”

Now I understand why Mazwakhe wants nothing to do with the Mthembus. It's deeper than our parents' death, they had already hurt him before that.

“Mazwakhe doesn't trust me after everything that has happened. Find a way to do it with him directly, you don't have to tell Qophelo what it's all about,” I say.

He exhales and stares outside the window. This is the worst thing a father can go through. I know the kind of an asshole Busikhaya can be but I also know the great father he is. He won't be able to handle this should the results come back pointing otherwise. Knowing my brother the way I do, he'd surely have no mercy or any regard for Busikhaya's

feelings.

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NONTOBEKO

I stare at the piece of paper, it has a stamp from the police station, I'm supposed to feel safe. I have a crazy ex looking for me high and low because I decided to end my business relationship with him. My company helped him up, he got contracts because people believe in me and anything I put my money on. Thulani was crazy to think he'd dump me like that, move on with someone else immediately and then expect me to keep investing in his business. He's even more crazy to accuse me of destroying his name, I can take my business anywhere I want and I have the right to inform my associates about the changes.

There's a knock. My anxiety knocks up as well, I hold my breath and wait for the person to knock again.

It comes again, louder this time. My sweaty hands fish the phone from my pocket. I dial for security with sweaty hands. The door opens before it can even ring. Relief dawns when I see who it is. I haven't seen him since the day after his brother got discharged from the hospital. I must say I was disappointed by the lack of communication, he'd view my WhatsApp status and never say anything. I guess it was my broken heart longing for company and the few times he protected me ignited my heart with hope.

“You should park your car inside the garage.”

Just like that, he doesn't greet or even acknowledge that we haven't seen each other in a long time.

“Hi Busikhaya,” I say.

He stands in front of me, I feel like a tortoise under his height, he's staring down at me like a master.

“Are you good?” He moves closer, my heart skips a beat.

“Yes.” My voice comes out in almost whisper.

“You shouldn't stress yourself too much, it's not good for you.” His voice is full of concern and not commanding for once.

“You've been stalking my WhatsApp,” I say.

“Were you not updating for everyone to see?”

Viewing someone's status and not saying anything to them is stalking in my books, but he wouldn't get it, he doesn't even think it's awkward that he just popped here and pretended as if everything has been fine.

“Why are you here Busikhaya?” I ask.

“I'm here to check on you.”

“After how long?” I snap, causing him to frown. I really need to keep my emotions in check, this man doesn't owe me anything. I ran over his brother, he nearly died and that's where it ends.

“I'm sorry.” I'm engulfed in shame, I step back and walk away. Am I that desperate? What the fuck did I just do?

“Ntobe!” He's right behind me, as my hand grabs the

bedroom door handle his arm reaches me and turns me around.

“I could lose my son.”

He's not okay, his eyes are lined with fatigue and sadness. Why am I so selfish? I was waiting for him to text first, not even once did I bother checking if he was okay.

“What happened?” I ask.

“It's a long story, tomorrow we are going to do a DNA test. I've been sure and confident all along, but now that we are just a couple hours away from doing it I'm scared. What if he is really not my son?” He looks really scared. My heart breaks for him, I cannot relate to what he's going through but I know it's a lot.

“It doesn't change anything, you will be his father,” I say.

“Mazwakhe will take him away.” His eyes turn red instantly, he clenches his jaws and releases a sigh. I don't know this Mazwakhe person but he sounds like a real threat.



“I'm sorry you're going through this.” My hands run over his broad chest, he releases more breaths and eventually the tenseness subsides.

“There's a guy outside, his name is Mshibe, he'll be looking after you,” he says.

Whaaat??? I don't need a bodyguard.

“Stop whining on social networks, nobody is going to do anything to you while I'm still alive and that fucker didn't deserve all this.” He scans my body, cold flushes my stomach as my heart leaps up.

“I hope so,” I say.

“You hope what?” His deep voice rumbles inside my chest and all of a sudden my tongue is tied up.

“That..that nobody comes after me,” I croak.

“Well except me.” His lip curves into a grin.

“You'll come after me?”

His brown eyes flicker with amusement.

“I'm coming after your heart Nontobeko.” He links his forehead onto mine, my heart is about to jump

out of my chest, my legs are turning into a jelly.

“Good luck,” I whisper.

“I don't need it but thank you.”

This kind of confidence is so fuckin' sexy. I'm pinned against the wall with just a hand, his stare is hovering over me and taking all my breath away.

He chuckles and breaks the stare. I loudly exhales a long held breath. We walk back to the lounge, he goes out and comes back followed by a little brown skinned creature. It looks around the house with its bushy eyebrows snapped together. The corner of its low lip is latched inside its mouth. Then it looks at me, my talent of studying people quickly points out the sadness portrayed in its heavy-lidded eyes.

“Hello, I'm Mshibe.”

Snap! The creature speaks, it's a human. A young handsome boy, he reminds me of someone but I cannot remember who it is.

“How old are you?” My voice is somehow buried in sadness, yet I don't even know his story.

“I’m 21,” he says.

I look at Busikhaya with my eyebrow lifted.

He got a kid to guard me?

“Don't worry, he has survived cheetahs and lions,” he says.

What does that mean? I look at the boy carefully, his clothes are a bit worn out, the sadness is there under his heavy-lidded eyes.

“Can I make you something to eat?” I ask.

He looks at Busikhaya, for consent I guess.

Busikhaya nods his head, then he says yes please.

I leave them and walk to the kitchen. I have so many questions for both of them. I want to know the boy's background and mostly I want to know Busikhaya's intentions.

“Kindly share those thoughts.” He pulls the chair and sits. It's going to be uncomfortable to do things with his eyes watching me.

“Where did you find Mshibe?” I ask.

“Long story..I don't eat tomatoes.”

I'm not making food for him.....Well, I'm actually preparing two plates. I get rid of tomatoes without thinking twice.

“What else don't you eat?” I ask.

Silence.

Did he not hear my question? I turn around and look at him.

“Why don't you ask what I eat instead?” – Him.

Now he's dictating what I should ask!

“What do you eat?” I ask because I have this stupid thing that makes me follow after his commands.

“Ngidla okufunwa yinhliziyi (I eat what my heart wants)” he says.

My heart should take it easy with the beats before I land in hospital.

“Oh, what does your heart want?” -Me.

“You.”

From food to me? Breathe Nontobeko!

[11/19, 09:46] : Chapter Fifteen

ZANAMUHLA

Jula has not given up on Mndeni. Yeap, he vows that he's going to get him. I don't know why he's becoming so obsessed with him, Daddy was here in the morning to drop him some stuff, he should be sticking to him.

“We have a guest,” Vuyiswa kicking the door open. She left in the morning saying she's heading to the library to finish her assignment, but now she's back with a Trustworthy bag.

“Who?” I'm lazy to even lift my head up. We have been on the couch the whole day, Jula has been trying on different colours of make-up, now his short-term goal is to become a make-up artist.

“Mazwi,” Vuyiswa says to the person behind her. The door closes, I lift my head up and see my

brother.

“What are you doing here?” I ask shocked.

He's carrying some shopping bags. The look on his face says he's annoyed. It confuses me, did Vuyiswa force him to come here?

“Here are your things.” He shows me the bags and drops them on the floor. It clicks, I remember that Vuyiswa lied about me running out of toiletries and stuff.

My brother has forgiven me, he just won't say it because he is Mazwakhe. He thinks admitting that he misses and loves me will make him less of a brother.

“Thank you handsome brother,” I beam as I make my way to the bags and opening them. God bless Vuyiswa's gold-digging nature. Even though I didn't need all these things but this gesture from Mazwakhe has proven that he still cares.

I walk over him with my arms widely opened.

“You're a God sent Mbuyazi,” I say.

“You're the last person I want a hug from Hlahla.” His arms remain on his sides. What's wrong with my hugs? It's not like I lotioned with Ngcwethi's sperms, he needs a chill pill.

“Tell her,” Vuyiswa chirps in.

I roll my eyes at her. What is her problem? She has no business with Mazwakhe.....Oh gosh, I really hope nothing is going on between them. Why didn't I use Bontle's phone that day? I wouldn't be surprised if Vuyiswa has been torturing him and asking him airtimes.

I ignore the look on his face and hug him. I have missed this sibling connection we have, when we fight about little things and me going an extra mile in annoying him. He's always had anger, I don't know where it stems from, even as a small boy he was always caught up in school fights.

“Are you dating Vuyiswa?” I ask.

“Who?” His forehead is creased. He doesn't know her name? I wonder how he saved her number on his phone.

“Me, duh! No cupcakes I'm not dating your brother.” She sounds a little bit offended. I must say I'm relieved, she would've driven my brother crazy. Mazwakhe needs a calm woman, not Vuyiswa and definitely not Barbie.

Jula stands up with his face half done. He is mastering the eyebrows, this make-up thing might be his calling. His eyes run over Mazwakhe, then he steps forwards us with a crook smile.

“Then I wouldn't be breaking any code if I wanted him for myself,” he says.

Mazwakhe for himself? We all laugh, except Mazwakhe. Jula cannot chase after every guy under the sun, especially if he still wants to win someone's heart.

“Ngizokudabula ngempama uyojika Eshowe.” He is pissed off. The mood turns sour instantly. Did he not catch a joke? Jula is back at the couch, fear is written all over his face. Even Mazwakhe's new friend, whose name he forgets, looks frightened. They thought Mazwakhe was a gentleman, Jula



didn't know he was poking a snake that's always ready to strike.

“He was just kidding.” I'm embarrassed. These are my friends, he's supposed to treat them as his own.

“Didn't he get enough toys to play with as a child?” he asks sizing up Jula's tiny body.

Okay, I must zip it. Jula realizes that today he's dealing with Lucifer's agent, he quickly gathers his belongings and leaves.

My heart sinks. I have grown close to Jula, he always brings light into everyone's life and make us laugh. I have even forgotten that he once traded me to his Daddy. Now we are best friends and possible sister-wives of the future.

“Hlahla we need to talk.” -Mazwakhe.

He turns around and walks out.

Bontle releases a long sigh. I even forgot that she was in the house. Her quietness saves her from a lot of things.

“He needs sex. A lot of it.” Vuyiswa rolling her eyes.

She disappears in her bedroom. I wish she had said that in front of him, I would've loved to see his reaction.

I get stares from other students as I follow after a guy whose trackpant is lifted up to the knee on one leg. He is a typical Zulu guy, wearing Orlando Pirates t-shirt and necklace over it. It's weird, especially in this area, but they cannot dare mock him like they usually do to other guests. He can knock you dead with just a flick of his fist.

“When are you coming home?”

Home? He kicked me out of it.

“I don't know,” I say.

“Nandi wants to meet you.”

“Barbie? No!” That girl called me a bitch. I don't like her and I'm not interested in meeting her the second time.

“That was not Nandi. It was my ex's sister.”

“You have an ex???” I ask.

He briefly chuckles at my ignorance. Obviously he has ex's, but he never spoke to me about any of his girlfriends so I have a right to ask where the ex pops from.

“Yes dummy, her name was Nombuso. She used to buy sweets and ask me to give them to you. She was a really nice girl until Busikhaya flaunted his money on her face.” His face changes as he mentions Busikhaya's name.

Qophelo's mother. He speaks of her the same way Busikhaya did. Was she really nice or she fooled both of them?

“What happened to her?” I pretend not to know the whole story. I don't want him to think I'm discussing his affairs with the Mthembus, he might disown me for the second time.

“Long story.” He heaves a sigh.

That's exactly how Busikhaya referred to it, as a ‘long story.’ I don't believe that's really the case, everything can be wrapped in few words. They're just not emotionally ready to talk about it.

We reach the bakkie and stop outside it. I know he didn't call me here to chit chat and it's not about Nandi wanting to meet me.

“You have seen Qophelo there at the Mthembus?”  
Oh, I see where this is going. I nod my head.

“What do you think of him?” he asks.

“He's well mannered, very clever and doesn't talk much.”

He digests it with a nod. I have prayed that the results come back proving Busikhaya to be the father, not because I'm dating his brother, but because he has sacrificed a lot for his kids. He is a good father, Qophelo has known him his whole life and the sudden changes will affect him.

“He could be mine, tomorrow Busikhaya and I are fetching DNA results. You might be an aunt, at least you're already dramatic, so you only need a few skills to qualify.”

I'm offended. He grins with satisfaction. It's nice to him that I might be an aunt, I wonder if the joy would be the same if I told him he'll be an uncle. I

bet he'd disown me from the planet.

“Are you going to take him if he is yours?” I ask.

“Obviously, I have already missed out on many years of his life and he needs to know his real identity.” He should add that he'd enjoy seeing Busikhaya shattered as well.

“But they raised him and it will affect him,” I say.

“So what do you suggest?” He is genuinely asking for my opinion! Wow, we're getting somewhere.

“If he is yours you'll need to easily worm your way into his life. Let him get used to you and then tell him the truth,” I say.

“Meaning I have to rub shoulders with Busikhaya?” His eyebrow is lifted. I can't believe he is bringing his personal issues in such a critical situation. Who cares about him and Busikhaya, here we are talking about a child whose life is about to change.

“He will remain his father as well, he raised him and that will never change,” I say.

He shrugs his shoulders.

“I'm not promising anything, Busikhaya is not someone I'd associate myself with.”

He really thinks that he's better than Busikhaya, and Busikhaya thinks the same. It's not surprising but very surprising if you know what I mean.

“Do you think you and him are different?” I ask and his eyes flush with irritation.

“Of course, I'm nothing like that idiot,” he says.

In Zulu we say “uthekwane akaziboni isphundu”, him and Busikhaya are different versions of one another. They think and act the same way.

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The day finally arrives, the truth is just hours away from coming out and Busikhaya is more restless than ever.

He walks inside his bedroom, opens the drawer and

takes out a photo album. Once in every year he has taken his kids to the beach, Nombuso's favourite place. He remembers how he unexpectedly fell in love with her whereas he had just approached her to prove the point to Mazwakhe after their fight during a soccer game.

Their families have never seen eye to eye, he might've inherited that from their fathers. The Ngwanes were nothing, they were just dogs to be kicked and didn't deserve any respect. His father had treated Ngwane the same, Busikhaya liked the power his father possessed and practiced the same behavior on Mazwakhe. Unfortunately Mazwakhe was nothing like his father, Busikhaya threw the ball on his face and world war III began. The coach failed to stop them, the principal and two male teachers had to be called. By the time the principal managed to pull them apart they were both sniffing blood.

Busikhaya vowed to make Mazwakhe's life a living hell. He was going to make sure that Mazwakhe regretted the minute he puts his hands on him. His

first move was taking something Mazwakhe loved the most, and that was his precious girlfriend Nombuso.

He wormed his way into her life. It didn't take a month for her to welcome him and he started working on winning her heart. The first week together was nothing but a hide-and-seek. Time went by, he started seeing a future with her. If she wasn't around he'd miss her and he realized that it was no longer about an enemy. He was in love and he had fallen in it very deeply.

Nombuso was like Qophelo, very humble and intelligent. More than everything, she enjoyed peace. Her gentle smile could brighten the whole province, her teeth were a perfect white set that decorated her full lipped mouth. She was a beauty inside and out. She had a lean waist and nicely shaped bottom. Her skin was brown and flawless. She enjoyed flaunting it in a bikini, the beach was her place of sanity.

He remembers their first fight, he wanted more from the relationship and she wasn't ready to dump



Mazwakhe. It escalated, ended in a physical fight and he gave her an ultimatum. It was either him or Mazwakhe, who at the moment suspected nothing at all.

Busikhaya accompanied Nombuso to him as she went to break things off. He felt powerful and untouchable as he watched Mazwakhe's face engulf in pain as Nombuso told him it was over between them. Determined to keep her forever he threw money at her, and like most girls she enjoyed every bit of it.

She fell pregnant, Busikhaya introduced her to his parents and they paid the damages.

Qophelo was born and Busikhaya had no doubt that he was his son. They checked his hands and feet, introduced him to the ancestors and did a ceremony for him. Nothing eyebrow raising had happened. He fitted in like any Mthembu.

At times he's been sick, just like any other kid, and Madoda would take him to the ancestors rondavel, call out his great-grandfathers and they'd heal him.

Eventually Busikhaya puts the album away and rises up to leave.

Qophelo walks in and sees his father all dressed up. He was hoping they'd spend time together since it's Saturday. They haven't played Crazy Eight in a long time, he has gotten better and cannot wait to beat his father at it.

“Baba where are you going?” He looks disappointed.

“I'm meeting up with a business associate,” Busikhaya says, unable to look at his son in the eyes. The pain in his eyes might reflect on him, Qophelo has a soft heart, and he doesn't want him to be sad.

“Is he that man we went to the doctor with?”

Qophelo asks.

Busikhaya swallows. Kids don't forget easily, he thought Qophelo would forget about their last trip with Mazwakhe.

“No, it's an associate from Durban,” he says.

“Okay, go well,” Qophelo says and walks out.

Busikhaya sighs in relief. He sends a text to Ngcwethi, letting him know that he's leaving. They're doing all this behind MaMbonambi's back. Mnotho suggested that they don't tell her yet, as it might weigh on her health crisis. She just lost her husband, and now her grandsons might be not hers.

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He finds Mazwakhe already waiting for him. They share a look, neither of them breathe a word, Busikhaya leads the way in. He feels suddenly hot as he sits in the waiting area and takes his jacket off. His heart is pumping rapidly, he has taken out a cloth that he keeps wiping his forehead with.

Mazwakhe is on his feet, looking around with an annoyed look on his face. He is anxious, Busikhaya's restlessness is giving him a headache. Why does he look so scared anyway? With all the money his family have, losing must be a hard pill to swallow right? He's scared things might not go his

own way, that he might lose the boy he claimed as his son to a NOBODY.

“Mr Mthembu,” the man in a white coat calls them in.

There are two of them but he only acknowledges one. Mazwakhe lets out a short chuckle before following them in.

“Mr Ngwane,” he directs to Mazwakhe at last and receives a piercing stare in return.

“The results came back yesterday. They're in this brown envelope, you can decide whether you open them now or taking them home.”

Neither of them could wait a minute longer.

Busikhaya asks for a glass of water. This is no longer a game, he doesn't care about Mazwakhe and their feud. It's about Qophelo, his son, and not knowing what the future holds for them.

“Mthembu are you alright?” the doctor asks.

“I just need a moment.” His chest just tightened up, he's struggling to breathe, he pushes the chair and walks out.

Mazwakhe clicks his tongue and leans back on the chair.

“Why are you staring at me?” he asks the doctor whose eyes have been glued on him for more than a minute.

“Are you okay Mr Ngwane?” -the doctor.

He gets annoyed, his eyes flicker with anger.

“Why wouldn't I be?” His brows snap together.

The doctor shrugs and they both wait for Busikhaya in silence. He eventually walks back in, looking a bit calm.

“If you don't mind, we would like to know now,” he says.

The moment is here.....The envelope tears open, both of them swallow and wait anxiously.

“These are the results of the DNA test done between Mazwakhe S bongis eni Ngwane and Qophelo S bonga Mthembu.....” Mazwakhe's breath has been held since the doctor read out his name. He's leaning forward on his chair, rubbing the palms

of his hands on his knees.

“Mazwakhe Ngwane you're 99.9% the father of Qophelo Mthembu.”

He closes his eyes and releases a long breath. Tears are burning his eyes, he clenches his jaws and fights them back. Qophelo is his son! He has wanted this from the day he found out Nombuso was pregnant, but he was denied that chance. He had no voice, no money.

He remembers how Nombuso was suddenly cold towards him. It was like she had never loved him, she didn't even look at his direction, his existence irritated her. He crawled to her and apologized for the things he didn't know. She was his first love, he didn't see his life without her.

When he found out that she was pregnant he went to her home and found men skinning a cow.

Busikhaya had brought ihlawulo and Nombuso made it clear that if he ever came near her again she'd call the police. He became an enemy to the woman he loved with his whole heart.

Eventually his love turned into hate. He hated both Busikhaya and her. She got pregnant for the second time, she wasn't cold as she used to be towards him. A few times they had bumped into each other and she had attempted to talk to him out of guilt.

They had unresolved issues, the biggest one being Qophelo's paternity, but sadly they never talked things through. Mazwakhe heard from one of the farm workers that Nombuso had died during birth delivery.

He never got the chance to say goodbye and he was shattered.

The doctor lifts up the second document, which is a waste of time to Busikhaya who hasn't blinked or said anything since the revelation of the first results. None of this makes sense to him but that's not even what has put his world into a harsh stop. He's trying to picture the new life that doesn't have Qophelo in it.

“These are the results of the DNA done between

Busikhaya Nkululeko Mthembu and Qophelo Sbonga Mthembu.....”

Both of them know what the results are. They just stare at the doctor blankly. Why is he wasting his energy? They still need a moment to process the truth.

“Busikhaya Mthembu you're 99.9% the uncle of Qophelo Mthembu.”

They frown, look at each other and glare at the doctor.

“What???” they ask in unison.

“You're both related to the child, meaning you all share the same blood.”

What? How? When?

[11/19, 09:46] : Chapter Sixteen

Nobody ever thinks one day he'd wake up and discover that everything he knew about himself had been a lie. Waking up not knowing who you are and



people who owe you your real identity are cold under ground.

Mazwakhe's world has come into a harsh stop. Who is he? That's what he keeps asking himself. How is he related to Busikhaya Mthembu? How are they blood-related?

He should be happy he just found out he has a son. But he hasn't even called Zanamuhla to let her know that she's now an aunt. He's locked inside the house, just a blink away from tearing up.

Nkanyiso knocks again, he is worried about his brother. He knows that something is not right and in his mind he thinks the paternity results came back negative.

“Bafo if you're not opening this door now I'm going to break it open,” he threatens.

“Break it!”- Mazwakhe.

Nkanyiso is tempted to do just that but then he remembers how his brother is. This could be just a

trap, he'd break the door and Mazwakhe will take all his frustration out on Nkanyiso.

He returns back to the kitchen where the family is gathered.

“Is he still not opening?” Mamkhulu asks.

“No, he said I must break the door.”

“You should've done as he asked.” Zandile shrugging her shoulders. Nkanyiso just gives her a scornful look and says nothing.

“We all know that only Zanamuhla can be able to get through him,” Khethile says.

“Why bother? Let him kill himself if he wants to.” Mamkhulu turns to her pot and stirs.

She is the first wife, her heart accepted that she was married to a polygamist only because she had no other choice. He married all four of them, Mazwakhe's mother being the second wife. Mamkhulu got along with other wives but she never forgave Mazwakhe's mother. She came five years in their marriage, Mamkhulu had been unable to

conceive and it didn't even take her months to fall pregnant. Not only did she give Mr Ngwane the 'father' title, she gave him an heir, something Mamkhulu wanted more than anything.

She remembers how things changed suddenly after Mazwakhe's birth. Ngwane hardly came in her room, he was always with the golden wife. Even the family worshipped the grounds Mazwakhe's mother walked on. She was labelled a barren behind closed doors.

Nobody knows what happened between Mazwakhe's mother and Ngwane, their love faded out of the blue. He got interested in his last wife, of course other wives were unhappy about it, but Mazwakhe's mother didn't seem to care. She didn't even look like someone who was still interested in her marriage.

Other wives would go to herbalist and get herbs to rekindle the spark. They'd mix drinks, trying to boost their sexual performances and Mazwakhe's mother would stay in her house and bead neck-pieces and bracelets.

They did not find their way into one another up to the day the death came and snatched her away.

“Maybe he misses his mother and wants to join her in hell.” Words escape Mamkhulu’s mouth causing everyone to gasp. They don't get along but they're still family and Mazwakhe is one of them.

“Let me go try, if I fail then Zanamuhla has to come and deal with it,” -Zandile.

She crosses the yard and goes to Mazwakhe's locked rondavel. She knocks for ages, Mazwakhe doesn't respond.

“Mazwakhe I don't want to disturb Zanamuhla by bringing her here. Open this door now!”

Finally there's some movement. Hearing Zandile threatening to bring Hlahla got him off bed. He does not want his sister to be involved, she'll put her life on hold to be with him.

The door opens, Mazwakhe's face is beyond pissed, he steps aside for Zandile to walk in and asks what the fuck she wants.

“We are worried about you? Did everything go well?”

Mazwakhe fails to stand the pretence and bangs the door on his way out. He leaves the yard and makes his way towards the Ngwane cemetery where his parents rest. He has so many questions for them. He can ask them but they won't be able to respond, and that's what hurts him the most. They owe him the truth but they're not there to answer.

Zandile was very shocked by Mazwakhe's reaction. He almost broke the door, only because she asked if everything went well!

She looks around the house curiously and her eyes land on a brown envelope on top of the table.

She peeks out the door to check if nobody is coming and then rushes to the envelope and opens it carefully.

There's too much Science written on the document, the only thing she grasps is Mazwakhe being 99.9% the father of Qophelo Mthembu.

Another peek!

There's no one, she goes to Mazwakhe's phone on top of the bed. Fortunately he never bothers about passwords and stuff like that. Zandile only swipes the screen and clicks where she wants to go.

There isn't much conversation between him and Zanamuhla. If he didn't tell his beloved sister obviously he cried to Nandi.

Indeed, they chat frequently. There are unread messages, in most of them Nandi is begging Mazwakhe to calm down.

Zandile scrolls up and gets the shock of her life. He is postponing lobola negotiations because he just found something new about his identity? And what does it mean that he has a son and the uncle of the son is Busikhaya Mthembu. Shouldn't the uncle be Nkanyiso? What does a Mthembu has to do with a Ngwane grandchild?

Days go by, Mamkhulu takes a short trip to Mazwakhe's uncle. She is desperate for the truth and will manipulate her way into it if she has to.

“Hawu MaNdlela,” Mazwakhe's uncle greets. He is always in fear, his nephew is a wanted man and he might receive the news of his death any day.

“Is Mazwakhe alive?” he asks before Mamkhulu can breathe a word.

“I can say he is okay.” She sighs. Her face is full of concern, they quickly give her a chair to sit and look at her curiously.

“You can say? Is something wrong with him?”

She exhales again, whatever she's about to say is heavy.

“The child wants to know the truth. This thing is eating him. He has lost weight, he's now just a sticksweet and you only see by his head that it's him.”

The uncle looks at his wife confused.

“I'm here to check if you may have any knowledge on who his mother dated before my husband.”

“What? My sister only dated your husband, they married in front of the whole community.”

His wife clears her throat. This isn't time to be defensive of a dead sister, especially when it concerns their nephew's health.

“Baba remember Sis' Celiwe was about to send ucu to Madoda Mthembu when your mother arranged with Gog' Ngwane that she must take Mlungisi instead, since they had enough cows.”

“Yeah, but she didn't send it. Mlungisi was the only man she was with.” Mazwakhe's uncle insists.

Mamkhulu rubs her hands together, her head is cocked to the side and sadness has dimmed her eyes.

“This saddens us as the Ngwane family. The boy just found out he has a son and Madoda's son turned out to be an uncle,” she says.

“Who said that nonsense?” Mazwakhe's uncle roars.

“They did a blood test, you also know scientists and their technology, they don't lie.” She clears her throat and switches back to her sad face.

“What does that mean? That my sister-in-law was



already pregnant when she met your husband?” The uncle's wife asks with her eyes widen.

“Or she never stopped seeing Madoda. She might've stayed with Ngwane because she was forced to and we were wealthy back then. Madoda only became rich after the bank robbery.” She clears her throat and chuckles. “Well, everyone knows how he started, we just choose not to talk about it.”

“You're trying to tell me Mazwakhe is Madoda's son?” This is confusing the uncle. He remembers how picky his parents were when it came to who his sisters married. Unfortunately Madoda was a part of the guys who weren't the cut they wanted. The Mthembus were very poor back then but his sister was unstoppable, she wanted Madoda. After umemulo they heard that she was planning to send ucu to the Mthembus and his parents quickly arranged a better man for her. Even though Mlungisi was already married by then he didn't have a problem when he was asked to take Celiwe as the second wife. Celiwe was the most beautiful girl in

the village and most men wanted her.

“If he is MaMbonambi’s son's half-brother then he is definitely not a Ngwane. The saddest thing is that this issue is taking a toll on his health.”

Mazwakhe's uncle exhales and stares into space silently. Why did his sister hid such a big secret? Mazwakhe killed Madoda, his own father! No matter how poor a person is they deserve a chance with their child. She should've told Madoda that she was carrying his child, surely he would've made a plan regardless of his home situation.

At the end life rolled like a ball, the man he thought was capable of raising her son lost himself in four marriages, his financial state took a knock as more children were breed and more wives had to be taken care of. And the man she robbed a chance of being a father rose up like a day. He was that one family member God had created to break the family curse. No, he didn't rob a bank. He got a job, saved money and started off with chickens.

They serve Mamkhulu tea and scones while trying to put pieces together. Eventually it's clear to everyone that Mazwakhe was conceived in marriage but the egg-scorer was not Mlungisi. His mother didn't stop dating Madoda immediately, their love was too strong to just let go and maybe they broke up only when Madoda left for Durban.

It's Mamkhulu's longest journey, she cannot wait to get home and break the news to everyone. The heir isn't a true heir after all. Nkanyiso needs to take over immediately, at least she'll be able to control him, he is not hot-headed as Mazwakhe. Maybe he can sell two cows and Mamkhulu will be able to renew her furniture.

Mazwakhe is standing below the kraal scrolling his phone. Mamkhulu passes silently, when she walks past Zandile's rondavel she asks her to call everyone together in her kitchen.

“What happened?” Two voices ask simultaneously.

“He is not a Ngwane. His uncle confirmed it, he is a

bastard child and he needs to leave.”

“Mamkhulu are you sure?” Khethile asks.

“Do I look like I'm joking? They confirmed it, his aunt knows the story from top to bottom, from when she started dating Madoda to when she seduced my husband...I mean our husband.”

“Celiwe was once involved with Madoda?” It's a shock to many. Mamkhulu narrates the story until they're all satisfied. They send for Mlungisi's cousin, he is the one they report family matters to, he is above Mazwakhe's position in the family.

It's almost dark when he arrives, they give him the bench and gather on a reedmat. He isn't much surprised when they break the news to him.

Mazwakhe has never behaved like a Ngwane, none of them were ever aggressive, the Ngwanes have always been known as gentlemen.

“There's nothing we can do about it. He was conceived in marriage and that makes him one of our own regardless of the difference in blood,” he says.

“Too bad Baba, I want him gone. The Mthembus killed our husband and we are not going to shelter one of them.”

“But he fought for Mlungisi’s death,” Ngwane's cousin says.

“There was no need, if he didn't kill Madoda his bloody brothers wouldn't have killed our husband in return. He has caused enough havoc in this family, he should go find his family and that's it.”

Many heads nod in agreement to what Mamkhulu said. Unfortunately there is nothing much Ngwane's cousin can do as Mamkhulu’s voice stands last as the first wife.

“Zandile call him, tell him to come with the bakkie's keys.”

Zandile wastes no time, she rushes out and look for Mazwakhe. He just closed the kraal and taking out his muddy boots.

“The elders are asking for you, please bring the bakkie keys with you.”

“Why? Is someone sick?” He rushes inside the house without waiting for an answer and grabs the keys of his father’s bakkie.

All eyes are on him as he makes his way in. Nobody looks sick, he starts wondering what the meeting is all about, seemingly everyone is here.

“Is everything alright?” he asks.

“Sit down son.”

He does as told, a moment of silence passes.

“Mazwakhe we have raised you, practically all of us. We didn't discriminate you and Ngwane did everything for you. Unfortunately the time has come for you to go to your family.”

“What???” Mazwakhe frowns.

“You're not a Ngwane, your mother's family knows that too. Your mother was already pregnant when he married Ngwane, or she slept with him behind our backs, we don't know. All we know is that only Zanamuhla is a Ngwane.”

Mazwakhe's face heats up. He has to stay in control

of his breathing and calm himself down.

“If Mlungisi knew that you'd be the cause of his death he would've divorced your mother. But he didn't know the truth and now it's up to me to decide. I do not need you here anymore, you only have this night to pack,” Mamkhulu says.

“He must just hand over the car keys,” -Khethile.

“Well, I'm not going anywhere, this is my home.” He rises up to leave and Mamkhulu stops him harshly.

“You don't want us to take this to court and embarrass you. Nkanyiso is the heir of this family and for your mother's sake give us the car keys and go start packing.”

“Sorry son, there's nothing I can do now. I wish your mother had told my cousin the truth early but I'm happy we raised you and you're a grown man today.”

Mazwakhe's world comes into an end. His mother is not present to tell him the reason why he destroyed his life like this. What did he do to deserve this life.

They take everything and leave only what belonged to his mother. He has to leave the home he's always known as his own, his mother's grave and all the memories.

He calls Nandi, he doesn't want to bother his sister, he knows how much she worries and he doesn't want to disturb her studies.

“Mbuyazi,” Nandi answers.

He draws a huge breath. Being called a Ngwane cuts deep into a fresh wound. He desperately wants the surname, he doesn't want to be a Mthembu. His father was Mlungisi, he raised him and taught him everything he knows.

“Nandi I'm homeless,” he says.

“What? Did they burn your home again?”

“No, I'm related to Busikhaya because my mother lied. She made me with another man and raised me with another one. My whole life has been a lie.” The wind fans his face and forces a tear out of his eye.

“What about ilobola and our wedding?” Nandi asks.



“They took everything. I only have a bag of my clothes and I will take the first taxi to Johannesburg tomorrow.”

“Do you have money at least? Did you take anything from the inheritance?”

“No,” -Mazwakhe.

The call ends.

He frowns and looks at the screen. It must be the network, he dials her number and calls again.

It goes straight to voicemail. He logs on WhatsApp and texts her, it only ticks once, the profile picture is blank and....he is blocked.

Mazwakhe does what he has never thought he'd do. He dials Busikhaya's number and calls him.

“Mazwakhe,” he answers.

Their beef didn't automatically end because they found out they were related. A lot happened between them, they can't just forgive and forget.

“Busikhaya.”

A moment of silence passes.

“Thank you for raising him up and thank you for not disowning him when you found out the truth.”

“Well, I love him,” -Busikhaya.

“I love him too but I cannot give him what you're giving him. I cannot even give him a home. I don't know when I'm going to see him, I hope it will be soon....please tell Ngcwethi to take care of my sister.”

“Are you killing yourself?” Busikhaya asks.

“I have no experience in killing dead people. If you do get a chance tell Qophelo that he has an uncle, he's hustling in Johannesburg and when things come together he will visit him. Tell him that uncle loves him so much.” A tear escapes his eye as he says the last words, he quickly wipes it away because a man doesn't cry.

The call leaves Busikhaya uncomfortable. He

knows Mazwakhe, he doesn't talk that way and he never softens his tone for anyone. For Zanamuhla and Qophelo's sake he hopes that nothing is wrong with him.

[11/19, 09:47] : Chapter Seventeen

ZANAMUHLA

We are heading to a long weekend, Bontle's bag is already packed, she's going home. I'm not sure yet what I'll be doing, I could go to the Mthembus but I don't want to be that girlfriend who's always there. I don't have much interest about going home since Mazwakhe is not there. He was already in Johannesburg when he called. Yes Qophelo is his son and he's letting Busikhaya raise him. I'm the proudest sister alive. He was able to put his feelings aside and just do what's best for his son.

“Any plans?” Vuyiswa walks in wearing pyjamas. I guess it'll be just me and her throughout the long weekend since Julia is leaving as well.

“Nope. You?”

“Someone is picking me up later.”

Wrong guess. What the hell am I going to do here alone?

“Have you checked on Mazwi?” she asks with concern.

“No. Why are you worried about him?”

She shrugs her shoulders and disappears in the kitchen. What's her story? Mazwakhe doesn't even know her name and they're not even a match. Even if they were, Mazwakhe is getting married soon.

Speaking of that, I should call him and find out when Nandi wants to meet up. Maybe we can even meet up this weekend, I could do with some time out.

“Hlahla.”

“Mbuyazi how are you doing?”

Silence.

“Mazwakhe?”

“I'm fine Hlahla.” He sounds opposite of what he's

saying.

“I'm ready to meet with Nandi and this weekend is fine, I have nothing to do anyway,” I say.

“We broke up, don't bother.”

Oh, what did I say? I'd say it's a gift, I foresee breakups.

“That ended really fast, but I'm not surprised, I knew before I even met her that she wasn't genuine. I'm just sad that my weekend will be boring throughout.”

“Why are you not going to Ngcwethi?”

Are my ears functioning properly? What did I just hear? Him asking me why I'm not visiting Ngcwethi!

“Is that Mazwakhe, my brother?” I ask.

“Yes. At least you will be safe with him.”

We are getting somewhere. I'm glad Ngcwethi has won his trust, it took a while and hopefully he'll be able to sit down and talk with the Mthembus one day.

“No I'd rather go home, that's if I'm allowed to,” I say.

“It's your home Hlahla, you can go. But please be careful, eat only what you prepared yourself.”

He just planted another doubt. It's easy being at home if he is also around. He keeps his eyes on everything, I'm not used to the life of frequently checking behind my shoulders. Home is where I'm supposed to be free.

“When are you coming home?” I ask.

“I'm not sure yet.” He exhales deeply.

“Alright, take care of yourself there. Vuyiswa and I are worried about you.”

“Whaaat?” Vuyiswa's voice behind me.

Oops! She heard that. I receive a dead look and end the call.

“I said no lie, you were worried about him,” I defend myself.

“And you just had to tell him? Wow Zano, now your brother will think I want him.” She storms out.

She's really angry. I didn't know it was supposed to stay a secret.

Later an old ugly man fetches her. They ask me to tag along, Vuyiswa is just feeling sorry for me but after what happened the last time I got in the car with a stranger I don't think I'll ever trust men I don't know.

Instead of being a potato on the couch I must do some school work. Exams are just a month away, I need to prepare and make sure my assessment is in order.

Oh, before I forget let me send that email to the bursary funder. I need to change my banking details, I don't even know if that's allowed, my current bank charges are insane. I had to open a student's account for my allowance.

I get response instantly. There's a link I need to follow, it's much easier online, within five minutes I'm done and just browsing through T&C's. I'm that bored, I'm reading everything on their site and one thing catches my eye.

Jama Ranch House? What do they have to do with my bursary? Why are they on this website?

Deep breath. I put my FBI cap on, it's time to investigate. In one of the pages there's an executive signature and I have seen it before. The long sliding B that connects to M, I have no doubt that Busikhaya signed there. He hated me when I got this bursary, meaning Ngcwethi orchestrated this whole thing and he hasn't found one reason to let me know. I thought we were past the secret stage.

He calls persistently. He knows there's something wrong and that makes me even more angry. I take the first taxi home, I cannot sit in the building they own and probably planted cameras to watch every move I make. I can't believe Ngcwethi has been lying straight to my face. Wow! To even think I was proud of myself thinking I earned this bursary. They're feeding me every month, sending allowances and transport fee. Basically I'm their charity case.



It's late when I get home. The bakkie is here?  
Mazwakhe said he was in Johannesburg, how did  
get there if the car is here?

I walk past his rondavel, it's locked so he is certainly  
not home. Well, I need to greet and let everyone  
know that I'm home. Hopefully they don't bring up  
the Ngcwethi drama.

“Zanamuhla you're home.” It's Zandile, also making  
her way to Mamkhulu's kitchen which serves as the  
family gathering place.

I'm just surprised by her new look. Did she get a  
blesser or something? Nobody ever rocks such a  
long weave for no special event in this community.  
And that being an exaggeration, most of us don't  
rock weaves, period!

DSTV dish? Where am I?

“Who won Lotto?” I ask.

“You mean we have to win Lotto in order to afford  
things? And shouldn't you be here with abakhongi?”

People inside the house heard that, when we walk in their eyes are glued on me.

“Good question Zandile.” Mamkhulu jumping into the conversation.

“They came and got rejected. Am I welcomed here?”

“You're already here.” She says turning back to the dough she was rolling. I guess they're okay with it, I walk in and formally greet.

“How did Mazwakhe get to Johannesburg, I see the bakkie parked on the yard?” I ask.

They look at one another. For a moment nobody comes with an answer. Their reaction gives me a strange feeling.

“He left it for Nkanyiso.” Finally Zandile says.

“Did he not talk to you?” Nkanyiso asks.

“We talked a few days ago and he was occupied with work.”

He nods. Nobody says anything. Maybe they were still gossiping about us and I'm making them uncomfortable.

“I’m going to bed,” I say.

“When are you leaving?” Zandile.

She cannot even wait, I haven't been here even an hour for crying out loud.

“Monday,” I say.

“Tell that Mthembu boy we want our cows. They also need to cleanse this home as they have attacked and killed. Nkanyiso and Uncle Ngwane will hold the negotiations,” Mamkhulu says.

What on earth! Since when Nkanyiso occupies such a senior position in this family?

“No. Mazwakhe is the one who will hold the negotiations and I'm waiting for him to be ready,” I say.

“Do you know how much we can get off the Mthembus if we get the King involved? Firstly, they kidnapped you. Secondly, they took your virginity and God knows if you haven't fallen pregnant yet and lastly they killed your father, fired bullets inside our premises and burnt your mother's house. If you

love that boy and you're serious about marrying him you'll forget about your stubborn brother and let us do this the rightful way.”

I know the Mthembus will manipulate their way, these are just dead threats. However, I want to be with Ngcwethi rightfully.

I'm confused as hell. I know that I want my brother to be in charge of everything and it's his duty as the first son in the family. He stands in for my father on everything.

His phone rings unanswered. I want to run this past him, if he's not okay with it then we are putting everything on hold until he agrees to accept lobola.

“Hlahla.” Oh finally!

“Why are you not answering?”

“I just answered.”

He's in one of his foul moods.

“I need to talk to you about something important, loosen up,” I say.

I hear him exhaling deeply.

“I’m listening,” he says.

“Mamkhulu wants lobola negotiations to start, she says Nkanyiso and Uncle Ngwane will be in charge.” I expect him to get angry, how dare Mamkhulu makes such decisions without him!

“What do you want?” That’s what he asks instead of lashing out.

“Me? I want to be with Ngcwethi and I want you to approve and walk me down the aisle.” My mind works really fast. Walk down the aisle? Really?

“Okay, let them proceed.”

Did he just approve of Ngcwethi and I? It’s going to rain cats and dogs.

“When are you coming home?” I cannot hold my excitement.

“I’m not sure yet,” he says what he’s been saying the whole week. I hope there’s no Gau-bitch holding him by balls and stopping him from coming home.

“I love you mcwa mncwa!” I say.

He doesn't say anything but I can bet he wasn't holding back on telling Nandi that he loved her.

“So you're going to end the call without saying anything?” I ask.

“You're my sister Hlahla, the only person I have and I'd do anything to protect you. Your happiness means everything to me, sometimes I even think I know what makes you happy more than you do and take drastic decisions. But all in all, I'll always have your best interest at heart. With that said, yes ngiyakuthanda khanda lakho.”

I burst out laughing. The call leaves me on high spirit, I don't even pay attention to the next call I just answer and greet joyfully.

“Zanamuhla what did I do?” His voice...the bursary funder...my very own NSFAS. Why did I answer?

“Ngcwethi.” I switch to my no-nonsense tone.

“I've been trying to get hold of you since yesterday. Where are you?” He's down. I try not to sympathize with his sadness this time. No, I'm angry at him.

“When are you allocating my September allowance?” I ask.

“What do you mean? Do you need money?” So he's going to act dumb! This guy is testing me, both him and his ancestors.

“I need you to tell me why you funded me with a bursary? Is it because your family is rich and you wanted a poor girl to dust up? Or you felt guilty that you kidnapped me and cost me my last semester?”

Silence. Now he can't speak?!

“Ngcwethi answer me.” I'm yelling.

“Yes I felt guilty. I don't normally act impulsively, what happened that night shouldn't have happened. I hate myself for burning your mother's house and for everything my family has done to yours.”

I can feel my body melting. I should be angry and it should stay that way. But fuck, I have a soft spot for this guy, especially if he's sad.

“If I had power I'd give you your parents back as well. Anything to complete your world, to fulfil your

dreams and make you happy.”

He got me. I'm over whatever happened. Bursary and scheming behind my back, it's all behind now.

“I have good news.” I'm back at the loving girlfriend tone.

“Really?” There's a sigh. He's relieved.

“My family is ready for negotiations. Mazwakhe gave Nkanyiso and my uncle a go-ahead. He finally approved of us.” I'm beaming with joy.

“Oh!” Definitely not the response I expected. I mean where did he dump his excitement?

“Did you change your mind about us Ngcwethi?” I should know if he's Nandi Reloaded.

“No, not at all. I'm just surprised by the sudden change of things. I'm happy sthandwa sami.” Again, he forgets to even fake it in his voice. He sounds worried instead of happy.

“Are we good now? You will answer my calls?” he asks.

“Yes but don't ever do things behind my back



again.”

“I’m sorry babe, from now on there’ll be no secrets. And my uncles will be in your home soon,” he says.

It was rough. The ups and downs were there. Along the way we got wounded, but finally we are here.

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### \*\*\*THE MTHEMBU OFFICES\*\*\*

Ngcwethi sighs heavily. They're all worried. Something happened at the Ngwanes, all of them know Mazwakhe well and he wouldn't just leave his sister's fate on the Ngwane's hands. He's been protective of her, it's so unlike him to just pull out from everything.

“Maybe MaMbonambi was right. I mean everything is corresponding to what she claimed, the paternity

results showing that you two are blood related, Ndaba hating that family for unknown reasons and now Mazwakhe is gone.” Busikhaya interprets thoughtfully.

“Maybe he found out the truth and failed to stomach it. You all know how hard-headed he is.” Mnotho shrugging his shoulders.

“He's like someone I can't mention,” Mndeni says and receives a dead eye from Busikhaya.

“So what are we going to do?” All eyes go to Busikhaya. This concerns the biological father of his son. Mazwakhe turned out to be Qophelo's real father and their half-brother. Sooner or later they have to hatch things out and find a way forward.

“We cannot do anything until he reaches out. He kept this from his sister, we should let him do it his way. We all know the kind of a person he is.”

“Yeah, right.” Mndeni clears his throat.

Busikhaya is getting fed up with the mockery. He excuses himself and walks out for a smoke. His brothers don't waste time, they start discussing him

and how shady he is lately.

“Is he seeing someone?” Mnotho asks curiously.

“I think I know who it is. Remember the lady who ran over me with a car? He was looking at her strangely in the hospital and they were vibing secretly,” Ngcwethi says.

“Did she look genuine? We certainly don't need another Nombuso. Forgive me, but this Qophelo issue just proves that you can't trust women easily,” Mnotho says with his hands lifted up.

“What do you know about women? You nut in your hand.” -Mndeni.

“Shut the fuck up, you attract men,” Mnotho strikes back.

The stupid argument goes on, Ngcwethi doesn't bother with them, he gets on the phone and calls Zanamuhla.

There's a car pulling up. Busikhaya raises his brows and continues puffing his cigarette. Their schedule

for the day is clear, they're just passing time before going home. Who could this be?

A guy in his mid-twenties steps out in a dazzling brown fur coat, skimpy jeans and green sneakers. In his hand he's holding a bunch of flowers. He looks very confident, even Busikhaya's piercing look doesn't intimidate him, he keeps his Naomi Campbell walk until he stops in front of Busikhaya.

He takes his shades off, looks straight into his eyes and smiles very friendly.

“Am I at the right place? I'm looking for Mndeni Mthembu?”

Busikhaya instantly remembers the restaurant story Ngcwethi had narrated for them. This cannot happen after the mockery Mndeni was giving him inside the office!

“Follow me.” His face remains cold but deep down inside he's dancing like a pantsula from Soweto.

“We have a guest.” He walks in and all eyes go to the person behind him. Mndeni can faint anytime, his face puffs up within a second.

Busikhaya is kind enough to give his seat to the guest and squeezes himself between Ngcwethi and Mndeni.

“Hello,” Mnotho greets.

“Little brother?” J ula smiling even wider.

“Yes, and you are?” He doesn't return the smile. Well, he is cold like Busikhaya...and Mazwakhe, if it's not too early to add.

“I'm J ulani Khumalo but you can call me J ula.” His eyes run to Mndeni who looks like the universe just turned its back on him.

“You have a crush on my brother?” Busikhaya asks.

J ula's face brightens up. “That's an understatement, I'm in love with him.”

“But he is not gay,” Mnotho says with a frown.

“And I don't want him to be. I just need a chance to show him how much I love him,” J ula says boldly.

“What attract you to him?” Busikhaya.

“Everything. The muscles, his voice, the way he

walks and how he breathes.” He could go on and on, but the sun is already setting down.

“But that's not all there is to him. He is a hardworking man, goal-driven, he's got his nose on the grinding stone and very smart,” Busikhaya says.

Mndeni remains dead quiet. Ngcwethi is trying very hard to hold his laughter from escaping, Mnotho keeps nudging him with an elbow and showing him Mndeni's face.

“The question is what are you bringing to the table?” -Busikhaya. He's having a time of his life.

Jula lifts one leg over his knee and leans comfortably on the chair.

“Nothing. I'm the table.”

“Oh wow!” Busikhaya lifts his hands up in surrender.

“Let's give them some space.” He directs to Ngcwethi and Mnotho, still in disbelief.

“She is the whole table, if that's not a queen right there I don't know what it is.” He chuckles.

They have to pull Mnotho out of the door. He

doesn't want to leave before seeing how everything rolls out.

“I like her.” Busikhaya says as they make their way to the cars.

“It's not her, it's him. Zanamuhla will kill you if she hears you saying that.” -Ngcwethi.

“Whatever he is, I want to see him frequently.”

Mnotho grunts in disapproval. As fun as it is seeing Mndeni getting uncomfortable, he doesn't want his brother to date men.

[11/19, 09:47] : Chapter Eighteen

ZANAMUHLA

Lobola negotiations are taking place in two weeks. I'm very excited and wish Ngcwethi can share the same excitement.

He's definitely not giving the reaction I expected, given the bumpy road that led us here, we should be over the moon. He's in one of those moods, you

only get one word out of his mouth, he's keeping distance from everyone and that makes me wonder why he even brought me here.

He walks through the door and stands next to the bed.

“You're here?” he asks.

Where else can I be? Everyone knows me but that doesn't mean I can just roam around the yard.

“Yes,” I give him a taste of his own medicine. One word answer and I'm back to my business.

“Who are you chatting to?” He peeks over my phone.

Really now? I give him a look and toss it on the pillow. He sits next to me and rubs his palms on his knees.

“You've hardly spent time with me since yesterday, it makes me wonder why I'm even here,” I say.

“I'm sorry.” That's it? I love an apology when expressed for the right reasons, and he's only saying sorry to cut the conversation.

“Ngcwethi, this is how life with you is like? One day



you wake and decide to shut everyone out?” I don't even know how people live with him.

“Zanamuhla not today!” He shuts his eyes and releases a deep breath.

“We are off today?” I'm on my feet, eyebrow raised and brewing anger. So one day we are on and one day we are not! Basically everyone is under his mercy.

“Ungathethi (Don't raise your voice)” It's a warning. I nod my head, slide into my flip-flops and walk out.

I walk in the kitchen, Mnotho and Qophelo are washing dishes. MaMbonambi doesn't want me here yet, she has to formally give me a doek to wear as soon as I officially become a fiance, but today I need to get away from her son and his moods.

“Do you need any help?” I ask.

“Yes,” -Qophelo.

“Nooo!” Mnotho objects.

I stand still, looking at each of them with my

eyebrows lifted.

“You can go relax in your room, we got this,”  
Mnotho says.

I can't miss the displeasure on Qophelo's face.

“I actually want to be away from the room that's  
why I'm here,” I say.

Mnotho frowns. I grab a cloth and start wiping  
rinsed plates without waiting for further objections.  
They let me be, after packing the plates inside the  
cupboard we go to the main house and watch TV. It  
hasn't really sunk in to me that Qophelo is a  
Ngwane. My brother's son! What I don't understand  
is why he fits so much in this family? Doesn't  
Ngcwethi sense things like this? Okay, maybe not.  
But everyone in this family is wearing isiphandla,  
isn't Qophelo supposed to be sick for wearing  
isiphandla that doesn't belong to him? Impepho  
from strange ancestors should affects him some  
way.

Busikhaya arrives just after eight, he has been  
AWOL the whole day. I wonder if he's seeing

someone. He's handling Qophelo's issue pretty amazing, like he's getting comfort somewhere. I mean it's not a light discovery to find out that you're not the father of a child you've raised from birth.

“Where's Ngcwethi?” He's looking at me.

I shrug my shoulders. Concern rises in his eyes. He turns to Mnotho and narrows his eyes.

“He's down,” Mnotho says.

“Ooh.” It sounds like they're used to it. They start discussing business, their voices rise above the movie. Qophelo is the first one to leave, I stay a few minutes then bid goodnight.

Passing by MaMbonambi bedroom's window I hear Mndeni and Ngcwethi's voices inside.

“I don't have a good feeling about this.” -Ngcwethi.

“Neither do I, but you wanted this bafo and it's finally happening. He's a grown man, he knows what he's doing.” Mndeni.

There's some silence.

“Ndaba would've wanted him in the family

business,” -Mndeni again.

“I don't see it happening,” Ngcwethi says.

That silence again. It's cold outside, I don't know what they're talking about and eavesdropping at your in-laws causes bad lucks.

It's almost 10pm and Ngcwethi is not back from his mother's bedroom. So he didn't hear anything I said about him bringing me here and not spending time with me? Now he wants me to sleep all alone.

I call him and his phone rings under the pillow. Even great! I let out a sigh and slide under covers. His phone keeps beeping with notifications. I don't snoop through people's phones but his is tempting me.

Only MTN texts you more than your boyfriend. I read and mark messages as unread, the power of technology! Just as I press the lock button I see a familiar cellphone number. Why the heck is Vuyiswa texting my boyfriend?! I didn't even know they knew each other to this level.

There's money involved, more like payment of some sort. He's been questioning her about alcohol. Why does it matter to him if Vuyiswa drinks? They had a heated argument about it....and why is my name in their conversations?

They're also calling each other, not frequently as they text. I put the phone away confused as hell. What is going on here? I call Vuyiswa right away. She drops my call and follows up with a text saying we'll talk in the morning.

I'm a bomb waiting to explode. How long have they known each other? Before me or after me. It's too early to be cheated on. Too early.

“You're still up?”

He thought I'd be fast asleep and he'd chat to Vuyiswa without any disturbances. I remain quiet and watch as he takes his clothes out, closes the door and climbs on bed like World War III isn't about to begin.

“You know my love, I'm worried about your brother

excluding himself from everything. If he really accept us he should at least be there on the day of negotiations.” He turns off the light, closes the space between us and wraps his arms around me.

“Did he say anything?” he asks.

I reach up and switch the light on. I need to see his face when he tries to explain how he knows Vuyiswa.

“Okay what's going on?” he asks as his eyes meet my icy glare.

“What's going on between you and Vuyiswa?” I ask and he gives me the exact reaction I wanted to see. Eyes all out, his Adam's apple twitching with a huge gulp and his body instantly freezing beside me.

“Nothing. Why do you ask?” He finally manages to ask.

“Com' on, you can do better than that.” Cheating and lying come as a special combo of talents. If you cheat lying comes naturally. How long has he been in this department? He's so immature.

“I don't know what you're talking about Zano,” he says.

“I saw her texts in your phone. I just want to know the truth. Was it me before her or her before me?” I ask.

“Babe please calm down, it's not what you think.”

Oh, the famous line! I roll off bed and find my clothes.

“Please take me home,” I say.

“I'm not cheating Zanamuhla.” He's in front of me, grabbing my clothes away and pushing me back. I hit the wall with my back and I cannot reverse any further.

“Can we talk about this some other day. You are already angry Zano, you're going to raise your voice at me and I won't be able to handle it.”

He's full of surprises. So I'm supposed to pause all these emotions and hurt for another day. I'm supposed to just switch back to normalcy and act as if nothing happened because the Mighty

Ngcwethi has been having a bad day.

“Either you're telling me now or you're taking me back home,” I say.

“Zano!” He sighs and steps back.

“Are you sleeping with her?”

“Geez! No Zanamuhla.” He grabs his head and curses. I follow him and block his way. He's panting. I want the truth and I want it now.

“I'm sorry,” he says.

Fuck life! The famous question would be, where did I go wrong, and he'll obvious say it's not me it's him.

“My friend Ngcwethi? Out of all people you could've cheated on me with!” I turn around, tears are threatening to burst out. Why would he hurt me like this after everything I've been through for him.

“I did not cheat.” There's so much fear in his voice. I feel him behind me, he captures me in his arms and turns my face to him.

“I hired her to keep an eye on you.”



WTF!!!!

“I don't understand.” My voice is trembling.

“Sthandwa sami I swear I didn't do all this to spite you. I needed to make sure that you were okay all the time. Getting you friends was the only way.”

My ears might be playing tricks on me. This can't be true.

“You hired Vuyiswa to act like my friend?” I ask.

“I wanted you to be comfortable when you get there. You had no friends previously and I knew that you needed.....”

J eeeez! He thinks he knows what I need. First it was the bursary, now my friends whom I share a kitchen with, are fake. All this was done for Zanamuhla's benefit?!

“No you did this for your own selfish reasons. No wonder Vuyiswa always keep tabs on me, she's monitoring my every move so that she can report back to you and earn money.”

This hurts more. Cheating was a better option for

him. I would've thrown a tantrum, blocked him for a few days and forgave him. Maybe I would've reminded him twice a week about the pain he put me through and brought it up as my defense whenever I do him wrong.

“Are you paying Bontle as well?” I ask.

“Yes.”

“Wow Ngcwethi!”

This exhausts me. I sink on bed, lift the covers to my chest and digest everything. I'm capable of making my own friends, my brother was paying for my education and maintaining me. One foot in my life and Ngcwethi thinks he can do everything better.

“I can sleep in the next room until.....”

“No!” What the fuck he thinks is going on here? He's not running away from the fire he ignited. He's sleeping right here on bed with me. I'm going to sit like this, lost in deep thoughts and not saying another word. He won't be sure what my next move is. He'll toss and turn the whole night.

He climbs on bed slowly and slides under covers like a sick snake. I switch the light off and sit with my back leaning on the headboard.

A long moment of silence passes. He's not asleep, not even trying to, eventually he clears his throat and lifts his head up.

“Please punish me if you want to,” he says.

It's not like I can spank him, he's tall and huge.

“Sleep Ngcwethi, I'm mourning the fake friendship.”

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He wakes up before me and that makes me angry. I wanted to wake up first, he destroyed my plans as he usual. I'm leaving later, going back to my fake friends, I don't even know how I'm going to face them.

“I was hoping we'd talk before breakfast.” He stands by the door, brushing his neck and looking ugly.

“What else have you done? Paid nature for my oxygen because you're Ngcwethi Mthembu?” I tie the scarf around my head, give him the once-over look and walk out.

I don't know if anyone ever cooks breakfast here besides Mndeni. I offer to help, he asks that I prepare Ngcwethi's breakfast since he's making bread and eggs. Pretending to be happy is an exhausting sport really. I have to smile everytime he brings up his name, which annoys me to the core at the moment.

“You need to get a boyfriend for your friend. I'm really tired of him stalking me, he's going to turn me into someone I'm not.” He passes a tray to me.

“J ulani?” I frown.

“I'm going to hurt him. It's not funny anymore.”

J ula what have you done again? I heard about the flowers stunt and I was hoping it was the last attempt.

“I will talk to him. Hopefully he was not hired too.”

“What is that supposed to mean?” he asks.

“Your brother has this talent of hiring people to come into my life. I wouldn't be surprised if Julani was hired as well.”

“That's hectic.” He fakes the shock but I can see right through him. He knows everything his brother does.

“But I'm going to deal with him and he won't know what's coming to him,” I say.

His eyes widen. “What are you going to do to him?”

“I don't know yet but his ancestors won't be able to help him when I do.” I pick the tray and walk out. Passing the message through a traitor is more effective than electronic mail. I know Ngcwethi will receive this update immediately.

We gather around the table and have breakfast. I didn't warm Ngcwethi's food, he's having cold leftovers and doesn't seem to pick any offence. I should've added salt, I would've loved to hear him laying out his complaint.

“Zanamuhla if your brother calls please let him know that I would like to speak with him one day,” MaMbonambi says.

There's a strange look shared on the table. I nod my head and carry on eating. Mazwakhe may have made peace with my relationship with Ngcwethi but I doubt he's in that place of holding conversations with the Mthembus yet. I mean he gave up lobola negotiations, there's a slim chance of him getting on the call with MaMbonambi.

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NONTOBEKO

“Here is your tea Sis.”

Jeez! Is he a spy or something? He moves very quiet, no footsteps, no breath.

“I didn't mean to scare you,” he says.

Deep breath. I force out a smile.

“It's fine Mshibe and thank you for the tea. It's just what I needed for this cold day.” I push the laptop aside and clear scattered documents from the desk. Working home isn't fun as I thought it would be. There's more pressure and endless calls. I have more fun things I could do, like lying on bed and listening to some Indie Arie.

“I did not make it,” he says.

I look up with a frown. What is that supposed to mean? He's the only person I'm living with here.

“You did not?” I ask.

His eyes stay on the cup. Am I missing something? This is one of my favourite tea cups....well except that it has a new design that I don't know anything of; his initials, a red heart and my initials at the bottom. It's a mystery how the tea immediately tastes differently, my smile reaches my ears and Mshibe looks hell uncomfortable.

“I love it.” I'm beaming with joy, over a cup of tea.

This boy cannot even force a smile, all he does is look around everytime like he's expecting someone

to attack him.

“He made the tea and left. He didn't want to disturb you, he said he'll come back later,” he says.

My heart sinks but I'm comforted by the cup of tea. He popped in during the day, made me a cup of green tea, paid attention into adding a bit of ginger, and then left.

“I can't believe he already know what I like and how I like it. Is it too early to call it love?” I sip and a giggle slips out as I go for a second sip. I'm like a teenager falling in love for the first time.

“I don't have much faith in love so I wouldn't know.”

After everything I've been through I shouldn't have any faith either, but my heart is that stubborn. It loves, they break it, it looks for someone else that's going to break it again.

I pick up the phone and call him as soon as Mshibe walks out of my study. It sounds like he's on the road.

“You left without saying hello.”



“You were busy.”

“But still you could've just peeked through the door and waved your hand before leaving.”

There's a hoot. I should stop being a nuisance he's driving for goodness' sake.

“I will call later, drive safely.” I end the call and get back to work. I haven't put a name to what I'm feeling for him yet, meanwhile he's declared clearly what he wants from me and he's not backing down. One thing I appreciate is that he's not giving me pressure nor rushing me into admitting anything.

The door shifts and opens.

This boy treats me like his pre-school student.

“Mshibe you need to find a hobby around the house. If I need anything I will shout.” Look, I even sent this email to the wrong address. “Aargh, fuck! It's dot-co-dot-za not dot-com,” I tell the stupid keyboard.

Someone chuckles as I punch the buttons with irritation.

“Mshi.....” What on earth! When did this one got here and how?

“Busikhaya!”

I forgot how intense his eyes are. He remains by the door, boring me with his stare and doesn't walk in.

“I came to say hello.” He waves his hand and smirks. He seriously needs to act his age, I didn't mean literally..urgh!

“You're impossible Busikhaya.” My lips curve into a stupid grin. All this blushing can't be good for my cheeks' health.

“Make me possible then.” He tucks his hands inside the pockets and finally walks in.

My throat is drier than Kalahari. I sit up straight and try to look bold.

“How?” I ask.

“Have lunch with me tomorrow as girlfriend and boyfriend.”

I'm taking my words back, he's not very patient. I'm still broken and he wants me, whether in pieces or

whole. I'm Bob The Builder here, not him. And I never live in the houses I've built, well not for long. He cannot build the builder, it makes no sense.

“We will spin.” He takes out his wallet and pulls a coin. I cannot believe this. Not even primary school kids play this game anymore.

“If it's a head I'm your boyfriend and if it's a tail you're my girlfriend.” Does that even make sense? Both results will mean one thing, that him and I are officially dating.

He places it on his palm and shows it to me. “See, I'm not cheating.”

“Busikhaya this is stupid.”

He pushes back some documents to create space for his spin. He twists the coin, it spins and we both watch with anticipation.

It's a tail. So I lose just like that? No, I'm not letting that happen. I take the coin and spin it myself. For the first time he lets his smile broaden. I can't believe a spinning coin is one of the things he finds amusing.

It's a tail again. This is witchcraft, how is this possible? I should've used my own coin, it wouldn't have betrayed me.

“Tomorrow, 12h30 be ready girlfriend.” He winks, blows a kiss and walks out like a captain who just won the world cup.

Okay think Nontobeko, what are you wearing tomorrow at 12h30???

[11/19, 09:48] : Chapter Nineteen

ZANAMUHLA

Ignoring Bontle is easy. If you don't talk she doesn't talk, that's naturally how she is. But Vuyiswa doesn't get it. I'm angry at them, whatever fake friendship we had came to an end the day I found out they were getting paid for it.

“Can I help you pack?” She's all over my face. I let out a sigh and keep my attention at the pile of clothes I'm folding.

“Zano you're being unfair. We have apologized a

million times. Ngcwethi did this out of concern, you don't really have an ability to choose right friends, remember how you once got kidnapped and trafficked?”

She's unbelievable! I was trafficked and I know nothing about it.

“So you're my bodyguard? A drunkard one.”

“Call me names or whatever you want. Yes I do drink occasionally and Ngcwethi kind of hired me to befriend a girl named Zanamuhla, but that doesn't change the fact that I care about you.” She steps closer, lifts one dress and folds it the wrong way. My goodness! She cannot even fold clothes. Tell her to dash alcohol, the professionalism will amaze you.

“Because you're getting paid to care bitch!” I zip the bag and take it to the wardrobe. I don't need too many clothes, I'll be gone for two days only.

“So what? He has money floating in his bank, it's not like I'm ripping him off and making him poor.” She climbs on bed and starts taking selfies. She's

impossible, dealing with her is an extreme sport.

“I wanted you guys to come with me but I found out you were my hired friends. I deal with lot of pretense at home and I don't need more, especially tomorrow.”

“Is Mazwi coming?” That's all she's worried about? I just told her I cancelled their invitation. Deep down I was hoping she'd beg to come, I know her fake ass would keep an eye on things and make sure that my fake ass sisters don't mess things up. I'm the first daughter to be asked for a hand in marriage and I honestly don't trust them with my food. Tomorrow I won't be able to keep an eye on everything.

“No, he's not coming,” I say.

“That's so unlike him.”

She knows how Mazwakhe is like? I hope she was not hired to keep tabs on him as well.

“Work is keeping him busy.” I shrug my shoulders. Finding out he has a son has pushed him to work even more harder. I know he feels under pressure competing against Busikhaya for the father role.

Busikhaya can afford to give Qophelo anything and when Mazwakhe officially meet him he has to keep up with the same standards.

“Why don't we call him?” She pulls her braids, adjusts her dress and then scrolls down her phone. I crawl on bed and sit next to her. I miss my stuck-up brother and his rules.

Video call? I had no clue and she made sure that she's the beautiful one, braids tied appropriately and dress revealing a popping cleavage. I got no heads-up, I'm leaning over her shoulder looking ugly AF, oily face and unruly hair.

Well, I didn't think Mazwakhe would answer a video-call. He's not a people's person. Little things about human beings' interactions annoy him, one of them being frequent calls.

His face pops on the screen. He's lying on bed inside of what looks like a shack. Is he not in Johannesburg? Is it not like in TVs? Tall buildings and fancy interior designs. In my head Johannesburg is crowded by celebrities, you cannot

leave town without bumping into Somizi or Bonang, and everyone live the life of their dreams there. I mean all celebrities live there, aspiring singers become international stars when they make it that side. I was foolishly hoping to see Makhadzi dancing somewhere in his background.

“Are you in J ohannesburg?” I ask.

He sees me and scratches his head.

“Hlahla how are you?”

“I'm good. Where are you?”

“In my shack.”

He lives in a shack? Like he left our fancy home for this. Okay maybe not fancy, but it's build in concrete blocks, painted beautifully with properly organized walls.

“Are you well?” Vuyiswa asks with concern.

“I'm trying. I will get there soon.”

Guilt kicks in. I'm more concerned about the shack not being my ideal J ohannesburg and my fake friend had to ask how he is before me. So much for



a sister!

“What do you mean you're trying? Is there anything wrong?” Vuyiswa. I still don't understand why she worries about Mazwakhe this much...Oh my bad, it's Mazwi, in a very very soft tone.

“No. I'm just.....” He pauses and lets out a heavy sigh. “I have a lot of work, there's no time to rest but I'm not complaining.”

His face badly needs a rest, you can tell that he's slaving and not taking care of himself very well. But he's not the one to take advices from people. He always think that he knows what he's doing. If it was up to me he'd cut himself some slack and take some days off to pamper himself.

“Tomorrow I'm going home for lobola negotiations. I still wish you could be there but I understand that you have to work,” I say.

“Don't forget what I said, keep your eyes open Hlahla.”

I'm worried about that too. I won't be able to keep my eyes everywhere but I don't want him to worry. I

assure him that I'll stay on guard.

Vuyiswa looks worried for some reasons. I really want to stay angry at them but somehow I need them. Bontle is really good in the kitchen, I'd like to have her preparing food for abakhongi rather than Zandile and Khethile. Vuyiswa can have her ciders while making sure that no one messes my big day.

“I don't have money, but can you guys come with me tomorrow?” I ask.

Bontle's face lights up. She rises from the couch she's been grounded on the whole day. “Are you sure? Like I don't mind coming, I'd even use my own money to travel and stuff.”

“Thanks F, and you F?” I turn and look at Vuyiswa. F stands for fake by the way.

“I have nothing to wear, I have to hit the shops later.”

She can open a boutique from her wardrobe, I don't know what she means by saying she doesn't have

anything to wear.

“Thank you guys. I don't trust my family that much, I'll need you to keep an eye on everything.”

“Don't worry, we are going with you,” Bontle.

The door swings open.....

“Going with her to where?” J ula really doesn't have any manners. He makes his way in, sits comfortably on the couch and bore us with his stare.

“Was J ula not supposed to find out? Where are you all going and why am I not invited?” He lifts his leg over the knee and looks at each of us with a demanding face.

“I asked them to come home with me tomorrow and help with preparations and stuff,” I say.

“And I'm not asked to come because...?” He drills me with an icy stare. I don't know how to explain this to him. We don't have gays back home, my family has never met a gay person and their reaction might offend him.

“You don't want them to know that you have a gay

friend?” Hurt lines up his beautiful face and I feel a knock of guilt in my stomach. He's the realist and he's not getting paid to be my friend. I should be transparent with him.

“They can be mean Julani, I don't want them to hurt your precious esteem,” I say.

“Look here...” He lifts his Tee up and turns around. Well I don't see anything out of ordinary, it's just his thin tattooed back that we all have seen a million times. “I have a crocodile's skin, your father's 12 wives and 50 siblings cannot do anything. I'm the Croc,” he says.

12 wives and 50 siblings? Does he think my father was King Mswati or something.

“Okay Croc, you're invited.” I put my hands up in surrender. The planning begins, Bontle already has a suitable menu in her head while Jula and Vuyiswa are only worried about what to wear.

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Nobody has said anything about Jula, they're keeping it at the sides of their eyes. His choice of clothing is surely grabbing him a lot of attention and I've seen Khethile and Zandile sharing looks every now and then.

The Mthembus have arrived. It's Busikhaya and three other men. My heart is dying to be in that rondavel where the negotiations are held. There was no drama as I had expected, Nkanyiso asked them to cleanse the premises with a goat for all the havoc they've caused, after that they were allowed to come inside.

Mamkhulu pushes the door and walks in. Bontle is the kitchen queen, even if they wanted to be part of the cooking they wouldn't because nobody knows what the hell she's making. "They want to know if you acknowledge those people as your future in-laws or not," she says and her voice lacks excitement. She could at least fake it like Zandile.

Jula jumps off the chair and rushes to me with

make-up brushes. I knew he'd exaggerate everything, it's not like I'm getting married, and the Mthembus know me, there's no reason to impress.

“Men are outside.” Mamkhulu looking at Julia. I knew this was going to happen sooner or later.

“He prefers being around us,” I interfere before Julia can respond. She doesn't give me more than a second of her attention, her eyes are fixed on Julani.

“He must go skin the goat outside,” Khethile.

I don't know why she always feel the need to throw in her quarter brain in everything. There's an eye battle between her and I. I can tolerate everyone, but not her. I've always felt like we are in competition of some sort. No matter what it is, she has never been on my side.

Nkanyiso walks. He instructs that I finish up and come immediately. I hate the look on his face, it's not welcoming at all and that makes me wonder how he's treating abakhongi.

“And you?” He's looking at Julani.

“He's helping out,” I jump in quickly.

“Men are outside.”

Jula doesn't know what to do. Everyone is glaring at him, Nkanyiso is ready to grab him by the arm should he be not out within the next two minutes.

“Can't he.....?” I swallow my words as Nkanyiso aggressively pulls him out the door. This is why I needed Mazwakhe here, he wouldn't have allowed situations like these.

“Mhlengi turned into Mahlengi,” Zandile says. She spanks Khethile's hand and they both break into laughter. We all read that book and Mahlengi was a transgender. Imagine overflowing with stupidity!

“He is gay.” I'm a teacher, I teach my learners who unfortunately have the lowest IQ in South Africa.

“Six and nine. Adam who get tempted by other Adams.”

Sigh!!!!!!

“Ndumiso is outside,” Mamncane says alarmed. She seriously thinks Jula is going to seduce her son?

Well, Ndu is family so I can't say much except that he's definitely not Jula's type, or anyone's type for that matter.

Vuyiswa gives me an assuring look before I leave. I didn't think I'd get nervous, I know the Mthembus and I've prepared for this day beforehand, but here I am sweating under the long dress and scared to even lift my head up.

“Do you know these people? They're here to ask for your hand in marriage.” -Uncle Ngwane.

“Yes I know them.” My eyes quickly scan around. There's a plate placed in the middle with stacks of money on it. Should it be this much? I mean they're not paying lobola yet, they're negotiating how much it's going to be.

“Thank you, you can leave.”

Relief washes all over me as soon as I step outside. I should go straight to the kitchen but my heart has been restless since Nkanyiso dragged Jula out of the kitchen. I take a turn and head to the crowd



gathered below the kraal.

He's washing the goat's intestines, his Gucci sleeves are soaked in dirt. Daddy will have to arrange him a therapist after this. You can tell that he's already traumatized.

“Who asked you to wash this?” I ask.

“I did,” Zenzele rises up and challenges me with his face. He's Nkanyiso's best friend and in his head he's a distant cousin or something like that.

“This is my friend, I invited him here and you had no right!”

“We ndoda, akusheshe lapho.” He says to Julia and then looks back at me. “Zanamuhla go to other women.”

Who does he think he is? Mazwakhe is going to break his chimpanzee face when he comes back.

“Julia let's go inside the kitchen,” I instruct wearing one of my no-nonsense faces.

Zenzele pulls out iwisa and fixes his stare on Julia. He's grounded on the same spot, frightened to even

release a full breath.

“You cannot assault my guest Zenzele.”

“You can even ask the chief, hitting a man's head with iwisa does not count as an assault.

Siyangcweka siyizinsizwa!”

Oh he wants to see the maroon side of me. I pull out my phone and dial Mazwakhe's number. I'm just a second away from blowing out on this chimpanzee.

Damn, why is he not answering his phone? I call again. Nothing.

“It's okay Zano, just tell me when you're all ready to leave,” Julani says. He's really not comfortable, I wish I had put my foot down and didn't invite him to come. This is a mess, they're still going to mistreat him and force him to do things he's not used to.

I also don't understand why Mazwakhe is not answering my calls. He should be here, making sure that everything is well. Fine, I get that work is keeping him in Johannesburg. But he could answer my call, that's the least he could do. I need his

support, he knows that we only got each other. Why is he leaving my fate on these people?

\*\*\* Mazwakhe you've been a mother and father to me ever since mother passed on. I got used to it, you've been there for me through every phase of my life. I understand that I have disappointed you a number of times, but I thought by now you'd understand how much Ngcwethi and I love each other. I thought you'd have forgiven me wholeheartedly and that you'd be there for me today, if not physically then emotionally. I have never felt like an orphan until today. Who are you leaving me to Mazwakhe? These people?\*\*\*

I send the text and wipe my tears. I feel his absence, my heart is sore, it's like he's never coming back. I should be happy today, so should Ngcwethi. But when he picks up we both stay silent on the line and just listen to each other's heavy breaths. He's feeling what I'm feeling. There's a huge empty

space in my heart and he does not have the power to fill it.

He breaks the long moment of silence. “Do you want us to go see him?”

“You and I?” I ask.

“Well, I can drive you to Johannesburg. I know he doesn't want to breathe in the same space as me.”

“Yes I would love to.” Another tear rolls down my face and I quickly reach up to wipe it.

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“....I have never felt like an orphan until today. Who are you leaving me to Mazwakhe? These people?” He throws the phone away and buries his head on the pillow. He's homesick and that's the hardest battle he has to fight everyday. He has to remind himself that he doesn't have a home, this shack is all that he has and soon Hlahla will realize that it's not work keeping him away. Yes opportunities keep

coming, people want his services left, right and centre. He's not sure who refers people to him, his name is amongst the best plumbers in town and money is not much of a problem.

Another message! He groans and drags his arm up to search where he threw his phone. Zanamuhla can throw tantrums the whole day, he knows how she can get and today he's in the worst mood. Only if she knew how much he wanted to be there for her! He wants her to get married as soon as possible and get out of those people's lives. As much as the Mthembus are not his favorite people, he knows that they protect those they love and when they love it's real. He witnessed it with Busikhaya. As much as he hates to admit it, Busikhaya loved Nombuso and took care of her. He loves Qophelo regardless of him not being his biological son. And Ngcwethi loves Hlahla.

No it's not Hlahla. It's a bank notification, R300 has been uploaded into his bank account from Vuyiswa. He frowns as he remembers the familiar name

belongs to his sister's friend. The tall, slim girl whose face is sponsored by Black Opal. The wine-drinker who wears long Indian hair and nails longer than the duck's claws.

He calls her. She must've made a mistake with the transaction.

“Mazwi,” she answers.

“Hi. You sent money to my account by mistake.”

“I did not send it by mistake, it's for you to buy pillowcases.”

He frowns. Pillowcases? Yeah, for the pillows, he knows what they are. But for who? And why must this girl send him around?

“I must go buy pillowcases?” He just wants to confirm.

“Yes, and get rid of ugly things on your pillows.”

WTF!!!

“Who are you again?” he asks.

“You know me Mazwi, you're not dumb.”

“I don't know you. Why do you think it's your job to change my pillows? I'm not a child and most of all, I don't take money from women. I'm a man, I can take care of myself.”

Vuyiswa rolls her eyes on the other side. This is the reaction she expected. This man is so full of himself. The weirdest part is; why is she drawn to him?

“Really? Allowing people to help you, financially or emotionally, does not mean you're less of a man. Acting strong and hiding yourself for whatever reasons will not help you. Avail yourself for those who you've helped to help you. The herder who takes cattle to the river drinks water too. It doesn't matter who you think you are or how long you think your feet can stand, your heart pumps blood and the pressure you're giving yourself is not good for you.”

There's some silence. Mazwakhe is trying to process everything she just said, and Vuyiswa is trying to control her emotions. They all had a bad day, Julani is somewhere seeking counselling,

Zanamuhla is locked in her bedroom and Bontle is feeling sorry for everyone.

“I lost my father because of depression, he committed suicide after battling with it silently. My mother succumbed to the same battle and after the second heart attack she died.... Mazwakhe I don't want you to die.”

“You don't know me. Why do you care?” Mazwakhe.

“You're my friend's brother.”

A moment of silence passes....

“Okay, but I need to reverse your money. I don't need it, I need a home.”

“What does that mean?” Vuyiswa.

“You won't understand and there's no need for you to.”

“Alright, but I understand that you need new pillowcases and I'm not taking that money back.”

“You don't owe me anything,” he says.

“Yes, the only person who owes you something is



you. Have a peaceful afternoon Mazwi, I need ices for my wine.”

Call ended....

Why is he being forced into buying pillowcases? A few hommies have come over his shack and none of them have complained about his pillows.

He grabs one and looks at it all over. There's nothing wrong, yet he feels like if he doesn't buy pillowcases there will be a problem with the wine-drinker.

Like he doesn't have enough problems already!  
Phewww.

[11/19, 09:48] : Chapter Twenty

ZANAMUHLA

We've been on the road for the past four hours, I'm exhausted but the urge to see my brother keeps me wide awake. Ngcwethi also doesn't want me to sleep, he keeps saying we're almost there and motivates me to stay up to keep him company. One

thing that's going to force my eyes to shut is this Shabalala Rhythm bursting through the speakers. Music is influenced by age, you can't be in your twenties and listen to this kind of music. His agemates are hyping over the likes of Kwesta and Master K.G.

“How do you know where he lives?” I ask.

“I know everything, you should know that by now.”

There's no such thing. That's why there are schools and elders, people learn as they go, you cannot know everything.

“You should give a piece of that ego for charity,” I say.

“Really?” He's choking in laughter.

We make another stop in Engen, he refuels the car and gets us drinks. It's really strange that Mazwakhe has not made any attempt to reach out. Not even a text to explain why he couldn't answer my calls.

“We are here, Alexandra.”

So this is Johannesburg? People who live here come back to the village calling us farm-julias and all sort of names. This is where they get the glow. Can they even breathe in this place? There are houses and shacks everywhere. Don't start on the crowds of people walking up and down. Every man looks like a tsotsi. I wonder where they keep their livestock.

“This is the famous Alex?” I ask.

“Wynburg, your brother lives in these shacks.”

No ways! Why would Mazwakhe do this to himself? This is worse than I imagined. He can afford a better place, if not, he can always go back home.

“My father had a house somewhere in Brakpan. I don't understand why he's living here.”

He doesn't say anything. We stay in the car for a moment, digesting our surroundings and thrown away by the living conditions.

“Let's find him.” He brushes my hand. His face is both pained and frightened. He doesn't know how Mazwakhe is going to take his presence or the fact

that he brought me here.

All the shacks look alike. Me being slow as I am, I'd probably forget which one is mine and enter someone else's. People are looking at us strangely, like we are shacks' tourists or something. You don't greet in places like this, people don't have the energy to return lousy greetings, they have more important to do. Like this one, I passed my shallow hellow and instead of greeting me back she yelled at the neighbour asking if she could borrow her broom. I didn't even know you can borrow a broom until now.

These people clearly undermine the power of witchdoctors. I heard they even borrow each other's hair...If someone came to me and borrowed a broom or hair I'd die and wake up in Mbongolwane hospital, if not transferred to King Edward. That's the biggest hospital in KZN, well according to our knowledge. If King Edward doctors fail to treat you then you're surely dying. Back in the village we know it's a matter of life and death if someone has

been transferred to King Edward. Church women start delivering prayers to the family, -usephethwe odokotela abaphezulu. Low and high doctors, we don't really know how this medicine thing goes but if you treat a person who was one foot away from death then you're surely a high doctor.

Eerh! The whole yard is muddy. We have to jump like frogs. Ngcwethi doesn't seem to mind, his pace is even annoying me, what if I fall while trying to keep up?

We stop in front of one. Its door is half closed to show that there's someone inside. My brother really lives here.

Ngcwethi is really scared. I step forward and knock on the rusty door. There's no reply, I knock again. Gosh, I'm even taller than the door.

“Mazwakhe it's me.”

I can hear the mattress shifting and footsteps coming close to the door. If he had medical aid I swear he would've fainted, but he does not have

one so he cannot afford to just faint out of the blue, the ambulance would come next week.

“Hlahla what are you doing here?” His eyes are bulging out. I don't know whether to cry or shout at him.

He looks over Ngcwethi, rage fills up his eyes and for a moment I'm frightened about what might happen next.

“I asked him to bring me here,” I jump in quickly.

“What the fuck! You cannot just bring her in places like this. Do you know how unsafe it is for....”

“Yet you live here, but it's unsafe. Mazwakhe why are you stressing me out like this?” I can't believe I sound like my mother. This is exactly how she cried when Mazwakhe was on his worst behavior.

“Come inside.” He pulls me in without waiting for a reply. Ngcwethi remains outside and I'm worried about his safety.

“Let him in,” I say.

“No!”

I knew his approval was fake. He still hates Ngcwethi, that's why he made excuses not to attend lobola negotiations.

“I love him Mazwakhe. You cannot disown me and turn your back to your home just because your sister fell in love with someone you don't approve of.” I'm yelling, tears are making a trip to my chest.

“You seriously think cutting me off is the solution?” I ask.

He pushes me aside and climbs on bed. Everything is in one place; the table, bed, pots and water buckets. I don't understand why can't the government provide RDP houses adequate for every citizen. This is not healthy, but those politicians can never relate while sitting in their luxurious houses in the suburbs.

“If you're here to shout at me then get the fuck out of my house,” he says.

“This is not a house!”

“Right? You're now sleeping with a rich, trust-fund asshole and you think you can put class tags on

people. Yes this is a fuckin' house. It shelters me everyday. Get the fuck out Hlahla, I don't want to drag you out."

"No, I'm not leaving until....." He grabs my arm before I can even swallow the fifth word. One step..two..and we are at the door. That's how little this 'house' is.

"Mazwakhe!" Ngcwethi's voice is commanding. He stands before him, I'm still in Mazwakhe's grip. There's a stare battle. I hold my breath, silently praying that neither of them lift a hand on the other.

"Take your girlfriend and leave."

I cannot hold back tears. Did he just refer to me as Ngcwethi's girlfriend? Yes I am Ngcwethi's girlfriend, but I'm also his sister and I'm here because I care about him.

"She's worried about you," Ngcwethi says.

"I don't care. LEAVE!"

He lets go of my arm, I crash on Ngcwethi's chest and let out a wail. He slams the door in front of us



and locks it.

“Sthandwa sami.” Ngcwethi cups my face and forces me to look at him. I'm a mess, everything feels wrong, even being in his arms. This is the root of hatred my brother has towards me. If we had not fallen in love with each other things would be normal. He'd come home after every two weeks as he used to. Check up on me and make sure that I had everything I need.

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We are in a BnB, the mood is intense. I don't know who to blame, me or him. But I know someone has done something wrong, otherwise we wouldn't be here.

“Zano you know that I love you, right?” His voice breaks the long moment of silence in a dark bedroom. I demanded the lights to be switched off, I cry better in a dark place where nobody can mentally judge me for my ugly crying face.

“I know that,” I say.

He exhales and wraps his arm around me. I move closer and snuggle myself on him.

“We can go in the morning and try again. I know that you're hurting, but you have to be patient with him.”

“I don't know,” I say.

Today was embarrassing enough, I'm not sure about facing his neighbours again. I just want to go back to KZN.

“Maybe you have to calm down around him and allow him to speak. Try not to sound judgmental, especially about his living conditions. You didn't only offend him, you offended the whole block Zanamuhla. Life is not simple, soon you'll realize that and understand where he's coming from.”

“Do you know something I don't know?” I ask.

“Even if there was, it wouldn't be my place to let you know. That man is your brother, you know him better than anyone and if there's anyone who can get through him it's you.”

Could Mazwakhe be in trouble? A lot of things don't make sense, but he said it's work only. If he's working then why is he living in that place? Our father had a house, there's no need for him to rent. I'm cracking my head, I don't know what it could be. It can't be our father's death, he doesn't get emotional about anything.

I didn't think I'd fall asleep, my mind was racing. I kept tossing and asking myself questions only Mazwakhe could answer.

I stand in front of the mirror and look at the reflection of my worn out face. Days like this need Julia's make-up skills. I look like I have aged twice over night.

“You're dressed up?”

Wow! I don't even look like someone who's dressed to go.

“Am I ugly?” I ask.

He stands behind me and stares at me through the

mirror. That look on his face..Nooooo!

“Don't even think about it Ngcwethi,” I say.

He pulls down the lacy arm of my dress and pecks my shoulder. “Remember I asked that you go to him a bit calm today, please let me help you release some steam.”

“I'm dressed Ngcwethi, you can't.....”

“I'll be careful...let me start with this.” He bends down and takes out my shoes. I fail to understand why he had to wait for me to dress up before proposing this session.

He strips all my clothes off and carefully place them on bed. We haven't explored much, sexually. I have enjoyed our few moments, I also love that he respects my body and it's not all he sees when I'm on bed with him.

“Ngcwethi do you.....” Gosh, how do I put this without sounding like a freak? Muff doesn't sound like the correct word. I don't want to end up scaring his elders.

“Ask.” He's wearing one of his few naughty smiles. I run my hands on his chest while trying to come with something up.

“You know the oral things, do you go all the way or you have some no-go areas?” I articulated this one very well.

“I don't know how to answer your question.” He just had to push my words out of my mouth. I was being very classy with this you know.

“Do you muff pussy?” I hope God is looking somewhere else. I mean there must be a group of girls gossiping somewhere and tarvens catering alcohol to youngsters, God should keep his ears open for more unholy things.

“Zanamuhla!” He laughs and buries his head over my neck. I like it when he does this. It gives me goosebumps.

“I have to know,” I say.

“Well.....” He laughs again. After a moment he composes himself and lifts his head up.

“It's you Zanamuhla Ngwane, I can go to any lengths for you. There's nothing called a no-go area between you and I.”

Okay calm down Zanamuhla! You've smiled long enough, you don't want to end up looking like a cat.

It's okay....chill.

“You really don't know how you make me feel.” His manhood pokes me, he intentionally presses harder and releases a low moan. “I can't wait to spend the rest of my life with you.”

Our eyes lock and for a moment I forget about everything. We are both in the world of our own. He gets closer, lifts my chin up with his finger and slowly brushes his lips on mine. The kiss deepens, him moaning on my lips has always made me weak. Women in general, love seeing men helpless. He looks very weak, his hands are skimming all over me hungrily.

My legs open involuntarily, he positions himself between them and trace kisses on every part of my upper body.

“I know that you want more,” he whispers while inserting his tip slowly. “And I'm going to give you everything Zolwandle...absolutely everything....hold onto me tightly....and please don't take your eyes off me....you're a diamond in my eyes....” Eventually my eyes shut and my ears focus on the sound of our colliding bodies. His thumb is rubbing my throbbing clit. His scratchy voice is soothing my eardrums as he keeps whispering sweet-nothings. The tension builds up from my back. I lift my body up but he presses me down and hits on the same spot repeatedly. I feel it pulsating throughout my body and waving down to my toes. His name escapes my lips as I yell out. I don't hear what he says, his pace picks up, his hands tighten around my neck...the groan!

I open my eyes, he's staring at me, when our eyes lock he leans over and steals a quick kiss.

“Condom?” I ask.

Post-cautions!!!

“Nothing will happen my love.”

And I'm supposed to take his word for it?

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He was right, I'm calm today. I knock on the door and patiently wait for my brother to open.

He opens, the reaction I get is not what I expected. His eyes quickly go to Ngcwethi standing just a few feet away from the door.

“Sure,” he says.

“Sure,” Ngcwethi.

Alright, that was awkward but at least they acknowledged one another. He signals for me to walk in. Ngcwethi remains outside even though Mazwakhe didn't close the door.

“I thought you left Johannesburg.” He shifts the pillows and climbs on bed. There's no space for chairs, if you're not standing you're lying on bed. Had I known I would've brought him a reedmat.



“I know I'm selfish and all, but the only reason I'm here is because I truly care about you.”

He doesn't say anything. He just stares up and counts air molecules.

“What is going on Mbuyazi?” I ask.

“Please don't call me that.”

My forehead grows into a frown.

“Who are you angry at? You cannot let those people get to you. You are a Ngwane, the first son of Mlu.....”

“I'm a Mthembu.”

Whaaaaaaaat?

“Excuse me?” I need him to repeat the joke he just cracked. I hope he's not here trying to pursue a career in comedy. Why do you think Trevor Noah went abroad? There's no money in the comedy industry, EFF delivers free comedy shows and nobody bothers to support local comedians anymore. It wouldn't work, he must stick to plumbing.

“My whole life was lie Hlahla. Mamkhulu chased me out like a dog. They blamed me for father's death. I didn't want him to die, I was fighting for us, for everyone!”

I need the clock to stop. I cannot process all this at once.

“You're a Mthembu? How is that?” I'm confused.

“I'm Ngcwethi's brother.”

WTF! No way in hell.

“No, you are my brother!” How can he say such thing? It doesn't make any sense.

“I'm your half-brother as I'm also his half-brother.” He shuts his eyes, a drop of tear escapes through closed eyelids. “I hate Celiwe. I hate your mother Hlahla. She gambled with my identity to fulfil her sick intentions. My life!”

No! No! No! This cannot be true. I mean how? Life cannot be twisted like that.

“Don't let this affect you though,” he says.

He likes pretending to be strong. He doesn't need to

be a man about this.

“I have lost my brother. How do you expect me to act as if this is nothing?” I ask.

“You have not lost your brother. I'm here, dealing with it and trying to accept things, but I'm still your brother. You have nothing to do with what the dead Celiwe did.”

Ngcwethi lets himself in. He looks at me and I'm soaked in tears. Is there a possibility of me and him being siblings as well? Celiwe you wouldn't dare do that to me. Not even in your grave!

“What about us?” I look at him, my voice is trembling. “Am I related to Ngcwethi too?”

“No.”

I release a sigh. Thank God!

“You can still come home and stay at our side,” I suggest.

“I'm sorry Hlahla, I cannot do that but I will come to Mpfana to see you every chance I get,” he says.

Ngcwethi clears his throat. “You can always come

to the home you truly belong to.”

No response.

“It's sad that the truth came out when both fathers have died. But it's fortunate that you and Busikhaya can work through this and make things right by Qophelo. He won't live the way his father lived,” he continues. Mazwakhe remains quiet. “I know that one day you were going to manage to kill Busikhaya and twenty years later Qophelo would've hunted you down and killed you as well.”

This is supposed to make him feel better but it doesn't, in fact he looks more depressed than before. I'm not sure I want to leave.

“It's not too late Mazwakhe. You have a chance to live your true identity.” He touches my arm. I turn around and look at him. It's time to leave.

“You have classes tomorrow,” he says.

“No!” I'm crying again.

Saturday was just a beginning. They're going to do anything they like, Nkanyiso is now the head of the

family and he's in charge of the lobola negotiations. He doesn't want livestock, he wants lobola in cash. I've already seen changes in their lifestyle, will they be able to save money for the wedding?

“Hlahla this is exactly why I didn't want you to find out. You cannot miss classes three days in a row just because your brother's identity changed,” Mazwakhe.

“It's not just that, I have no one to protect me when I'm home,” I say.

“You're getting married nje Hlahla.”

I cannot be too sure of that. Those people might just chow all the lobola money and take no responsibility in sending me off. It's all Nkanyiso's duty now.

“Very soon,” Ngcwethi adds.

I frown. What is that supposed to mean? The families just started on negotiations.

“Very soon?” I ask.

“In two months.”

Whooooooooooah! Two months. Is this Before The 90 Days? I'm shocked.

[11/19, 09:49] : Chapter Twenty One

ZANAMUHLA

He wants me to be fine. They all do, but I can't just switch back to normal as if nothing happened. It's not just Mazwakhe's life that has been affected, he's now my brother who also happens to be my brother-in-law as well. What stresses me the most is the fact that I might never see him in the Ngwane premises again. Yes his DNA is different, but he grew up in that home, created memories and it's the only home he has ever known. He fought for the Ngwane dignity, even against those who happen to be his own family, he even killed his own father for them. That should count for something, right? It should outweigh the DNA, his heart is at the Ngwanes and they say a home is where the heart is.

“Okay I've had enough of this long face. Get up, we

are going shopping.”

This girl! Can't she see that I'm at my lowest? Clothes don't make me happy, I'm not her. I'm also not a fan of shopping, going in and out of the shops with baskets. I'd be buying everything online if I didn't have trust issues.

“Zano you can see that I'm thin but now you want me to lift you up and drag you to the bathroom.” She means business.

Why didn't she go to one of her 99 blessers? I don't know why Bontle had to go to the library, her company is better than the nagging Vuyiswa.

“I have everything I need Vuyiswa. I don't need new clothes or anything,” I say.

Did she even hear me? She's wrapping a bandana over her braids and looking at her glamorous reflection on the mirror.

“Is Ngcwethi coming over or you're the one leaving?”

Urgh! That again. I promised Ngcwethi that we'll

spend the afternoon together. I know that he won't allow me to come back so I'll just ready myself for the night.

"I'm going over, you know he can't come here," I say.

"He actually can." She glances back at me and I just sigh.

She knows what I'm trying to say.

"Have you seen the underwear section at Mr Price?" She's brushing her cheeks with brown facial powder. They always tell me to put efforts into looking more 'girly' and twentieth, her and Julani. I have bought the eyebrow pen and some cheap red lipstick from the China shop down the road. I just need some courage to put it on. Maybe I'd look like a doll too.

"You definitely need one of their lingerie."

Linge-what? That lacy thing worn by porn stars? This girl doesn't know who I am nor does she have a clear understanding of my background.

"Red ones are for submissive bitc\*\*s who'd swallow balls and get tied on bed the whole night. You know



the 'yes daddy' type...Whereas black is for us the motherfugers who push the damn fuger and ride him until he sings all his pin codes and passwords.”

Informative hey. I didn't know colours represented characters. When I grow up I want to be a motherfuger who gets passwords.

“I actually think tonight could be a good night to take the sangoma on an adventure,” she says.

“Adventure?” I raise my eyebrows.

“Surprise him with a blowjob in the most uncomfortable place and then put your lingerie on and ride him like a horse.”

God please forgive this girl, she does not know what she's saying!

“I'm not on that level yet,” I say.

“Which level? There are levels?”

“Obviously, I'm not a sex freak and I'm not ready to be a bit\*\*h.”

She breaks into laughter and shakes her head.

“Zanamuhla Saint Ngwane, it doesn't matter how slow, how often or how reserved you do it. At the end of the day we are all getting laid, not going all the way out doesn't make you less fucked,” she says.

“Fineeee! I get your point but I'm scared to just act like that. He was very weird when I asked him about muffing so I'd rather follow his lead and pace.”

She laughs again. “What are you? A wife from the 60s. Follow his lead my left foot, pull that man by nose.”

Pull him by nose? I like him the way he is, always in control of everything and commanding what goes where. But one night wouldn't hurt, I'd do all those dirty things and switch back to Zanamuhla Saint the next day.

“Trust me Ngcwethi is also intimidated by you,” she says.

“And how do you know that?” I ask a bit jealous and annoyed.

“I have seen how he becomes when he doesn't

know where your thoughts are. He gets uncomfortable and scared.”

Oh that's nice to know.

“He really loves me hey,” I say.

“Trust me on that one, that man loves you and he deserves some spicy game.”

Mmmm! I also think he does. Game on!

I ended up buying two lingerie, both black and red. I haven't decided if I want to be a ‘yes daddy’ type or the motherfucker who rides like a horse for passwords. I never believed her when she said shopping can be therapy. Just two hours ago I was sinking in sorrows and feeling like the world was closing around me, but after this trip my mood has uplifted. I'm not sure how I feel about my mother yet, she did the most selfish thing but I have to stay positive for Mazwakhe's sake. He wants me to focus on school and achieve all my dreams.

Everyone he loved and protected has let him down, I cannot do it too. I'm completing this qualification

and doing everything we initially planned together. Soon both of us will be the Mthembus, him as the biological son and me as the wife, Mrs Mthembu.

“All you need to do is keep the eye contact, play with his balls while licking and sucking the joystick.”

The lecture is still on. The word joy-stick bores me, it's in the same WhatsApp group with axe-wound.

“What do I do when he bursts?” I ask.

“You swallow and clean him with your tongue.”

Swallow as in swallowing? Like when you swallow ultramel and lick the container? I think I need sex classes, the ones for students with special needs.

“I'm not swallowing sperms Vuyiswa,” I say.

She rolls her eyes. I can't believe she's been doing all these dirty things and she thinks they're normal.

“It's not compulsory, just fun.”

Well fun can miss me. There are a lot of things I can do for fun and swallowing sperms is not one of them.

Bontle is finally back. She looks exhausted. She's that student that makes you feel negligent, like you're not putting efforts in your education.

“Am I sleeping alone today?” She looks at Vuyiswa. You can never be sure with this one.

“No I will be here,” Vuyiswa says.

“Is Xolani not coming?” Bontle.

Vuyiswa shrugs her shoulders and pulls out the new shoe she was fitting. This is so unlike her, I mean it's a freakin' weekend.

“I'm trying to focus on my studies,” she says.

“What about your 99 boyfriends. How are you going to ignore them?” I ask.

“I don't have 99 boyfriends.” Her tone lacks humour.

I was kidding, that's how we roll.

“Your blessers,” I clarify.

“I don't take orders from them, if I need time I need time.”

Oops! Bontle and I share a look. Which wrong toe did I step on?

“Did you find someone?” Bontle.

I break into laughter. Is Vuyiswa even capable of seeing men beyond walking ATM machines? I don't think so.

“Maybe. Maybe not.” Vuyiswa.

“Whooh! You mean you're capable of falling in love? You Vuyiswa?” I ask.

She lets out a sigh. “I don't know much, all I know is that I care so much about him.”

Yeah she does, her face is a proof of that.

“Does he know?” I ask.

“No. He doesn't even like me and I don't know if he ever will.”

“Mmmmmmm.” That's all Bontle says.

“Do you believe in love?” I turn to her. She's kind of a weirdo. I've never seen her talking to any boy or even crushing on one from TV.

“I believe in God,” she says.

What an answer! But don't we all believe in Him?

“What about love?” I ask.

“Jesus will provide me with a good man when the time is right. For now I'm going to put my focus on my books.”

Vuyiswa rolls her eyes. “Bontle you don't even go to church. Jesus won't give you any man, remember he's also not married, I'm sure he's busy searching a wife for himself.”

I have my overnight bag packed, Ngcwethi comes to pick me up. It's actually weird to see them together, all three of them, my boyfriend and my bodyguards.

I can't believe they all pretended not to know one another.

His hand touches mine. I look at him and realize that I'm angry. Gosh, I need to calm down, we went over that and kind of buried it.

“Sorry,” I mouth a low whisper.

“I’m sorry too,” he says.

Vuyiswa clears her throat causing us to break the eye contact.

See why we couldn't chill here, there are eyes and ears everywhere.

“We should go, it's getting late,” I say.

Vuyiswa runs after me as I go fetch my bag. She gives me the same piece of advice she’s been giving me the past hours. Now I have to take an oath like I’m on the stand; everything I’m going to do tonight is going to be nothing but whor\*ng.

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I can't believe Vuyiswa is actually texting me for updates. The plan is not working, his fuckin’ brothers are gathered here and they don't look like people who intend to leave us alone anytime soon. They're talking about soccer and that topic has no



conclusion. They could go on and on the whole night.

**\*\*The coast is not clear yet\*\*** I text back.

Mndeni sees my alarmed face as our eyes meet. He frowns with a little smile on his face. I need to act normal!

“Why didn't you come with the table Zanamuhla?” Busikhaya asks.

I was supposed to come with furniture?

“The table?” I ask.

Laughter! What's so funny? They're weird, all of them.

Phone beeps again. Vuyiswa! Now she's making it seem like we had a deal of some sort.

**\*\*You're not a sailor Zanamuhla. Clear coast for what? Grab that man to the bathroom.\*\***

Lord!!! I reach out for the glass and take a huge sip. What did I sign myself into? I cannot just grab Ngcwethi to the bathroom, it's not a normal thing to do.

“Are you okay?” Ngcwethi leaning over me and grabbing my hand under the table.

Deep breath. I nod my head and go for another sip.

He pecks my cheek and pushes the chair back. He's going to the bathroom which is just next to the bedroom.

“I actually need my jersey there,” I say and leave before him.

He follows behind and turn to the bathroom door. This is the only chance. I wait until I hear water flushing and then push the bathroom door to let myself inside.

“Sthandwa sami.” His back is turned, he's washing his hands.

Zanamuhla you can do this! I walk closer and stand behind him.

“Is everything alright?” He turns and bumps on my face. I give him no chance, I cup his face and initiate a kiss.

He breaks the kiss after a moment. “Babe are you

okay?”

I can hear Vuyiswa's voice in my ears telling me to make him uncomfortable. He deserves it, I mean he's done a lot of things to me, both good and bad.

“I'm perfect,” I say.

My hand slides inside his boxers, his eyes widen in shock.

“Zanamuhla what are you doing?”

How does it look like? I wink at him and pull down his pant to his ankles. I wasn't sure I could do it, the slow motion kneeling thing that I was instructed to do, but I do it while keeping the eye contact. He looks scared, he doesn't know what my intentions are and Vuyiswa did say that men get frightened when they're not in control of things. I like them weak like this...well not in the outside world, only in the bedroom.

I do the hand thing, he starts breathing heavy. I honestly thought it would be disgusting but I was ready to go through with it eitherway. Surprisingly it's not, I lick the tip and see him clenching his jaws,

that's motivation enough for me to go deeper.

“Zanamuhla come on!” His voice is a low trembling whisper. His hands are pulling my hair. He likes it, I just don't understand why he hasn't screamed his passwords yet, Vuyiswa said he will mos.

“Baby you're killing me!”

Gosh, that was freakin' loud.

I need to go a bit easy but he's not making it easy. He's pushing himself in my mouth and groaning dramatically loud.

“Shit Zanamuhla, I'm cumming!” Loud cry.

I pull out as quickly as possible. I'm not about the swallowing life. I catch him with the hand and stroke his shaft, in the split of a second he shoots out and my name involuntarily escapes his mouth. His thighs are trembling.

What am I supposed to do now? I didn't expect things to turn out this way at all. How do I face life outside the bathroom after this? Everyone heard

what was going on, why is he such an idiot! There was no need for him to be loud.

“Thank you sthandwa sami.” He pulls me to his chest and embraces me in a tightest hug.

“You're welcome,” I say.

“I'm going to return the favour as soon as those idiots leave.” He pecks my lips and smiles. I swear his eyes have stars in them. Is he glowing or it's my eyes?

“Let's go,” he says.

“No I'm not going.”

“Why?”

He's really asking me this.

“You were freakin' loud Ngcwethi. You weren't supposed to, you just spoiled everything.”

“Do you have any idea what you were doing to me? I couldn't help myself.” He's smiling. Lord!

“Ngcwethi this is embarrassing.”

“Come on babe.”

I fold my arms and release a sigh. My mind is made up, I'm not leaving this bathroom until those brothers go to their bedrooms and I'm leaving before everyone wakes up.

[11/19, 09:49] : Chapter Twenty Two

ZANAMUHLA

He doesn't think that my reputation is at stake, he's not voicing it out but I can see that in his mind I'm a drama queen. A heavy weight sheds off my shoulders as the car drives out of the yard. I cannot hide from his brothers forever but maybe in a week or two I would've gathered some strength in my shameful-self to look at them in the eyes.

“Can we at least grab some breakfast on our way? Or people are going to crucify you for doing what lovers naturally do?”

I'll let that slide. He doesn't get it. If sucking someone's shaft was such a normal thing to do as he puts it, we'd be seeing lovers sucking each other on the pavements, churches and everywhere.

“Anyway, yesterday was the best night of my life.” He glances at me briefly, he's not over the bathroom session, I don't think he ever will. The probability of me being the first lady to ever give him that kind of pleasure using what God gave me to pray with, gives me pride and joy. I broke his....whatever virginity it's called, I broke it and if he ever cheats on me it will confirm the Men Are Trash narrative.

“I wish you had allow us to take things further. The whole night, just me and her.” His eyes fly to my thighs quickly and crack his lips into a smile. We didn't do anything after the bathroom session, I was scared he was going to scream harder and wake up the whole family.

“Next time we'll do 6-9,” I say.

He frowns. I'm not surprised.

“What's that?” he asks.

“I will teach you when the time is right,” I say shrugging my shoulders. It feels so amazing being the well informed one in a relationship. “Didn't you say that you know everything in life?”

“I did and sex is not everything.” He doesn't shift his eyes from the road. He's trying to be smart with me.

“It didn't look that way in the bathroom,” I say folding my arms and giving him a challenging stares. He feels it on his skin and smiles.

“You love seeing me weak, don't you?” he asks.

“No. I love seeing you happy,” I say.

He left hand lets go of the wheel, it comes in contact with my knee and he drives with one hand. I can't believe my response has changed the whole atmosphere. It has gone from light and funny, to deep emotions and exchange of electric spark that rides through his hand to my thigh and back. Even when his hand leaves my knee I can still feel where it had touched like it never left.

“I'm happy Zanamuhla. I'm always gonna be happy as long as you're breathing next to me. Any other thing you give to me is just a bonus, you made me happy the day you accepted to be in my life.”

“You gave me proper food.” My mind travels down the memory lane and my eyes tear a bit as I



remember everything we've been through. "And I hated you and blamed you for everything," I say.

"That's how I connected to you, your hunger strike affected me emotionally and I knew that it wasn't something that would just fade away."

"But you don't even eat much, why is food your obsession?" I ask.

"Food is not a resource that everyone has access to. Many people go to bed with empty stomachs everyday and I don't understand why there are people who starve themselves on purpose."

"But you do have an access to it. Why does it bother you? It's like those high-profile politicians speaking about lack of housing while drinking whisky in Sandton," I say.

Ouch! That doesn't sit well with Mr Born Rich. I could've constructed my question differently and tried not to offend him. He's a good person, I know his concerns come from a good place.

"I'm sorry," I breathe under shame. I've been called judgmental three times and if there's ever a fourth

time that'll mean these allegations are true.

“Do you know that a person can survive three weeks on wild fruits? No solid food.” He's not pissed as I thought he was.

“Wild fruits?” I ask.

“Amahlala, amapoti and amaviyo.”

I hate those things. Mazwakhe used to bring them home after herding the cattle, amaviyo taste like a rotten morvite.

“Why would someone eat those things?” My lip is curved up, pushing my nose into wrinkles as I try to imagine someone living on those fruits for three weeks.

“My family was once the poorest in the village. They'd starve for days with not even a grain of rice in the house. One day my uncle who came after my father fainted in the veld while looking for amaviyo to eat. They had gone a whole week without any solid food and he was anaemic.” He's trying to put it together but his face is selling him out. I can read every emotion he's going through as he narrates the

story. I didn't even know they were once poor and that's how I am normally. Even drunkards, in my head they've always drunk alcohol, I never think out of the box. People start somewhere, we all have a story to tell. Even with drunkards, they'd tell you it started with a can of Castle Lite and the next thing I knew I was finishing a whole crate of beers alone.

Of course his family was once poor, I'm just shocked by my own stupidity I guess.

“Your father was there, eating snacks and whatever your grandparents had packed for him when he took out the cattle.”

Why am I sensing hatred in his voice? He's not looking at me, not even one glance and I have a feeling that he doesn't want me to see how much this conversation actually breaks him.

“My father begged your father to help, to give his young brother with just a piece of something to eat. But he refused and chose to throw what remained and crushed it against the sand with his foot....he died Zanamuhla, right there in the veld.”

I close my eyes and try to absorb what he's saying. My father was not the most goodhearted person on earth but I wouldn't have thought he was capable of doing something like that.

“Food means everything to us. It meant everything to my father and my uncle who died. When I felt your need for food I knew that you were the one,” he says.

I swear my eyes are going to pop out. Am I that deep to him? It sounds like our future has certainty, everything has been written down and my biggest fear is, what if we don't live up to it? What if this whole relationship heads to a different direction, will his ancestors punish me? I don't know why they had to get involved. I mean the whole purpose of dying is to butt out of earth's business and it seems like the Mthembu ones still have their claws back on earth. No offence.

“So your father hated mine for several reasons. It wasn't just the issue of my mother?” I ask.

“Don't twist this, it's your father who hated mine. He

could've saved my uncle but he didn't. He was a rich, spoilt arrogant boy who thought everything in this world only belonged to him. That's why he didn't hesitate to marry your mother knowing very well that she was with my father. But that doesn't matter, he found MaMbonambi and was happy till death.”

I didn't even realize that we have arrived outside the building. I can't believe he's taking sides in this. I'm supposed to sit here and listen to him putting all the blame on my father. Hear me out, I'm not defending him or trying to paint him as a saint, but this happened maybe 45 years ago. Why should we fight about it?!

“And your father killed my mother, the same way my father killed your uncle,” I say.

“Didn't she die because she was ill?” he asks.

She could've been saved if his father wasn't a corrupt senior member of the community. If he didn't hate my family over food they piped out in the toilet.

“Didn't your uncle die because he was hungry?” I

ask.

We get in the stare battle. He's angry at my father and I'm angry at him for being angry. He knew who I was and he still courted me. I don't need him to make me feel bad about being my father's daughter.

"It's not funny Zanamuhla," he finally says.

"Am I laughing?" I ask.

"The way you phrased it sounded like you were trying to crack a joke."

"If I were to crack jokes you wouldn't be an audience Ngcwethi."

Another stare battle! This time I'm the first one to look away. His hand touches me and I'm forced to look at him again.

"Should I walk you in?"

"No," I reply with my hand on the door.

"Zolwandle are we okay?"

I climb out, close the door and walk away without looking back. I don't understand why the family

history is getting between us now. Both families wronged each other, it doesn't matter who didn't give his food to who. I regret why I even enquired about his obsession with food.

I walk past Vuyiswa in the kitchen and I don't even have the strength to greet her. All that gagging and sucking for a morning fight!

“Is everything okay?” She leaves whatever she was doing and rushes after me.

I throw my bag on the bed and let out a heavy sigh. She's right behind my heel and in front of my face before I even know it I'm suffocated in a rib-cracking hug.

“What happened?” she asks.

“We fought over food stuff.” I don't have the energy to explain everything right now.

“Zano! You fought with your boyfriend over food at your in-laws? I understand that we eat noodles most of the times but you didn't have to embarrass

yourself.”

Lord! I crawl on bed and bury my head on the pillow. She rambles on and on about how ‘wack’ our reason for fighting is.

“On that note, are you hungry? I'm cooking noodles, Bontle is oversleeping.”

“I can't wait, thank you,” I say and release another sigh of relief as I hear her footsteps out. She closes the door behind her. Privacy is a moment of reality, I feel my eyes heating up and tearing into waterfall.

The door opens again. Can't I be left alone and cry in peace? I don't want to explain.....

“You left your cellphone in the car,” the voice I'm not sure whether I love or hate breaks in my room.

I don't lift my head up. He can't see that I'm crying. I'm not weak, I can't allow him to do that to me.

“Zanamuhla.” He's near. I can feel him next to my shoulders. I press my face harder on the pillow and try to collect myself.

It's so easy for him to just flip me over and force me



to look at him.

“I’m sorry,” he says.

“It’s okay. I’m not trying to trip you with tears, hate whoever you want to hate.” I wipe my eyes and try to look unbroken. But he sees right through me and stares at me until I break into tears again.

“I’m really sorry for bringing that stuff up. I’m not usually an emotional person, I don’t know how things escalated that fast.”

“It’s okay.” I nod my head and wipe another drop of tear. He stares at me, he’s suffocating in regret. I nod my head once again, whatever, it’s okay.

“I want to be with you today,” he says.

“I have classes Ngcwethi.”

“I’ll wait for you. Do your laundry, cook and do whatever you want me to do.”

“Don’t feel guilty,” I say.

He’s not convinced and he doesn’t care.

He’s phoning one of his brothers, cancelling his day

on the grounds that something urgently has come up. He's the second born...well third now, and he's treated like an egg. He gets his way most of the times, I don't think it pleases Busikhaya but he understands that this is the special child. Just like that, they grant him a day off and he climbs on bed.

“Where is the iron? Can I please choose what you're going to wear today?”

Oh boy! I haven't even digested the fact that I'm leaving him with my stuff all to himself.

“Pick what doesn't need to be ironed.” Yeah I can be lazy like that and I'm a wife material as well.

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“And?” Vuyiswa.

It's not like this will offend them, they take orders from him to make a living.

“He's staying the whole day.” I roll my eyes and plug the kettle for my morning coffee routine. Okay I'm

not rich, I have no morning coffee routine but I might have one soon.

“Doing what in this boring place?” She frowns.

“My laundry, cooking and cleaning my room.”

“Can I sneak my clothes into your basket?”

Lord! He's not a washing machine.

“Get yourself a man,” I say.

“I will but I don't think he'd do my laundry and all that FEMALE duty nonsense,” she says.

“He sounds like an arrogant man.”

“He is, and I love him like that.” The smile on her face! My word, Vuyiswa is really in love and she loves this man with his arrogance and everything.

“He is lucky, you're a rare girl to find,” I say.

She rolls her eyes. “You're funny.”

“I mean it Vuyiswa, you're a motherfucker and falling in love is not in your game. So whoever captures your heart is lucky that you even looked at him that way. And you're just special and rare.”

She sheds a tear and envelopes me in a big hug.

“Hugs? What happened?” Bontle’s voice breaks into the room.

“Join in,” I say opening my arm for her. She drags herself to us and we all hug each other. They're fake but real, I'm not contradicting myself this one is too deep to be explained in a white man’s language.

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I won't lie and say my day has been fruitful or that I heard what any of my lecturers said. I just saw their lips moving and all I kept thinking was, what is Ngcwethi doing in my room?

I didn't even wait for the bus after my last class, I stopped the taxi and paid a whooping R8 to be taken just behind the corner. Somebody needs financial management classes, I feel like I'm not spending my R1500 riches wisely.

I nearly fall and hug the floor as I push the door with all kota and coke energy.

“Are you okay?” He rushes to me and helps me out. I feel like an idiot, he was just watching TV.

“I’m okay,” I pull my hand off his arms that have supported me from the second I fell, I look around and sigh with relief as I see every part of the apartment intact.

“Are you hungry? I cooked.”

“Yes. What did you cook?”

“Ummmm..it's nice.”

Well, he looks clueless about the ‘nice’ he cooked. I follow him to the kitchen, he takes out a plastic container from the fridge and dishes out. He could've at least took it out of the shop's container and hid it before lying.

“Are you sure that you cooked?” I press my lips tightly together to stop a giggle from escaping.

“I’m sorry sthandwa sami, things didn't go as planned, I guess I undermined the amount of work that goes into laundry and cleaning a room with empty cosmetic containers.”

I shoot him a look, he chuckles.

“Why don't you get a washing machine?”

Rich people are funny. How do you GET a washing machine? That thing sells and it costs thousands.

“You make it sound like I'd just walk into a shop and take it without paying a cent,” I say.

“You'll pay, money is not a problem.”

“I'm Zanamuhla Ngwane,” I remind him.

“You're my woman, you don't have to worry about your studies and worry about doing laundry as well.”

Sigh!!!!

“And where do you think we'll put the whole washing machine here?” I ask.

“We evicted some students, you can....”

“No Ngcwethi, I didn't come here to show off with washing machines to other students.”

“Okay,” he says.

I hate and love how he lets go of conversations with one word. After 'okay' I know he doesn't persist further and it reminds me the less of a talker he is when he's not with me. Ngcwethi can stare at a stranger for a solid five minutes and says nothing. He can sit with a bunch of loud mouths and not say even one word. But give him Zanamuhla, he talks for the whole Africa.

Well he dished and now he's warming the food, that's something to mentally celebrate. I wrap my arms around his waist and rest my head on his back. We have lot of things to talk about, not for our families but for our own emotional wellness. I didn't know this family feud was so deeply rooted. I don't think there's anything we can do about it except finding our own way forward with no grudges.

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I'm late but it's still Monday

[11/19, 09:50] : Chapter Twenty Three

Nontobeko

He called and told me he was coming over. Yes he told me, he didn't ask if I was comfortable or not. Just like our first date where he won the game and told me we'd meet the next day for our first date. That day I left a huge chunk of my confidence behind, I remember how nervous I was, it seemed like we were the only couple in that restaurant, we had a lot of privacy and his presence was heavy than ever.

Running around the house and fixing every part of it makes me realize how this guy makes me desperate for perfection.

I want to be more than myself and that's the mistake I've made so many times in the past. I give people more than I give myself. If I can't cook pasta for myself, why must I cook it for someone else? If I love wearing shorts, why must I change to this long dull dress for someone else? I have been there,



done that and I'm still here, pursuing yet another relationship. This time I have to do things differently.

“And now?” -Mshibe.

He clears his throat as soon as words escape his mouth but he fails to iron the creased frown plastered on his face.

“Please order something we are going to eat tonight,” I tell him.

“I thought you were cooking.”

“Well, not anymore. We are ordering, make it enough for three people.” I grab a glass and pour myself some wine. The gym has really paid off, I've lost a kilo or two, and this short fits perfectly. I don't remember when was the last time I let my hair down and didn't stretch myself to unimaginable lengths for a guy. Not just the Brazilian hair that's laid over my shoulders and swings just above my ass, but the chase of perfection and fixing others before myself.

This time I should do things differently. First move, sitting on the couch and enjoying a glass of wine

while bingeing on Queen of the South. Mshibe is moving sheepishly around the house and giving me strange looks. I know he's silently asking himself what happened to all the preparations. I was ready to wipe this whole house and cook a storm for Busikhaya's first official-boyfriend visit. That was before I remembered how all my relationships had ended after every sacrifices I made.

I hear Mshibe's voice talking to someone, that must be him. I need to calm down and bring on my business face. I don't know how come I'm so powerful and untouchable in business and yet so weak in personal life.

By the look on his face he's been given a clue of what to expect. His eyes run from the glass in my hand to my bare thighs revealed by the short jean.

“Nontobeko!”

I can already tell that he's pissed.

“Hey, I just finished the series.” I'm surprised by the boldness of my voice. The wine is doing its magic, I

reach to the glass for another sip.

“I don't care,” he says.

Not even the wine can protect me from the coldness of his voice. I shrink a little bit, but keep my face unfazed.

“Are you alright?” I ask.

“Yes. Are you?” His eyes chase the glass I'm putting back on top of the coffee-table.

“I'm fine,” I say.

“It's very clear. You're having a good time, sitting on the couch naked and drinking wine.”

Drinking wine, yes. But naked? He's exaggerating.

“I'm indoors and I felt like wearing this today. So why not?” I shrug my shoulders.

Now he looks really pissed.

“I cannot have a wife who dresses like this in front of young boys. Ms hibe is here and you're sitting with your thighs pooping out like this?!”

I need another one, fast. I down a huge gulp and

look at him with my forehead furrowed.

“Wife? Busikhaya we just started dating a week ago, you cannot expect me to act like a wedded wife.”

“Act like a decent woman! I thought you were matured Nontobeko. Walking here I couldn't tell whether I was walking on the future mother of my children or a prostitute.”

“Don't control me Busikhaya.” I narrow my eyes.

“Is that how you call it?”

Silence.

We just stare at each other. His lower lip keeps moving, there's a lot he'd like to say but something is stopping him.

“Talk,” I say sipping on the glass one more time.

“Do you love me?”

The question catches me off guard. Yes we're dating but I haven't defined my feelings for him yet.

“Why are you asking?”

“Because I have forced someone to be in my life

before, manipulated her and blinded her into loving me.”

Interesting! He does look like a bully so I'm not surprised at all.

“Did it end well?” I ask.

“Yes it did but it wasn't the natural love. I don't want to repeat the same mistakes again. I know I can be a bit pushy but Nontobeko if you don't love me and if you don't see a future with me, please let me know.”

“You're right, you're being pushy and treating me like your ex who couldn't give you her natural love.” I can't believe he's seriously comparing me to a dead woman. So I'm going to suffer for another woman's shortcomings?!

“The same way you're making me suffer for your ex-idiots. This is not you Ntobe, you're trying to prove a point. I know that you're an adult, you can do anything you want but for us to work you have to meet me halfway.”

Sigh! I pour another glass and down it. He watches

me silently, I put the glass away and drag my tips myself to the bedroom to change back to my dress. I did stand my ground for a minute, I should be proud of myself even though he saw through me and overpowered me.

Strong hands grab my waist, carefully move the weave aside and pulls up the zipper of my dress. I can feel his height behind me and his cologne cannot be mistaken with anyone's.

“Thank you,” I say.

His hands remain on my waist, his breaths are heavy behind me and I'm suddenly very sober.

“I'm not going to hurt you Ntobe.”

I don't say anything nor move. We stand like that, a few moments of silence pass.

“I respect you as a woman and as an individual with a full capability of making her own decisions. But for our first night together I thought you'd be more welcoming, more loving and more respectful.”

“What did I do that was so disrespectful?” I ask.

“Drinking and dressing up like that.”

“It won't happen again.”

He turns me around. I'm a bit nervous to look at him in the eyes now, I should've brought a glass with me.

“Do you really mean that?” he asks in almost whisper.

“Yes but that doesn't mean that you have the right to control my life,” I say.

“Do I look like a controller?”

“Hell yes!”

He chuckles and bows his head to steal a quick kiss. It was supposed to be just a peck but his hands grabbed my butt and the kiss deepened.

“Everything about you turns me on,” he whispers.

I clear my throat and step back from his embrace.

“You came for sex?” I ask.

“What? No. I want to spend time with you, sex is just

what my body desires. You look hot and any man can be tempted.”

“Sorry, that won't happen anytime soon,” I say.

He nods his head slowly with a slight frown on his face.

“We'll have to wait for 90 days before engaging into any sexual activities,” I say.

“Are you mourning?” The frown grows.

“No, it's a rule thing. If you love me as much as you claim then you won't have a problem waiting 90 days before getting between my legs.”

He chuckles in disbelief. I keep my face straight, I mean it.

“Ntobe you're not serious. How am I going to explain to this organ that your cherry has some ground rules?”

I shrug my shoulders. “He's been with you since birth, surely you'll find a way to keep him in check.”

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We're eating and Busikhaya is staring at me the whole time. Mshibe doesn't talk that much, now that Busikhaya is here it's even worse. The table is awkwardly quiet.

“How is Sango?” I break the silence.

“She's good.” He doesn't have the same excitement he always have when talking about his kids.

“And Qophelo?”

“Good as well.” He turns his attention to the food and I see the corner of Mshibe's eye stealing a glance at me.

“I have to go rest,” he says.

“Sure.” Busikhaya without looking up.

Mshibe takes his plate with him and disappears. He's gone from the bodyguard to a little brother. I have moved him inside the house and his company is the greatest thing to look forward to everyday.

“You look tense,” I say stealing glances at Busikhaya.

He doesn't look up. “I'm not tense.”

“Not enjoying your first night?” I ask.

“It's not that.”

“What is it then?”

“Don't worry about it. Can I go take a bath?” He lifts his head up and I meet his pained face. Is it because of 90 days rule?

“Let me go and prepare it.” I put my fork down and pick up the sarviette. But he stops me before I can take one step off the chair.

“I will do it myself. I don't want to trouble you.” He gets off the chair and walks away.

“Busikhaya!” I call after him.

He turns around, fakes a smile and says it's cool.

I'm cracking my head thinking about the drama that just unfolded. I stand by the rule, no sex until 90 days. But was I a bit harsh towards him? Yes men

have broken me but I shouldn't put all that on him.

I clean the table and leave the dishes on the sink. I had hoped that we'd snack and watch a series together. I find him lying on bed in his full clothes, except the shoes, and staring at the ceiling.

“Busikhaya,”

Silence.

I crawl on bed and sit next to him. He wraps his arm around my waist and now I'm confused if there's a problem or not.

“You don't look happy,” I say.

“That's because I'm not.”

“Because of me?” I ask.

“No it's not you. I guess I got ahead of myself without a clarification that we were on the same page.” He exhales and turns his head to me. “I've been alone for so long. I don't remember when was the last time I got excited about seeing a woman. I was restless the whole day, checking my watch every second and looking forward to the sunset.”

I just hold his hand and stay quiet. This isn't about sex, it's about the relationship itself, the love he was hoping to give and receive.

“We are not there yet, are we?” he asks.

“I don't understand your question.”

“You don't love me Ntobe?”

This question does not have an answer yet, at least not the straightest answer he's looking for.

“I don't know, only time will tell.”

He exhales and pulls off his arm that's been wrapped around my waist. He's disappointed and a part of me feels bad.

“We just need to take things slowly,” I say, hoping that his mood would improve. This doesn't mean that we're not together.

He shuts his eyes for a minute and then sits up.

“Please give me sleeping blankets.”

He's sleeping on the floor?! Gosh, I didn't know he was this dramatic.

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Mazwakhe's phone rings, he reaches for it and glances at the screen. It's the number he doesn't recognize, after contemplating whether to answer it or continue with his sleep he finally decides to answer. Had he known who it was he wouldn't have picked up.

“Can we talk?” MaMbonambi asks.

“Yes.” He's pissed but he keeps his voice calm out of respect.

“I heard about everything that happened. I didn't know anything about you except that your mother had a thing with my husband.’

He stays silent, even though he wishes to end the call before this woman can go further with her subject. She has already called his mother and father's relationship a ‘thing.’ God knows he won't

be able to tolerate more. As much as he hates Celiwe, he still won't allow people to disrespect her memory.

“You need to come home and traditionally apologize and clean the blood you have spilt in this family.”

“That won't happen,” he says fearlessly.

“It has to be done. You're not protected by the Mthembu ancestors as you were conceived in marriage and introduced to your mother's husband's family as one of them. But your son, Qophelo, is sheltered by the Mthembus. You don't want your sins to fall on his shoulders.”

He releases a sigh and finds the guts to end the call.

He said he'd do anything for his son and this isn't even a difficult task. He just need to put his pride aside, forget about the family feud and focus on what's best for Qophelo.

His phone rings again. He lets out a grunt in irritation and answers.

“I will think about it,” he says.

“Think about what?” A young woman's voice comes through the phone's speaker.

“And now? Who is this?” Mazwakhe.

“I'm Vuyiswa.”

“Who is that?”

Vuyiswa gets pissed on the other side. This is getting boring, he should've saved her number by now.

“Really Mazwi? Anyway I'm just checking up on you.”

“Little girl if you have nothing to say please leave me alone. Your friend is my sister and not me.”

Vuyiswa knows the attitude, it was one of the things she fell in love with. She down the remains in her glass, plugging up the courage. If she dies, she dies!

“That's right, you're not my friend. I want more than that from you Mazwakhe,” she says.

At first Mazwakhe doesn't get it.

“You want your R300 back?”

“No, I want you.”

The ancestors must be really angry with him. Did a girl just ask him out? In which world has this ever happened?

“I really care about you Mazwi, like from the very first day we communicated over the phone.”

He needs to untie his tongue and say something.

“Thank you, I appreciate that but I'm not looking for a partner. Even if I was, it wouldn't be you. Please don't call me again, I'll e-wallet your money. Thank you for the pillowcases and for caring,” he says.

“I told you that I didn't want that money back. I gave it to you out of the goodness of my heart. Please don't send it back and please don't cut me off,” Vuyiswa says almost in tears.

“I don't need any friend Vuyiswa, don't make this hard. I still respect you as my sister's friend but if you keep pushing I might lose it,” he says.

There's a bit of silence. Not even the wine could save Vuyiswa from all the embarrassment.



Eventually she ends the call and Mazwakhe sighs in relief. That was the most awkward thing that has ever happened to him. A girl asked him out?! It's his duty to ask girls out. He wonders how many guys she has asked out in total. His father...well the man who raised him, did tell him that girls from the cities were different. He doesn't even know what attracted that kind of girl to him. He's a plain village man grounded in culture and traditions. Of course he'll take a wife one day when his life has fallen into place. A good wife who'll cook for him, wash for him and bear him children. The kind of a wife who'll fulfil her duties and remain in her respective role as a wife, who'll respect him as her husband and submit to tradition standards.

To calm himself down he calls Hlahla. There's a lot to talk about anyway, they don't talk often as they usually did before the whole Ngcwethi situation.

“You don't sound okay,” he says.

“Relationship problems.”

He huffs, regretting why he pointed that out. He is grateful that Ngcwethi is in her life and taking good care of her, but that doesn't mean he should butt in their affairs nor does it mean he likes Ngcwethi as a person.

“Well, I have real life problems. I have to go cleanse the Mthembu ancestors and apologize for everything. I'm going to do it for my son, if it wasn't for him they would've gotten that apology from their asses.”

“Mazwakhe!” Zanamuhla in shock.

“I don't regret anything Hlahla. Blood will not change how they treated us in the past. Wrong is wrong, it doesn't matter who you are.”

“That's because you don't know the whole story. A lot happened between my father and your father. A man died before we were born, your Mthembu uncle, and they blamed my father just like we blamed theirs for our mother's death. Did you know that mother was forced to marry my father?”

“No,” Mazwakhe.

“Did you witness any love in their marriage?”

“Ummm...maybe when I was still young, but it ended and I don't think neither of them cared.”

‘Exactly! This is too deep for us to understand, I don't think we even need to go back there. The Mthembus are willing to forgive you and accept you, if you can't change the past at least control your future. You are not an orphan, you have brothers who silently care about you and a stepmother who's willing to make things right between the two of you. So if you think your problems are worse, look at my life. Do you think I have a family that cares about me?’

“I'm here Hlahla, don't talk like that.”

“Do you get the point though?”

“Yes.”

“Great! I need to check on my friend, she's going through personal issues.”

“Which friend?” he asks anxiously.

“Vuyiswa. I think her crush rejected her. He's all

we've been hearing about this past week. She really loved her arrogant guy, her heart must be really broken.”

“Why would she fall in love with someone who was not asking her out? Is that normally how she is?”

Zanamuhla lets out a short chuckle. Who does he think Vuyiswa is? Normally? There's nothing normal about that girl.

“First of all Vuyiswa doesn't love. Oh well that was before meeting the arrogant guy. She only involve herself with men for the benefits and trust me, we were all surprised by the sudden good-girl acts until we found out she was saving herself for a crush.”

“That's really strange.” He has a frown on his face.

“It is and I better check if she's not killing herself in that room.”

“Please do and make sure she's okay.” His own voice sounds worried. But it's her sister's friend, he has to worry, right?

He slides his phone inside the pocket and walks out

of his shack for some fresh air. He shouldn't be thinking about that girl, she's not his to worry about. However his hands go against his mind, he dials Hlahla's number and calls her again.

“Are you alone?” he asks.

“Ummm no...just give me a second.” There's some movement and the sound of the door closing. “We can talk now.”

“I'm just checking if you have talked to Vuyiswa.”

“Oh you know her name? I thought you didn't.”

“I choose what to remember and when. Are you going to answer me or not?”

Zanamuhla senses the attitude and rolls her eyes.

“She's not okay but Vuyiswa is a strong girl, she will survive.”

“How do you measure people's strengths madam? Or you guess based on what they put on the front?”

“If you can do a better job why are you not flying down to KZN and offering your services?”

Zanamuhla.

“She's not my friend, it's none of my business.”

“Yet you called.....wait Mazwakhe, are you the one she's been crushing on?”

“You're finishing my airtime, bye.”

“Oh my gosh, you're also arrogant and.....” Call ended. Zanamuhla looks at the screen in disbelief. Why didn't she see this one? All dots are connecting. “Vuyiswa and Mazwakhe? Jesus Christ!”

On the other side Mazwakhe regrets making his last phone call. Why did he care? It was none of his business. He needs to block this girl from contacting him. He cannot predict what she may do next.

Logging in the app his eyes quickly notice Busikhaya's empty chat history. It shows that he sent multiple messages and deleted them before Mazwakhe could read them.

Wonders fill his head. What did he want to say and why did he delete those messages before he read

them? If something was wrong with Qophelo he would've called.

[11/19, 09:50] : Chapter Twenty Four

Zanamuhla

Things are going too fast. Today the Mthembus brought lobola. Well half of it, they were not allowed to pay everything at once even though Ngcwethi wanted to. He wants this wedding as in tomorrow. I know I should be feeling some kind of fear, this is really happening, in no time I'll be someone's wife. But that's not the case, I'm actually looking forward to it. It doesn't need a sage to see that I'm not welcomed here. At least in two months time I'll be out of their hair.

I wanted to have a private moment with Nkanyiso before leaving. I understand that I have no say in the pride price or whatever, but it's important for me to know how they're planning to spend it. There are other expenses to consider, wedding plans and all.

“Zanamuhla,” says someone from the door.

Thank God it's him! He came at the right time, I zip the bag and call him in. He's awkwardly tall for his age, even taller than Mazwakhe. He has to bend his neck in order to fit through the door. I love the new swagg, Igckama Elisha's brand from head to toe. He's actually a walking R5000 rand, if not more. These maskandi clothes are quite costly, I won't even start on the branded towel that costs the price of a maize meal.

“You look nice,” I say.

There's a pompous smile. The smile that the likes of Patrice Motsepe crack at the lousy compliments. The one that tells you ‘this is just a peak, there's a lot more.’

“Well, I try.” He shrugs his shoulders and walks around the bed like he's Ramaphosa himself.

“I wanted to talk to you about the wedding. Vuyiswa knows a planner who charges reasonably and he's the best in town,” I say.

“A planner of...?” He lifts up his eyebrow.

“The wedding planner, someone who will plan the



wedding.”

“Why must we hire someone to plan? Zandile and Khethile will help with the preparations.”

He's gotta be kidding me! Those two fools didn't even finish school. They couldn't plan study tables, how would they plan the whole wedding?

“I want a real wedding Nkanyiso. It will be my first and last wedding, I need everything to be perfect.”

“You're not the first person to get married in this family. Remember when Aunt Nozizwe got married, our mothers planned it and it was the most beautiful wedding.”

Hell, no! Do not start me on Aunt Nozizwe's wedding that looked like a birthday party of a 70 year old granny. I remember the cake very well, I didn't know it was okay to bake bread, cut out crumps and plaster the soft part with icing.

Oh, and we sat on benches that were borrowed from some church. The bride wore what looked like her own grandmother's matric ball's dress.

“No! You will give me a proper wedding,” I say.

“Zanamuhla you have no say in this money. My job is to send you off and I will do that. I have other expenses to take care of, we haven't performed the first ceremony for Dad and there are other things to do.” He turns around and walks towards the door, but before he exit he looks back.

“They need to pay back ihlawulo that Dad paid for Mazwakhe. It wasn't his job to pay for the child he didn't make and the virginity he didn't break. Kindly pass the message to your beloved husband to-be.” He turns around and leaves.

Son of a bitch! Mazwakhe is still struggling with his new identity, the community cannot find out about this yet. I can't believe he's doing this to Mazwakhe after everything he has done for him. This coward cannot even fight for himself, Mazwakhe was always saving his ass.

“Lovely bride, are you ready to go?” Vuyiswa walking in. She's getting very comfortable and

forgetting the main reason I asked her to come. I wish Bontle had come as well, unfortunately her own family matters came up and she couldn't come.

“Yeah, let's get out of here.” I pick my bag up. There's no need to say goodbye, nobody cares, they'll only need me when the Mthembus come again.

“Has Mazwakhe called you today?”

I'm getting tired of the two of them. If it's not her, it's Mazwakhe. I report back and forth. How is Mazwakhe...Is Vuyiswa okay..it's tiring!

“He did,” I say flatly.

“And?”

“He wanted to know if things are okay.”

“Things only?” She lifts her eyebrow.

I roll my eyes. “And you of course.”

Thank God the taxi comes before her cheeks crack from endless smiles. It's really weird that she's attracted to Mazwakhe and she actually made the first move. My poor brother needs counselling

wherever he is. Clearly he also cares about Vuyiswa, it's the way she is as a person that scares him.

Yes he is scared, I can prove it.

“Hlahla I’m at work,” he answers just as I’m about to drop. Vuyiswa raises her eyebrow next to me, I don’t tell her anything.

“Oh, sorry. I was just checking on you,” I say.

“Well I’m good. Did you talk to Nkanyiso?”

I really don’t want to bother him with the Ngwane problems, he’s trying to work on himself and I know if he finds out what Nkanyiso is up to he’ll take the first taxi to KZN. Hopefully Ngcwethi can intervene and help on this one.

“No, I didn’t get the chance,” I lie.

“Let me know when you have talked to him.”

“Okay. By the way I’m with Vuyiswa and she wants to say hello.”

“Your signal is bad, I cannot hear you.”

“No it’s not...hello...Mazwakhe?”

Well, he's gone. I want to laugh, after not having any phobia his whole life my brother is finally suffering from girlophobia.

“It's not funny,” Vuyiswa says abruptly.

“It is, you just don't get the joke. You're the only thing in the world that Mazwakhe is scared of.”

“Really?” Her face lights up. I thought she was angry at me!

“Yes but don't pull a J ulani on him. You already lowered your...ummm...your Queen of queens standard by making the first move. Leave the ball on his hands.”

She heaves a sigh. “You're right, it's just that I worry about him.”

“I'm his sister, I will take care of him.”

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Things didn't go as Busikhaya wanted but he understands where Ntobe is coming from. It's the 90 days thing that he doesn't understand. It feels like a punishment, he's paying for what that idiot, Thulani, did. Why is he so soft on him? He's been harassing her, stalking her and threatening to kill her for costing his business important deals. Instead of dealing with him, Busikhaya has been trying to prove himself to Ntobe and protecting her from the devil. And now he has to pay for his sins?!

"I've been knocking," Mndeni says letting himself inside the bedroom. Busikhaya doesn't shift from the window, he keeps pulling up the leather glove in his hand.

"Are you going somewhere?" Mndeni asks.

"It's about time I pay Thulani a visit."

Mndeni frowns. "Nontobeko's ex-boyfriend?"

"He was not her boyfriend, just a loser who used her as his ladder to success." He turns around and walks to the drawer besides the bed. He pulls it and takes out the gun.

“Come on, you have to attend Sango's dance classes tomorrow,” Mndeni.

“It's not even good dance classes. All they do is jump and stretch their legs around.”

Mndeni bursts into laughter. He only attended those classes once and it was the most boring thing he's ever watched. Now he just make excuses whenever Sango invites him to attend with her.

“That shit is so wack. I'd rather sit at home and help MaMbonambi feed her chickens than to see that shit ever again.”

“What shit?” Ngcwethi walks in. He sees the gun in Busikhaya's hand but it doesn't seem to shock him. He came to stop him. They don't need more blood on their hands.

“Sango's stretching classes,” Mndeni says.

“It's called Ballet. There's plier, étendre, relever, glisser, sauter and.....”

“Stop with nonsense, they're stretch classes!” Mndeni cuts him short. They both sit on bed and

look at Busikhaya standing mindlessly in the middle of the room.

“Killing spree?” Ngcwethi asks.

“What do you expect me to do? He fucked Nontobeko up and now I have to pay for it. 90 days without any sex? What kind of rule is that?”

“Act Like A Lady, Think Like A Man,” Ngcwethi.

“What???” Busikhaya and Mndeni ask in unison.

“There's an American clown who wrote a book and that's where all this 90 days shit came from.”

The shock on their faces! Ngcwethi always tell them to read books and get knowledge. See their ignorance now.

“He needs to be dealt with,” Mndeni says.

“He's rich and famous, you cannot do anything.”

“Well the lightning that will strike him is still doing push-ups in heaven,” Mndeni says and they both break into laughter, much to the irritation of Busikhaya. Why are they even in his room? He shouldn't have told them about this 90 days thing.



They'll use it any chance they get and mock him.

“When the joke is over please get out of my room,” he says shooting a fierce look at them.

“No, we love this bed. It's not like there will be any lady warming it anytime soon,” Ngcwethi says.

“Of course, act like a man and think like a lady.”

“It's Act Like A Lady, Think Like A Man,” Ngcwethi corrects him.

“No difference, it's still no sex for 90 days,” Mndeni.

Laughter! This time Busikhaya drags them off his bed to the door. They wish him a lame goodnight and leave in stitches.

He puts back the gun inside the drawer and lies on bed. The past few days have been hard on him.

There's a lot going on in his mind. Ntobe being at the top of his thoughts, then there's his bronemy.

He lives in a shack, surviving on the piece jobs he gets from clients they've been referring to him.

MaMbonambi wants him to come and apologize to the ancestors. It's the right thing to do, for

Qophelo's sake, however Busikhaya knows how Mazwakhe take things.

To him he's not just a bronemy anymore, he's a father of his son. He had every right to take Qophelo from him but he chose not to. It's time for those two words to be said. The past needs to stay in the past, Qophelo will need both of them in his life.

He had typed a lot of messages in the past and changed his mind before Mazwakhe could read them. In them he was explaining himself, justifying his doings and using their son as the reason why they should make peace. But the truth is, he only had to type two words.

**\*\*I'm sorry\*\*** and hit send.

Mazwakhe reads the message but he doesn't respond.

**\*\*I miss the part of me that your presence awakens. I hope you're warm where you are. I love you Ntobe.\*\*** He turns to Nontobeko for comfort.

Unlike Mazwakhe there's a reply.

**\*\*Thank you, have a good night\*\*** That's all it says.

It's been so long since he last heard anyone telling him three important words; I love you. He's trying to move on but life is not allowing him to. There's no where to move on to.

He takes the box he promised himself that he'll never open again and sits with it on bed.

She's smiling in heaven now, God is blessed to see her beautiful eyes everyday.

“Nombuso your kids are grown now. It's weird being the only man in Sangelihle's classes, other little girls bring their mothers and I know deep down she wishes to be accompanied by her mother too, even if it's for one day. And that's the only thing I cannot give them. I cannot give them you.” He exhales and stares at the picture.

“It's Qophelo I worry about the most. He's a quiet child, I don't know what to do most of the times, I

just do what I think will be the best. I think he misses you.”

The knock disturbs him. Why can't people give him space? It's almost 10 pm, what happened to their warm beds?

“Mndeni or whoever you are, go away,” he yells.

“Babaaa!” - Sangelihle’s voice.

He hides the photos and quickly rushes to the door.

“Are you okay?” Concern fills his voice as he lifts her up checking if anything hurt her.

“I want to sleep here,” she says.

“Sangelihle you know this is Baba's room, you cannot sleep here. Have you ever seen me sleeping in your room?”

“Yes I have.” Sango's answer is very quick and straightforward.

Busikhaya chuckles and kisses her forehead. He never sleeps in her room, he only pretends to so that she'd fall asleep and then he tiptoe his way out.

She untangles herself from Busikhaya's arms and

jumps on bed. She jumps up and down until Busikhaya asks her to stop.

“Bab’ Ngcwethi said princesses do sleep with their kings if they like.” She slides inside the covers.

Busikhaya's phone brightens up, there is a bubble popping sound that causes Sango to giggle. Why hasn't he deleted these stupid games though?

Thanks to Ngcwethi for the company, he won't have a chance to go anywhere tonight.

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Zanamuhla

He's always dreaming about something and he takes his dreams seriously. But today it's strange, he woke up and drove here because of a certain bad dream.

“Ngcwethi you're scaring me. At least drink something,” I say.

“No I'm okay.” He continues with his staring and jaw

-clenching. Thank goodness it's just me and him. Vuyiswa left early, she said there's a sale somewhere and she wants to lay-buy her 100th pair of boots.

“Talk to me. What’s going on?” I ask.

“I wanted to see you.”

“Why?”

“Because I love you.”

He can be weird with limits. There’s no need to overdo it. I know he loves me, but to just drive here to tell me that?!

“Am I in danger?” This could be the only reason for this behavior. Maybe he's here to protect me against whatever he sensed.

“Yes..No..I mean, babe come here.”

I am here! Which other here is here?

“Look, we didn't do things right,” he says.

I thought he said he knew everything and he's always right, what is this now?

“How?” I ask.

“Well, not exactly me and you. Your family. There is umemulo that was spoken into existence in the presence of your ancestors.”

“Umemulo?” This is the first time I’m hearing about this.

“Yes and it has to happen before we get married. Did you have any back pain last night?”

My hand involuntarily touches my back. There's no pain anymore, I took painkillers and placed a pillow under me before sleeping.

“Yes, I think I hurt my back on the taxi seat on our way back here,” I say.

“No, you didn't.”

Oh fuck then!

“Umemulo is not a birthday party you can plan and cancel whenever you change your mind. Once it's mentioned ancestors get involved. That's why even if the person who was promised umemulo dies, the family still performs it for her. It's not a game, you

mention it, you do it.”

Well I didn't know it was this important. I took it as the Zulu 21st birthday party.

“I don't know who promised to do it,” I say.

“Mazwakhe did, it was discussed above the kraal and he pointed the exact cow that would be slaughtered on that day. Things like that can create real-life problems if not honoured.”

Deep breath! Mazwakhe is no longer a part of my family. His hands are tied, he cannot do anything.

“They have sold most of the cows.” I'm holding back the tears burning my eyes and threatening to come out. We don't have much time, only two months. Why is this coming up now?

“That can be sorted, as long as they perform this ceremony for you,” he says.

“What if they refuse?” I ask.

“We cannot afford that.”

It seems like I have no choice but to crawl back to Nkanyiso and beg. Ngcwethi can take care of the



wedding, including paying for what Nkanyiso was supposed to take care of, but he cannot do umemulo for me.

Bastard! He's not answering the phone. Now I have to call the witch!

“Zanamuhla,” she picks up after the second ring. Her cellphone stays between her breasts, she wants it nearer just in case her gossip-buddies call.

“Mamkhulu I need to talk to Nkanyiso about something important,” I say.

“He's not here. What is it?”

“There's something that needs to be done before the wedding. Umemulo.”

There's some silence, then the ear-breaking laughter.

“Zanamuhla you think you're special. Zandile is older than you and no ceremony has been done for her.”

“The difference is, I was promised umemulo and

Nkanyiso has my lobola money that will help him perform it.”

“You won’t tell us what to do. If you have a problem with Nkanyiso having your lobola peanuts then come and take all of it. Don't harass us!”

Call ended! Am I being tested or what? She knows very well that I cannot take my lobola ‘peanuts’ and do umemulo myself.

“What did she say?” Ngcwethi asks behind me.

I release a sigh and look at him with tears running down.

“They won't do it.”

“Don't cry sthandwa sami, we'll find a way.”

Fuck the Ngwanes! They're really cruel people, the Mthembus have been right all along.

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Phone rings. Ngcwethi's number pops on the

screen and Mazwakhe sighs. He just came from work, all he wants is a warm meal and bed.

**\*\*It's about your sister\*\*** The text follows up.

His heart leaps when he reads it. Could Hlahla be in danger? He dials and calls Ngcwethi back.

“Where is she?” he asks as soon Ngcwethi picks up.

“She is in the kitchen.”

“You said something was wrong with her.”

“I never said that, I said it was about her.”

Mazwakhe clicks his tongue in irritation.

“Anyway, do you remember umemulo that was supposed to happen?” Ngcwethi asks.

His memory serves him fresh. Yes, he was planning to do umemulo for Hlahla with Nkanyiso, but she fell stupid in love and he had to cancel everything.

“It needs to happen before the wedding and the family refuses to do it,” Ngcwethi says.

“I can't say I'm surprised,” Mazwakhe.

“Things can be bad. You fought your blood family for justice, surely you can fight those who raised you up for the same reasons.”

Mazwakhe exhales. He's been the bad guy almost his whole life. He always has to fight to get what he wants. He has to shed blood before people listen to him, before they do right by him and his sister.

“Tell Hlahla I said hello.” He ends the call and starts packing his clothes in a small bag.

The army will turn against one another and their opponents will be watching from the other side of the river with glasses of whisky in their hands.

[11/19, 09:51] : SUNDAY BONUS

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## Chapter Twenty Five

It's a quiet night brightened by stars aligning the sky and a piece of moon teasing the night. The only

sound coming is of scuttling rats and a small puppy quarreling in front of what used to be Mazwakhe's house. He ignores the sudden dejection in his heart and walks past it. He has so many memories of this place, even after finding out the truth he still wishes it was his home.

There's a dog jumping up and down in front of him, wrapping its tail around his leg and yipping happily. He brushes its back and hushes it away.

He stops in front of Mamkhulu's rondavel and knocks. Everyone is asleep, it's just five ticks away from 11pm. He only left MaCusha tarven when they were closing up. He arrived in Mpofana before 5pm and passed time by staying in the tavern. There was no where to go.

“Who is that?” the sleepy voice comes inside.

He doesn't answer, instead he knocks again, harder this time.

“I asked who are you?” Now the voice is clear and pissed. Before Mazwakhe can knock again the sound of a key turning can be heard. As soon as the

door handle moves he pushes the door and steps inside.

“Who is this?” she asks.

To make things easier for her Mazwakhe reaches up to the light switch and turns it on. He flashes teeth-revealing smile that last only half a second.

“Mamkhulu, how is life?” he asks.

“Mazwakhe!” She's in disbelief, rubbing and narrowing her eyes for the clear picture of what is in front of her.

“What do you want? I told you that you're no longer welcomed here,” she says.

“I'm not here to stay, but hopefully what I came to deliver will stay in your ears because I don't want to come here again,” Mazwakhe says.

“Why are you delivering things at this time? I'm sleeping, can't you see?” She turns around and climbs on her bed. Mazwakhe remains standing, only then she realizes that it might not be a pleasant visit. She has seen this look a hundred

times before, no mercy ever comes out of it. It's the same look he had the day he went to kill his own father, Madoda.

“What's going on, son?” She sits up and looks at him a bit alarmed.

“Son? You have a son who looks like me?” He steps closer and stands just a few feet away from her bed.

She clears her throat, a cold shiver running down her spine, but she covers her fear with a smile.

“Does Nkanyiso know that you're here? He wanted to call you a few.....”

The gun rests on the pillow next to her, words go back to her chest as she stares at the object next to her with fear. Her heart almost leaps out of her throat, her chest turns drier than the Sahara deserts.

“If I can kill my blood father for mistreating the man I thought was my father, what makes you think I'd spare my mother's sisterwife for mistreating my sister?” He cannot find her eyes even though he's glaring straight at her face. Her eyes are roaming everywhere, except at Mazwakhe.

“I'm not following,” she croaks like a sick rooster.

“You don't have to follow, do right by my sister. From the sum of money you have requested for lobola I don't think it'll make you poor to do umemulo for her and do what is expected from you as the bride's family.”

“Oh, you're talking about that? Of course we'll do everything in our power to honour every single wish of hers.”

“Didn't you refuse?” He picks the gun and traces her jawline with the muzzle. There's warm water flowing between her legs and a low buzzing sound coming from her behind. The air changes instantly, Mazwakhe curses and covers his nose.

“Next time you'll fart on your way to the chapel of rest,” he talks beneath his hands and quickly walks out of the door.

The next person for the surprise visit is Nkanyiso. He opens the door half-naked and tells Mazwakhe to come in.



“I thought you were not allowed here,” he says.

Mazwakhe only follows behind him and doesn't say anything. Everything has been changed, the windows, bed, wardrobe and bedside table.

Nkanyiso is now a man living his dream, there's a human lying on bed with her face covered and her long silky hair hugging the pillow. Life must be really good.

“You could've called if you needed money,” Nkanyiso with his back turned. Something cold behind his neck forces him to turn around.

“Nkanyiso,” Mazwakhe says calmly.

“What's going on? Please remove the gun.”

He doesn't remove it, Nkanyiso lets out a shrill cry that awakens the resting human on bed.

“I can pull this trigger any second and walk out of this door as if nothing happened. But you've been my boy, I'll give you a chance to rectify your mistakes.”

“I will do anything you want me to do, just don't hurt

me.”

“You will do what Hlahla wants you to do with the money that's supposed to do it.”

Nkanyiso nods his head before Mazwakhe even finishes the last sentence. “I promise. I'm going to be a good brother to her from now on.”

Mazwakhe glances at the young girl who looks like she can faint anytime, she is someone's little sister, this is not a scene he'd want for a young girl like her to witness.

“Don't make me come back here like this again, I will only come for Hlahla's upcoming ceremonies with my uncle.” He pushes the gun behind his waist and gives him one last look.

“I didn't change one bit, only the surname did, so don't patronize me Nkanyiso.”

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They have eyes and ears everywhere. The word has got to them that Mazwakhe was spotted in the

tavern late at night. He is not a drunkard, the only reason he must've been there was because he had nowhere to go.

“Bring him home Busikhaya.” The order comes from MaMbonambi and all his sons find their different directions around the village in search of their father's first son.

Busikhaya takes Qophelo with him. If there's anything that could motivate Mazwakhe to accept that he's a Mthembu, it is his son who already lives on the surname.

“Do you remember the uncle we went to the doctor with?” he asks Qophelo as they drive out of the homestead.

“The one who shot Bab' Ngcwethi?” Qophelo asks.

For a moment Busikhaya is lost for words. He remembers the funeral incident but he had hoped that the kids didn't see it, or at least they have forgotten about it. Unfortunately he cannot protect Mazwakhe from this one.

“Yeah, that one. Do you remember him?”

“Yes,” Qophelo nods his head.

“He is a member of our family. Do you like him?”

Qophelo gives him a strange look. “I don't like other men, I'm straight.”

Busikhaya's eyes widen in shock.

“How do you know that?”

“I'm attracted to girls,” Qophelo says shrugging his shoulders. Fear kicks Busikhaya's balls. This boy is only 12 years old for goodness sake!

“You have a girlfriend?” he asks.

“Baba you're also attracted to girls, but do you have a girlfriend?”

Ouchhh! He smiles and shakes his head. He's growing up way too fast and getting clever by the day.

“Alright, I hear you. I will reconstruct my question; do you think you can accept that uncle in your life?”

“No, he wanted to kill Bab' Ngcwethi.”

“One day, when you're old enough to understand, I

will tell you the truth. He's not a bad guy, your mother loved him and I know she'd want you to love him as well.”

“But I told you I don't love other men.” Qophelo is getting fed up.

“Sorry J ama, I meant that she'd love you to have a relationship with that uncle.”

“Is he going to live with us?”

“No, I don't think so.”

Qophelo nods his head and looks outside the window. Busikhaya doesn't want to be pushy, even though he would've preferred if his son asked more questions and told him where his heart stands with Mazwakhe. He's the only comfort Mazwakhe can have, he can bring him hope and maybe he'd come back from Joburg and join the family business as MaMbonambi wishes. She has accepted him as her husband's son, even though he was conceived behind her back, she knows how much Madoda loved his family and she'd do anything to make him proud.

“Baba is that him?” Qophelo snaps him out of his thoughts. He's pointing at Mazwakhe standing in front of the stop sign with his bag. It looks like he's leaving already.

“Yes it's him. Let me stop the car and you'll go tell him that Gogo is asking him to come home,” Busikhaya says and looks for the right spot to turn the car.

When the car stops Qophelo climbs out and makes his way to Mazwakhe.

“Good morning Malume,” he says politely.

Mazwakhe is tongue-tied. He cannot take his eyes off his son. This human belongs to him. He made this perfect young boy. In him he sees Nombuso, the most humble God's creation that made his heart jump everytime his eyes landed on.

“Gogo asked us to fetch you, me and Baba,” Qophelo.

He was not planning to go to the Mthembus, he came to see the Ngwanes to remind them who he is, but how can he say no to his own son? He came all

the way to the taxi stop looking for him. God knows how they found out he was in the village!

“Can I help with that?” Qophelo looking at the bag weighing down his new uncle's shoulder.

“No, thank you.” He's still staring at Qophelo, his new world. When he turns around and takes the first step towards the car Mazwakhe stops him.

“How are you?” he asks.

“I'm good,” Qophelo says with a frown.

“I'm happy to meet you...” He nearly said ‘son’ and stopped himself. The timing is not right, he doesn't want him to feel what he's feeling. Finding out that you've been living a lie and adjusting your mind to the new reality is the heaviest thing a heart could carry.

“Actually, we have met before,” Qophelo says and chuckles.

“I know. I'm just happy to meet you again and that today you talked to me,” Mazwakhe says.

“Well, Baba asked me to.” He walks on, Mazwakhe

follows behind. When they get nearer the driver's door opens and Busikhaya steps out.

“Get in the car,” he tells Qophelo.

Qophelo does as his father says. Busikhaya and Mazwakhe stand outside the car, staring at each other.

“You never got back to me,” Busikhaya goes first.

“What did you want me to say? Sorry doesn't change anything,” Mazwakhe says.

“What do you want to change?” Busikhaya.

The question leaves Mazwakhe caged in thoughts. Would he want things to be different from how they are? He's still angry at everyone who has wronged him, but his heart has found some comfort. Very strange, he can't even point out where's this comfort zone is coming from.

“I'm over Nombuso, I don't wish anything was different except my surname,” he says.

“Pity, you are a Mthembu and you're not really different from me.”



“Don't compare me to you and your two brain cells,” Mazwakhe grumbles. There are no similarities between him and Busikhaya. He's still trying to figure out how they even became brothers. He wanted the world to be a better place, he wanted to kill him, but DNA happened.

“Two brain cells are your green balls,” Busikhaya.

In the blink of an eye Mazwakhe's bag is on the ground, they're holding each other by throats and exchanging insults.

“Babaaa!” Qophelo's voice pierces their ears and they immediately stop and look his direction.

There's another car pulling up. Ngcwethi jumps out of it and rushes to them with a pissed look on his face.

“In front of a child? Really guys?” He glares at both of them. Qophelo is watching inside the car fearfully. His father said they're family with this uncle, why are they fighting? He always tells him that family fight the enemy, not one another.

“It's the Ngwane Batista.” Busikhaya shrugs his

shoulders. He receives a murderous stare from Mazwakhe.

“I’m not a Ngwane, neither am I Batista. My name is Mazwakhe Mthembu.” Saying it is not hard as he thought. He may hate the surname but it's who he is. He is a Mthembu, not a Ngwane.

“Okay baThembu, can we go home and settle this as adults? You're both parents, please act like it and stop being WWE wrestlers on the streets.” Ngcwethi goes to Busikhaya's car, opens Qophelo's door and pulls him out. He doesn't want him to witness any more argument or fight, if they want to kill each other they must do it out of the child's presence.

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Zanamuhla

I have never seen him so scared. He's been pacing up and down since I got here, I even have a throbbing headache from it. But what did he think?

Leaving Mazwakhe and Busikhaya in one car!

“Please try Mazwakhe one last time,” MaMbonambi says to me. She doesn't understand this whole voicemail thing, it means the phone is switched off, no matter how many times I try it won't go through until the owner switches it on.

“It's still off Ma,” I say.

“Where are these children!” Her hands start trembling, she is sweating and breathing heavily. Mnotho is in front of her in a lightning velocity. He fans her with a cloth and asks her to breathe in and out.

There's a car pulling up outside. Everyone marches towards the door except Mnotho who has become MaMbonambi's nurse. This boy would do anything for his mother.

It's Busikhaya's white Fortuner. They both climb out shirtless and make their way towards the house. I don't know who is cursing between Mndeni and Ngcwethi behind me.

Mazwakhe finally meets my eyes. He has a bleeding scratch on his neck, I just know he's been fighting. They're too old for this. What is Qophelo going to learn from all this? I understand that there are unresolved issues from the past and they can't just get along within a day. But to act like cats! I'm disappointed in both of them.

“Hlahla I didn't know you were here,” he says.

“I didn't know you were here either.” It's strange that I had to find out from other people that my own brother was in the village. We talked a few days ago, he could've mentioned it.

He looks disappointed as well, but he is not the one to apologize. Busikhaya leads the way inside the house and we all follow.

MaMbonambi sits up straight and gives Busikhaya an icy stare. I feel my own hands sweating, only mothers can send you to ICU with just a look. I feel sorry for Busikhaya.

“I said go fetch your father's son, and what did you

do?” she asks him. I didn't know she could be this angry, she's always a humble woman.

“I fetched him,” Busikhaya responds with his head bowed.

“You're the eldest but your brain is the size of a chicken.”

Mazwakhe looks at him with his lip curved up into what could be a grin. They both share a look, Busikhaya doesn't look pleased with Mazwakhe. This is going to be one hell of a brotherhood.

“You're finally home.” She turns her face to Mazwakhe.

As expected, he doesn't say anything, he just stares at her.

“Where did you sleep last night?” she asks.

“I didn't sleep,” Mazwakhe says.

“You could've come home. This is your home and your father was a family man, he would've wanted you to join the family and grow his business together with your brothers.”

“I have my own business to grow, but thank you for the warm welcome,” he says.

“You never got back to me about our last phone conversation,” MaMbonambi.

“I don't have a problem doing the rituals and apologizing to the elders, I will do it.”

“We bought the goat, they'll deliver it later,”  
Busikhaya jumps into the conversation.

They bought the goat together? We are all surprised. They didn't look like people who did anything mindful except fighting like mouse and cat.

Indeed a white goat is delivered by a white van in the afternoon. It's one of the Jama vehicles so I guess they bought it from the family ranch farm.

The uncles and other relatives arrive, it was a cleansing ceremony but it has turned into the celebration of a new family member.

Am I not feeling left out? Ngcwethi is nowhere to be found, everyone is gathered in the ancestors'

rondavel and I'm not allowed to enter there yet. I'm stuck in the kitchen with piles of dishes to wash and pack.

When is Busikhaya and Mndeni bringing girlfriends? This is a huge family, Sango is too young to help with anything and MaMbonambi is too old to help a makoti.

“Do you need help?” the voice comes from the door. I lift my eyes up to Mnotho and immediately release a sigh of relief.

“I don't know how to wrap these knives,” I say.

He walks in and takes out a clean dishcloth. Instead of wrapping the knives he helps me with the dishes.

“I think you all need to bring girlfriends, I'm bored here alone,” I say.

“Count me out.” He chuckles and continues wiping the plates without looking at me. I'm serious AF.

“You're not that young, some of your agemates are already married,” I say.

“I'm married too.”

Trevor Noah wanna-be!

“You're funny,” I say.

“I'm married to a ghost.”

I laugh. He doesn't. I frown. He shrugs his shoulders and starts packing clean plates inside the cupboard. If this is his strategy to scare me, it's working excellently.

“What ghost?” I try not to sound frightened as I am. I heard some weird ghost stories growing up.

“It's complicated. Have you started preparing for exams? Don't let my brother distract you, bathroom sessions can wait.”

How to shut Zanamuhla up? Well, bring up the bathroom session thing. I would've loved to hear more about the ghost wife but he has pinned on the last nail. I keep shut and help him pack the plates.

[11/19, 09:51] : Chapter Twenty Six

Zanamuhla



I wouldn't get carried away and say things are okay. Yes the rituals were done, Mazwakhe has apologized and they all ate breakfast together as a family. The uncles are planning a date to send ihlawulo to the Ngwanes as they requested. But Mazwakhe is my brother, I know his mood swings and in a few months that I've known the Mthembus, I have seen that Busikhaya isn't much different. I just wonder how long they can stay without strangling each other, the lack of conversation between the two of them is also worrying. The only person I see getting along with Mazwakhe is Mndeni. Mnotho is a little bit reserved, which comes as no surprise, I mean he is a ghost's husband. Before I forget, let me fish some info on that matter, hopefully I won't come across as a Mamgobhozi girlfriend.

“Sthandwa sami,” I say.

I'm not happy with that eyebrow thing he's doing. I'm trying to wear the concerned sister-in-law look and burying the curious citizen one.

“Why are you looking at me like that?” Gosh, look at

me selling myself out. He always look like this, his frown is half permanent.

“I'm waiting to hear what you want to ask,” he says.

“If that's how you wait to hear things, with your forehead furrowed and eyebrows curved, then you have to leave it,” I say. He irons his face and gives me a go-ahead with a slight shrug. Well, now it's more awkward but curiosity always wins.

“Is Mnotho married?” I approached this one very cautiously. If it was any other day I would've asked him directly where his ghost sister-in-law lives.

“Did he tell you that?”

“Yes,” I say.

“No, he is not married.” I cannot miss the irritation in his voice. His jaws tighten and he turns his back on me like he's hiding his pissed face from me.

“But he said he's married,” I persist.

“In that case, I was not invited in his wedding.”

“No surprise there, he said he is married to a ghost.”

He turns around swiftly, he's both pissed and disbelieving. This keeps getting interesting.

“He told you that???” he asks.

“Wasn't he supposed to?”

“Fuck no! He is crazy, that's why he had to fuckin' go overseas to get back his senses.”

I'm thrown away by his tone. Is he allowed to talk like this? All these fucks with the same mouth that talks to the ancestors?!

“I think you should go out and get some fresh air,” I say.

“If I go out of this room the only thing I'm going to do is strangle that idiot.” He clicks his tongue and sits on bed. Now I regret bringing this up, it seems like one of those family untouched subjects.

He squeezes his bracelet and mumbles something I can't make sense of and then heaves a sigh. He was resetting his emotions and it worked.

“I'm sorry. It's just that we all worry about him.” Now he sounds worried.

“What really happened?” I ask.

“She died, they were not even dating, just childhood friends who promised each other forever.”

“That's weird. Didn't he attend her funeral?” I ask.

“No, she drowned in the river. We tried, everyone did, but we couldn't find her. Her family buried her clothes after 2 years of searching with no success.”

“How sure are you that she drowned? What if he is right, she is alive?”

“Zano, it's been years.”

“So what?”

“Mnotho had dreams, he was a different one, the one who wanted to reach different heights. We all had our trust on him, even Ndaba. But look where he is now, still in the village and holding onto a ghost.”

My heart breaks for him. I didn't know it was this deep.

“Did you help him heal or you told him to heal?” I ask.

“Zanamuhla it's been too long. He's not a child anymore, he knows what death is. Even Qophelo has accepted that his mother died.”

Dear Lord! Is this what they tell him? How do you compare people's healing process!

Mnotho has an attitude, he took after Busikhaya, but he's very soft inside. I have seen how he treats MaMbonambi, he is overprotective. Even with me, he's always there to make sure that I don't overwork myself.

Such people never get what they give in return. Protective people don't always anyone protecting them.

He lets out a sigh. “Anyway, don't bother yourself with this nonsense. You have to worry about umemulo and izibizo that will take place on the same day.”

“Same day???” I'm beyond shocked.

“This home needs you Zanamuhla. I also need you next to me, I want you to be my wife and enjoy every moment with you,” he says.

“But we do everything that married couple do,” I say.

“It's not enough. I want to do everything knowing that you are mine and have.....”

“Have what?” I cut him short with my eyes narrowed.

“Children,” he says with a smirk on his face. I kind of knew he was going to say this, it's like I'm in his thoughts.

“You know the reason I'm studying, right?” I ask.

“Zanamuhla you don't need to work. I'm here for you, I will provide for you with everything you need,” he says.

“You will rebuild my mother's house and stone her grave?”

“Yes I can do that.”

Such an idiot! He was supposed to say no.

“Does that make sense to you?” I ask.

“Yes.”

I'm done with this conversation and I'm out of here.

“Zano, what did I do now?”

His elders will tell him. I open the door and leave. Imagine your husband building your mother's house! He wants me to be labelled as a gold-digger. I furthered my studies so that I can stand on my own, help my brother build his legacy and not depend on anyone.

Icy stare! What did I do to this one?

“Brother,” I say.

He is standing by the door of Ndaba's rondavel.

“Aren't your exams starting next week?”

Oh, he's not happy about me being here instead of college.

“I'm leaving this afternoon,” I say.

“Don't be stupid Hlahla,” he keeps his voice low. I stand nearer him and listen. “I know that you love him and he loves you too, but please do not forget where we come from and what our dreams were.”

“Don't worry, nothing has changed,” I say.

He nods his head and signals for me to go on. I don't know if it will be easy but I'm going to fight for my independency. Ngcwethi can provide all he wants but I still want to work, to buy my own car and build my mother a beautiful house, even though she'd never see it or live in it.

Mndeni and Mnotho are working in the kitchen as usual. I have never seen Busikhaya or Ngcwethi doing anything. Why is MaMbonambi allowing this to happen? They may be the eldest but they didn't hire any maid. Work should be split equally among them. They're all unmarried sons here.

“Thanks for coming,” Mndeni. He dries his hands with a cloth and speeds out of the door before I could say anything.

“What is running away from?” I ask Mnotho.

“Burnt dirty pots,” he says.

I roll my eyes and join him on the sink.

“Who cooked like this?” I ask.



“Your husband and he refused to scrap his mess.”

Well, I guess it's my job to remove it. I wonder what he was thinking, cooking pap or whatever this was, on a full heat? I need to boil water.

“How is your wife?” I ask.

“My wife???”

“Yesterday you told me that you're married.”

He lets out a brief chuckle. “Oh that! I don't know, I hope she's safe where she is.”

“Is she not dead?” I ask.

“People believe that she drowned in the river and died. But that's not true, I know that Khwezi is alive.”

“How do you know?” I ask.

He dries his hands, takes off the necklace and shows me a ring clipped on it. It looks like a plastic ring from shebert.

“Is this a real ring?” I ask.

“It's not a diamond ring. It's not made of silver or gold. But it's a real ring to me. She gave me this

when we were 12 and I gave her my watch. If she died I would've known.”

“How Mnotho?” I ask.

“By a dream or something. She would've let me know by now. I know she would have.” He sounds convincing, as crazy as it may sound, I believe him.

“How long has it been?” I ask.

“10 years, 7 months and 19 days.”

“I'm really sorry.” I wrap my arms around his neck. At first he hesitates, I tell him it's okay, then he rests his head over my shoulders and hugs me back.

“You will find her Mnotho, don't give up.”

“Thank you,” his voice is breaking. I brush his back in comfort, instead of relaxing his body tenses up, I feel his chest vibrating. My word! This boy is going through a lot.

“You're allowed to cry, I know it hurts,” I say.

He starts crying shamelessly. I brush his back and allow him to. I know from my own experience that having a brother doesn't always mean you have

someone to lay your heart out to. Mazwakhe is a good brother, I'd give him his award, but he doesn't know how to listen to my personal problems. He'd rather solve everything than to allow me to whine and cry.

There's someone coming in. It's Busikhaya, he almost falls as he makes the U-turn and rushes out to disappear as quick as possible. I'd be lying if I said I understand any of them. Tell me, why is he running away instead of asking why his little brother is crying?!

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It feels good having Mazwakhe around the table. I have not eaten lunch with him in a long time. The only person who is not here is MaMbonambi. That woman is always busy with endless Durban trips.

“As I was saying, after Ngcwethi's wedding I'm also sending lobola,” Mndeni.

“To who?” I ask.

“You will meet her when the time is right.” He's beaming with joy, however nobody seems to share the same excitement.

“Don't bother MaNgwane, by the time when the time is right they would've broken up,” Busikhaya says.

Mndeni digs in his plate and shoots a look at him. I also don't see Mndeni having a working relationship anytime soon, he's too playboyish and generally not serious about anything in life.

“I can't wait for that day. Being here alone is boring,” I say.

“Alone? What do you mean?” Ngcwethi.

“Sango is too young, MaMbonambi is hardly home.”

“But we are always here,” Busikhaya says.

How do I tell him that they're boring without sounding like a disrespectful girlfriend?

“I can't relate to any of you,” I say.

“Are you trying to say we are boring?” Mndeni.

“No, that's not what I'm saying. I wouldn't say such

to my brother-in-laws,” I say.

They laugh and start their boring soccer conversation. Mazwakhe says a few words here and there. He is not complete into this Mthembu thing yet but he's getting there. Busikhaya and him don't interact that much but there haven't been any more catfight and that's some improvement.

Mnotho is awkwardly quiet. I wish they could give him the benefit of a doubt and help him look for her. Busikhaya has connections everywhere, Ngcwethi can construct a road in a space of 3 months, Mazwakhe can kill anyone standing on his way and Mndeni can lighten any situation with his personality.

If they can all join heads they'd be able to help their little brother. They can turn the whole country upside down. The only thing Mnotho needs is closure, they can give him that.

There's a hand lifting my dress and brushing my thigh under the table. I find him staring at me. He cannot do this in front of my brother!

“You're leaving today,” he keeps his voice low, I'm the only one who can hear him.

“Stop what you're doing.” I down a huge sip of my juice to calm down my pumping chest. I don't like the finger-drawing thing he's doing on my thigh.

“Go put on that swimming costume thing I saw in your bag. I'm going to come shortly after you,” he whispers and join the loud conversation without raising any suspicions.

I have a swimming costume thing in my bag?  
Wonders shall never end.

There's a soft pinch on my thigh. I look at him, he narrows his eye. What's wrong with him?!

“I have to go pack,” I announce.

Everyone looks at me, including Mazwakhe with his scary eyes. I hope he didn't see Ngcwethi brushing my thighs. He can be sharp-eyed. Him joining the family won't be an advantageous thing on my relationship side. Imagine what's going to happen when Ngcwethi has to randomly kiss me!

“Tell us when you're leaving,” Busikhaya says.

Well, it's not like I'll ever leave without....Oh, I have done it before. The last time I was here I left without telling anybody.

I empty my bag looking for a swimming costume thing. I cannot find it, I only brought my dresses, panties and bras, toiletries and that lingerie Vuyiswa made me buy. What could be a swimming costume among these things?

“My love,”

Great, he is here!

“I don't have any.....”

He lifts it up with excitement splashed all over his face.

“This is a lingerie Ngcwethi and it's not worn during the day. I thought you said you know everything,” I say.

“Where is that written?” he asks.

“It's logic Ngcwethi and I'll only wear this the day you start supporting your brother,” I say.

He frowns. “Which brother?”

“Mnotho, stop thinking he's crazy, you also have no proof that Khwezi died,” I say.

He throws the lingerie back inside the bag and yawns. This the exact bad energy they give Mnotho and he doesn't need it. Why can't he be positive?!

“Uyakwazi ukuwisa induku kodwa Zanamuhla! (You can turn a person off Zanamuhla) What did he drill into your head? That everyone is crazy and he's not?”

“He could be wrong and he could be right. What evidence do you have that she died?” I ask.

“There's no evidence of her being alive. Zanamuhla stop this. We want him to move on, don't give him dead hope.”

“Can't you ask the elders or sense something?” I ask.

“I hate it when people treat me like that. Don't mock



my gift.” He walks out and slams the door.

When did I mock his gift? It looks like I just messed my goodbye fuck.

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I'm being accompanied by five guys to the residence. I don't know who came up with the idea, Mndeni and Busikhaya are enjoying beers at the backseat. Mnotho is driving with Mazwakhe sitting with him at the front. Then there's a weird couple, holding hands but not talking to each other.

“Ngcwethi I didn't mock you, if that's how you felt then I'm sorry,” I say.

“I'm over that,” he says.

“Then what's the matter?”

“I'm just thinking about everything you said.”

That's one positive step. At least he's digesting on it.

“I don't know what to do,” he says.

I squeeze his hand. He looks at me, sadness is

written all over his face. I peck his lips and brush his cheek in comfort.

Someone clears his throat. Mazwakhe! What an exhausting brother to have around.

I send Vuyiswa a quick text letting her know that we are on our way. She has this tendency of wearing only underwears during the day. At this point she cannot afford to look like that in front of Mazwakhe.

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Being back here is not exciting as it used to be. Ngcwethi helps me out of the car, Mndeni carries my bag and everyone climbs out except Mazwakhe.

“Bafo you don't want to see where she lives?”

Mndeni.

“He has a situation inside,” I say and receive a piercing stare from him.

“What situation?” Busikhaya asks curiously.

“There's no situation,” Mazwakhe says abruptly.

“He doesn't want Vuyiswa to see him,” Ngcwethi jumps in. That earns me another icy look from Mazwakhe.

“Nilalana ngegama lami?” (You fuck each other over my name)

He needs to chill. It's not that deep, I'm sure at some point he also discussed me with Nandi.

They all break into a fit of laughter. Mndeni being the loudest of them all.

“Don't laugh too loud, Julani is on the third floor,” I say.

Mazwakhe lifts his eyes to him. He just stopped laughing like he never started. I've never seen anyone cutting a laugh so quickly.

“Are you guys sure that you're the Mthembus? We don't have chickens in our clan.” Busikhaya taking my bag from Mndeni who doesn't look like someone who intends to go inside the building anymore.

“We are the Mthembus, Mr 90 days,” Mndeni says.

Busikhaya clicks his tongue in irritation. I don't

know what that means but it doesn't sit well with Mr B 90 days Mthembu. I guess Ngcwethi and Mnotho are the only ones having the last laugh.

Mndeni and Mazwakhe stay in the car and Busikhaya is delayed at the security desk. Only Mnotho and Ngcwethi come with me. I have gained respect from other students. They always greet when they see me. I don't like that I had to date a monied guy to earn respect but I still enjoy it.

And then? Vuyiswa and the wrongly wrapped doek!

“What's up?” I ask.

She is searching for someone with her eyes. “Where are others?”

“Waiting for you outside,” Ngcwethi says.

I nudge him with an elbow, he looks at me and grins. I thought he was the mature one. Nobody is waiting for Vuyiswa, if anything they're avoiding her.

Her doek isn't doing any justice, she's still wearing a skinny top and a bumshort, things Mazwakhe

wouldn't approve of if they had any relationship.

“Oh, great. I actually have a friend waiting for me at the parking lot. Maybe I'll see Mazwakhe and say hello.”

A friend? That's how she refers to her fuck buddies. I don't think my brother can stand seeing her with another guy, this is such a clever move. He is not her only option, he needs to realize how lucky he is.

“Good luck,” I tell her.

She winks at me, I give her my thumb and she disappears out the door.

“And then?” Mnotho.

“Whose side are you on?” Ngcwethi.

There are sides? I was not aware of that.

(Wed insert later, don't kill me † ♂ )

[11/19, 09:52] : Chapter Twenty Seven

“Who is that?” Mndeni asks, curiously looking at the man holding Vuyiswa's hand as they walk away from the parked Ford Fiesta, making their way towards the building.

Mazwakhe remains silent even though his eyes are glued on the couple as well.

“It looks like she has already taken someone else. Better you than me,” Mndeni says reflecting back at his own miserable life. Maybe Julani will finally get the message, he's not attracted to men, even if he was, Julani wouldn't be the type of guys he goes after. Even though he doesn't know Nandi very well, they just met a while back in the mall, but he believes that whatever connection they have is strong. She is a bit broken, her boyfriend dumped her after finding a new job in Johannesburg. Mndeni has to build the trust that was broken by another foolish man. Talking about how she stood with that man through thick and thin always bring her to tears. He even promised her marriage but as soon as he got another job and moved to Johannesburg everything changed.

Mndeni has to take things slowly with her, even though he'd like to introduce her to the family, it will be too soon. This is one relationship he wants to last, Nandi is different.

They didn't meet the bookish way, bumping into each other, books scattering and Mndeni helping her pick them up with his eyes glued on her like a magnet. No, it was a normal day at Pick'nPay queue, she was in front of him and her card kept declining. Mndeni had no time to wait, he offered to pay for her and they started chatting as they exited the store. They exchanged contacts before parting and after a few chats on WhatsApp they decided to try a relationship. So far it's been good and fun. They have a lot in common despite their different backgrounds.

Vuyiswa and her man disappear inside the building. To say Mazwakhe is boiling inside would be an understatement. His whole face is burning, his fists are itching to dismantle the urban fool's jaw.

“Let's go inside,” he says to Mndeni.

Mndeni's eyes widen in disbelief. Has Mazwakhe forgotten why they were camped inside the car? How short is his memory?

“Whaaat? I'm not taking that risk!” he says.

“Stop being a chicken. Tell him to fuck off once and for all. How long are you going to hide from that gay?”

“Look who's talking! Why didn't you tell Vuyiswa to fuck off because you're Mr Bold?” Mndeni asks irritated. They're both in the car because they're hiding from their suitors. Mazwakhe is in no position to give him stupid advices. As big as he is, he couldn't tell the tiny Vuyiswa to fuck off. It doesn't even make sense, he could've just gave her what she wanted and fucked her.

“My situation is different,” Mazwakhe defends himself.

“How is it different? Is it because your suitor is a woman and mine is a cheesy guy?” He sighs and shakes his head. “How did I become so unlucky



vele?” he thinks out loud. Why did Julani choose him out of all people? Is it only his ass that deserves to be cracked? Is it because he's too handsome and sexy? Why didn't he go after Busikhaya, surely he wouldn't have made him wait 90 days like Nontobeko.

Mazwakhe is tempted to tell him that he is unlucky because he is a Mthembu but then he remembers he is also one.

“Can we go in?” he asks impatiently.

Mndeni sighs and gives in. They both walk inside the building, Mazwakhe is taking the wildest strides, he wants to know what's going on inside. Even though the afternoon is chilly his forehead has drizzles of sweat.

The door is widely opened. Vuyiswa and her man are standing in the kitchen, Vuyiswa is pouring drinks in the glasses. Mndeni walks past them and calls out Ngcwethi's name. Mazwakhe leans by the door and watches the couple handing drinks to

each other. This is a students building, are they allowed to drag in different men? This is how they study? Alcohol and men.

“Bro, can we help you?” the man asks.

Vuyiswa lifts her eyes up. A pang of fear strikes her face when she sees who it is, but she quickly buries it with a weak smile. “Hi Mazwi, I didn't see you.”

He only stares at the man standing next to her and doesn't say anything to her. He is one of those urban men who always dress up for occasion, drive cute cars and he must be coming from a stable household, no confused identities and all that shit. But that doesn't change the fact that Mazwakhe can knock out his foolish ass with a fist. That's the only thing going through his mind, smashing this fool's head and teaching him a lesson he'd never forget.

Vuyiswa clears her throat nervously. She didn't expect him to be this angry, she only wanted him to be jealous.

“Zamani let's go to the lounge,” she says.

Mazwakhe steps in, he's still staring at the man and

rubbing his itching hands together.

“He will wait a bit, I need some clarity,” he says.

Vuyiswa lifts her eyebrows in question. She forgot the other side of Mazwakhe Zanamuhla once told her about. This might be it, he'll harm the poor guy.

“He is my guest Mazwakhe,” she says sternly, hoping that it will scare Mazwakhe off. But he doesn't care, he pushes her aside and stands in front of the stupid Zamani with a deadliest look on his face.

“You called me bro? I'm your bro?” That's not all he wants to punch him for, there is more, but this ‘bro’ thing is the only thing that can justify his anger. Yes, he hates being called bro with passion.

“Zamani leave, please.” Vuyiswa gets between them.

There's a stare battle. Zamani drop his staring weapons and leaves angrily. Vuyiswa releases a sigh of relief. The scene nearly became a Wrestlemania.

There's a moment of silence. They're both glaring at

each other. Vuyiswa is pissed but she doesn't know where to start voicing it out. This guy blocked her after she bravely confessed her feelings to him, and now he comes out of nowhere and fights the man she trapped him with.

Well, Mazwakhe is also angry at her.

“This is the life you live?” He breaks the silence, penetrating her with his eyes.

“Which life?” Vuyiswa asks, ignoring the chilly feeling in her stomach. He is the most challenging person she's ever come across and she cannot afford to bow down her head.

“Dressing up like this, drinking like a fish and opening your legs for every man?”

“Yes,” she says.

“Why are you doing all this?”

“Remind me again, how does my life concern you?”

“Well, it doesn't concern me,” he says.

“Exactly, none of your business! Leave me alone, bro.” She grabs a the bottle and walks away

swaying her hips.

"Damn it!" Mazwakhe curses and bangs his fist on the table.

"Help me Lord!" Busikhaya says looking at him with disapproval and walks past before he could respond.

Mazwakhe takes a moment to pull himself together then follows the lounge direction where everyone is gathered, except Vuyiswa who has shut herself inside her room.

"Is everything alright?" Zanamuhla asks.

He ignores her and stands behind the couch, there's no space to sit, they have all crowded on the single couch. He looks horn mad. She wasn't supposed to walk away from him. And she called him bro! He's no coloured thug.

Mndeni's phone rings, he smiles at the name flashing on the screen and stands up. "You'll find me in the car, baby is calling." He answers and

makes his way out.

Nobody bothers about his relationships anymore, he always get this excited about all of them and they never last more than three months. He is the one with commitment issues.

“Who is she?” Mnotho asks curiously.

“We'll know her soon, he'll bring her just to brag and to set the record straight to some suitors,”  
Busikhaya.

After a short moment Mnotho also stands up to leave.

“Zanamuhla, I hope we'll see you soon. Good luck with your exams,” he says.

Zanamuhla follows him out with her eyes. He is helpless. Those who are supposed to stand by him and help him don't believe him. They don't want to hear anything he has to say.

“Bontle please check on Vuyiswa,” Zanamuhla says.

Bontle leaves the room and goes to Vuyiswa's room. It was getting awkward, Zanamuhla saved her. She

finds Vuyiswa lost in her thoughts and hugging the pillow.

“Why are you hiding here?” she asks.

“I don't want to be where Mazwi is,” Vuyiswa replies.

“Why?” Bontle frowns and sits next to her.

“I asked him out, he turned me down and now he is.....”

“What on earth! Vuyiswa you asked a man out?” She is on her feet, her eyes are bulging out. She is in awe, her hands are over her cheeks, her mouth hangs open after her last words. Indeed the world is coming to an end!

“Keep your voice low. I didn't kill anyone,” Vuyiswa shushes her and pulls her back on bed. Jesus' distant cousin!

“Who raised you?” Bontle's mind refuses to accept what she just heard. A girl asked a man out? That's a man's duty. Lord forgive!

“Don't make me feel bad. Men ask us out everyday and nobody ever says anything,” Vuyiswa.

“Because that's how things are supposed to be. Trust me, even if Mazwakhe was attracted to you in anyway, you have destroyed your chances for good.”

“What do you mean?” Now she's a bit worried.

“You disgraced yourself Vuyiswa. Men don't like girls who throw themselves on them,” Bontle.

“I don't care, he can think whatever he wants.” She shrugs her shoulders and opens her half bottle of wine. She didn't bring any glass, she sips straight from the bottle. Only if alcohol could end all her problems forever!

“You don't look like someone who doesn't care,” Bontle says.

“Fuck off Bontle!!!!”

Back in the lounge, Mazwakhe is staring at the room Bontle disappeared in. He's wondering why Vuyiswa is not coming out. Is she mad at him? She should be. He acted like an idiot, he had no right to



fight another man. When she wanted his attention he turned her down.

“Who saw her drowning?” Zanamuhla.

The conversation Mazwakhe has been absent from goes on.

“Her uncle did, he was the one who alerted the community,” Busikhaya says.

“I don't understand. What made him think she had drowned? She went to fetch water and got delayed. As time went by the uncle went to look for her, he found the bucket and her shoes floating on the water. But he didn't see her drowning, it was all suspicions.” Zanamuhla frowning in confusion.

“Zanamuhla forget about this thing. Just let it go,” Ngcwethi says.

She pretends not to hear him and looks at Busikhaya.

“Was she close to her uncle?” she asks.

“I'm not sure,” Busikhaya says.

“Maybe you guys should look into this. Mnotho is

not doing okay. I have told Ngcwethi about this, investigating for the last time won't kill you. The girl could be alive somewhere.”

“Who is that uncle?” Mazwakhe brings his attention back into the room.

“Bhekani Ndlovu, the one who used to drive the truck and deliver blocks,” Ngcwethi tells him.

“I know him, he used to date young girls,” Mazwakhe says.

“They wanted lifts from the truck,” Busikhaya.

“Maybe.” Mazwakhe shrugs his shoulders.

It's time for them to leave. Zanamuhla's roommates are not comfortable with them around and they need to go home to check if the cattle was brought back.

“Can I use the bathroom first?” Mazwakhe.

“On your left,” Zanamuhla says.

Busikhaya doesn't wait, he leaves them behind. Mazwakhe makes his useless bathroom trip. He closes the door behind and stands mindlessly

inside the bathroom. Half naked or drunk, he needs to see her before leaving. Hopefully she has not lost interest and she doesn't hate him. He goes to the sink and washes his hands slowly. The bathroom door opens, he looks back just as she attempts to step backwards. When their eyes meet Vuyiswa gets electric shocked and stands motionlessly on the same spot.

“I was just washing my hands,” Mazwakhe says.

“I didn't know someone was inside, I'm sorry.” She turns around and takes only a few steps before Mazwakhe calls her name. It's the first time she ever hears her name coming out of his lips. She looks back at him with her eyes bulging out.

“I'm leaving tomorrow,” he says.

“So what?” She sounds rude and that's not what she intended.

“I guess I just want to say sorry about the earlier incident. I hope I didn't cause any problems between you and your BOYFRIEND.”

“No you didn't,” she says.

“So you wanted me to be your side?” The temporary apologetic face is wiped off by irritation.

“Mazwi you didn't want to have this conversation, that's why you blocked me, right?”

He exhales deeply. “Yeah, sharp.”

“Let's keep it that way, please excuse me.” She turns around and walks away.

He takes a few strides and catches her before she makes it anywhere far. He brings her back inside the bathroom and pushes her against the wall and stares at her with anger brewing in his eyes.

“What do you want from me?” he asks.

“I don't repeat myself Mazwi, get off me.”

He doesn't comply, he grabs her face and attacks her lips with a wild kiss. At the moment he doesn't care about the smell of alcohol and her lack of clothing. He's lost in her. Her slim body fits on his like the piece of a puzzle.

Things happen too quickly, before Mazwakhe knows it he is the one pressed against the wall.

There's a hand sliding inside his boxers, he lets out a low moan. His manhood reacts to the soft hand massaging it all around. His breaths are growing heavily in response.

Vuyiswa breaks the kiss and pulls her hand out of his boxers. She has got the satisfaction she needed but he still wants more.

“Vuyiswa,” he calls her between heavy breaths.

She inserts her finger inside his mouth. He needs no lecture, he sucks it like a hungry puppy. Vuyiswa brushes his cheek before making her way out.

“Vuyiswa!”

She is gone.

He turns around, holds onto the sink and releases a deep breath. What is she doing to him? This is harassment.

“I thought you were never coming out,” Ngcwethi says releasing Zanamuhla from his embrace. He nearly left Mazwakhe behind and he regrets why he

didn't. He's ungrateful, he just walked past and didn't even look at them.

He has serious anger problems. What's the excuse now? The mere bathroom provoked him?

“Can I come see you tomorrow?” He shifts his attention back to Zanamuhla.

“No, you're not good for me, my exams are starting soon.”

He pulls his face, Zanamuhla chuckles and kisses his cheek. It's getting hard living far from her. If it was up to him he'd drive her to college every morning. He has thought about suggesting it a number of times but fought against it. She'd bite his head off and not speak to him for days.

She walks him to the ground floor and kisses him goodbye. He's not happy about leaving and that's how clingy he has become.

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Vuyiswa

I get a call from an unknown number in the middle of the night. I answer with my eyes closed. If Zanamuhla didn't stop me I would've finished the whole bottle of wine.

“Who is this?” I ask, the caller has been silent since I answered. What is the purpose of this call? I hope it's not one of those illuminati night-flyers.

“Mxm, fuck off!” I'm about to remove the phone from my ear and go back to my sleep when I hear him calling my name. I haven't got used to it, not that he has called me more than once, but to hear it coming from his mouth slaps differently.

“Are you sleeping?”

Some questions though!

“Yes Mazwi, it's 01:39am.”

“I'm sorry.”

Sigh!

“Whose number is this and why are you calling me at this time?” I ask.

Silence.

“Mazwi?”

“Vuyiswa why are you doing this to me?”

I'm completely lost. I haven't done anything to anyone, I'm just sleeping on my bed.

“What are you talking about?” I ask.

“You said you like me and roamed with another fool in front of me. What is your intention?”

So he's tall for nothing, his memory is shorter than Bontle's legs.

“Mazwi you said I'm not your type, you're not interested in me and blocked me,” I remind him.

“I was shocked, okay. I have never been in a situation like that before,” he says.

“Now you're no longer shocked?”

“Vuyiswa!”



“I have to know when you're going to be unhocked. Didn't I shock you?”

“I want us to do things normally.”

“Define normal for me,” I say.

“I want to ask you out on a date.”

I swear I see the sun coming out at night. He's asking me out? Glory!!!

“Aren't you leaving tomorrow?” I ask.

“I'm not sure anymore, my life is here and you are here.”

My heart does a little dance, my foot is rotating gently on bed, my fingers are tapping on the pillow. Is this how happiness feels like? I have never felt this way before.

“Yet I'm not your type,” I say.

“Can we start as strangers tomorrow?”

“Okay, deal.”

“Please go back to sleep.”

“Yeah, I'll have one glass for celebration then sleep.”

Silence.

I said that on purpose. I'm not going to change. Yes, there will be times for compromises, but the girl who called him and told him she was interested in him is the girl he is asking out. Nothing is going to change.

“Why do you drink?” he asks.

“Because I'm over 18 and I can afford to buy alcohol.”

“And body-revealing clothes?” -him.

“I'm comfortable in them,” I say.

He croaks out a brief chuckle. “We will talk tomorrow, text me after your classes.”

Why do I feel like someone is preparing to change my lifestyle? I'm not about to dress like his sister or spend my weekends drinking rooibos tea like Bontle.

[11/19, 09:52] : Chapter Twenty Eight

They all put their jackets on and stand. Mazwakhe remains on the couch, he hasn't participated in any of the conversations even though he was present and listening.

“We have to go,” Busikhaya says, looking at him.

He looks up and finds all three pair of eyes glued on him.

“We?” he asks.

“In this family we do things together. Mnotho’s problem is our problem, nobody ever fight alone here,” Busikhaya.

“So you're going to a fight?” He saw them shoving guns behind their waists, licking black powder and swallowing with their faces squeezed in despise of an awful taste. They have never believed in sitting down and talking things. Just because Hlahla assumed that the uncle might know something it doesn't mean he really does know something. It's an assumption that needs to followed up on carefully. This is a critical matter, war doesn't guarantee the truth.

“As if that's something strange to you! Yes we will fight if we have to,” Busikhaya.

“Well, I don't just fight. I talk, if I'm not listened to then I fight,” Mazwakhe says.

Busikhaya releases a dramatic exhalation, he is bored to his bones. “You're not going to get an award for it! Nobody cares what.....”

Ngcwethi lets out a disturbing heavy sigh that brings silence to the bickering brothers. Sometimes it feels like he's the older one. Busikhaya needs more reprimanding than him, it's always been that way. Mazwakhe seems to be no different from him.

“This is for Mnotho. Whatever beef you two have ends here, when we step out of this yard we are the J amas, we show unity and stand against the world together,” he says.

“No fight?” Mazwakhe.

It's more like he's giving them an ultimatum. No fight or he'll stay behind and not go.

“Yes, no fight, but we cannot go unarmed,”

Ngcwethi says.

Finally everyone is on board, it's almost 8pm when they leave. Even though the Ndlovu homestead is not very far, they choose to ride in a car instead of walking. Busikhaya is sitting at the back with Mazwakhe, they're both glued to their phones and not exchanging any word. It's been only 11 days for Busikhaya, 79 days to go and he's not sure if his patience will be able to carry him. There's no denying that he loves Nontobeko and he'd do anything to be with her. But 90 days of no intimacy! They're adults, kisses and cold hugs are not enough. He wants more and she knows that. Tomorrow she asked him to come for dinner, he's trying not to let the fear of torture her body gives him stand in the way. Maybe it's part of the plan, a certain chapter in that stupid book advising her to invite him over constantly and watch him bite in his sexual desires.

Mazwakhe's phone vibrates, he looks at the picture sent to him and chuckles. It's strange how everything is happening, a half-nude picture of a woman he wants to have something solid with

would have never made him laugh in the past. He's always been careful about the type of girls he goes after, and appearance has always been a determiner.

“Can you stop? I'm trying to listen to an important work-related voice note,” Busikhaya says in irritation.

“Get a girlfriend and stop annoying me,” Mazwakhe.

“Why don't you take your own advice, or even better shove it in your arse?” Busikhaya claps back.

“I have a date tomorrow and I don't need you to spoil my mood.”

“Date with who?”

“None of your business.”

“Is it Vuyiswa? What do you know about dates and the culture of taking a fancy girl like Vuyiswa out?”

“I'm sure it's not that complicated,” Mazwakhe says. He's been to a restaurant before, he knows how the food is ordered and how to use fork and knife.

There's nothing to worry about, he plans to keep

their conversation natural. The whole purpose of tomorrow is to do things the natural way, him asking Vuyiswa to be his girlfriend and taking the lead as a man.

“Well, it is. Do you know what you're going to order for her?”

“No, I don't. You tell me, fancy boy.” Now Mazwakhe is beyond annoyed. Busikhaya thinks he knows everything and he's better than everyone.

“I'm trying to help you, don't embarrass yourself there.”

“Well, that's the main purpose of the day. Vuyiswa thinks she will be the man of our relationship,” Mazwakhe.

“What is that supposed to mean?” Busikhaya asks.

“Have you seen how she dresses up? I'm not going to have a girlfriend who walks around half naked.”

“That means it's over before it even began,” Busikhaya says and chuckles. He knows girls like Vuyiswa, the 50-50 generation that wear pants in a

relationship. She won't change herself for a man.

“She chose me, there's no turning back now. I want her, just not as she is,” Mazwakhe says.

“Good luck, ask Ngcwethi for the bath-salt before leaving.”

Mazwakhe just chuckles. He doesn't need bath-salts, Vuyiswa loved him without them and she'll change for him willingly. Tomorrow will determine the real bull.

“Did you guys actual talk without a single stupid argument back there?” Mndeni.

“Fuck off,” Busikhaya.

“Happy birthday to you too.”

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“I'm getting tired of this!” Mndeni sighs and returns back to where his brothers are standing. Busikhaya takes his second turn of torturing Bhekani who still



refuses to say anything about Khwezi's death.

He grabs him and shoves his head inside the bucket of water. When he starts tapping his foot Busikhaya pulls him out and orders him to talk.

“What made you follow after her?”

“She...was my...my niece.” He drops on the floor and fights to catch his breath. Busikhaya steps on his chest and repeats the question for the second time.

“You only started caring that day. Do I have to kill you before you tell me the truth?” He's losing patience, it could only take one bullet to finish this.

“How would he talk when he's dead?” Mazwakhe. He's sitting on the wooden bench placed near the door. He has been glued on his phone all along.

“Mazwakhe don't annoy me now. You will join this motherfucker and together you'll go navigate your road to hell,” Busikhaya chews him out. He has more important things to do with his time than begging an old wrinkled man.

“Mndeni how to join this Instagram thing? I'm told I'll find some pictures there.” Mazwakhe turns his attention to Mndeni.

“Why don't you just leave, Instagram king?”  
Busikhaya asks pissed.

“Geez, guys we don't have time for this!” Mndeni.

Mazwakhe shoves his phone in the back pocket of his jean and joins Busikhaya.

“Ngifuna ukuyolala. Baba iphi ingane?” (I want to go sleep. Sir, where is the child?)

“I said I don't know,” Bhekani responds stubbornly.

“She died or you don't know?”

“She.....”

“Think carefully before answering, I'm not Busikhaya, I'm not going to water your face and massage you.”

“She died,” he says without any second thought.

“And why did you follow her? What made you think she might drown in the river?” Mazwakhe.

“My instincts told me,” Bhekani says.

“Are they telling you that you're about to lose an ear?” He pulls out the pocket knife and places it against Bhekani's cheek. His eyes widens at the sight of a knife.

“For not listening when I told you to think carefully before answering,” Mazwakhe explains.

“Oh, shit!” Mndeni says delightfully and steps closer for a better view. Mazwakhe kicks Bhekani's chest with a knee and presses his arms on the floor to restrict any movement.

The knife is only a few inches in his skin when he cries out and asks for another chance. The sight of blood sets Ngcwethi off, he leaves the room and stands outside to guard.

“These ears are useless, you don't listen. One simple question and you couldn't follow the instructions.”

“I will think before I talk, please stop,” Bhekani begs.

Mazwakhe pulls away the knife and lifts him to sit

up.

“Where is the child?” he repeats the question and sits on the thin smelly mattress.

“Don't forget to think boy, imagine going to the tavern with one ear and missing some of Judith Sepuma's lyrics,” Mndeni says and breaks into laughter.

“Don't let him distract you, take your time and think carefully,” Mazwakhe says.

Busikhaya lets out a sigh. They're really going to beg this grandpa? If it's an ear that needs to be sliced, so be it. They've been here for almost an hour trying to talk to him.

“Time is up, talk!” he says.

Mazwakhe looks at him with disapproval. He had his time to deal with this and he failed. “Can you stop interfering in this?”

“You have time to waste, I don't.”

“Fuck off!”

“No, you fuck off!”

“Fuck off both of you!” Mndeni jumps in furiously. These two always act immature than their kids. Ngcwethi talked to them about brotherhood and how.....

“Khwezilokus a is married.” He startles all of them. They turn to him with their eyes bulging out.

She is married???

“I beg your pardon?” Mndeni.

“She got married. I married her off to my friend in Ngudwini.”

“So she is alive?” Busikhaya.

“Yes.”

They look at each other. The new reality stings and slaps hard. They didn't believe Mnotho, they told him he was crazy and forced him to keep shut.

How are they going to tell him the truth? Khwezi was sold to a man and she's been married to him for years.

They have let him down and he might never forgive them for this.

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Vuyiswa

I know this is not the kind of look Mazwakhe would approve of, but today is too special for me to slide into baggy clothes and look like a granny.

“That dress is too short,” says God's cousin, Bontle.

“I know sweetie, I'm standing in front of the mirror.”

“Don't you think it's a bit whorish?”

Bathong! Is whorish even a real word? No, I don't think a mere dress can make one ‘whorish’, whatever that is.

“Zanoooo, come look at your sister-in-law,” she yells out and Zanamuhla runs in within a minute. They share so many similarities, but Zanamuhla takes the cup on curiosity, she always wants to know what's happening around her.

“So you are not going to wear a bra?” She is in complete awe.

People still wear bras these days?!

“Must I let it loose?” I ask brushing down my weave.

“Anything you want, just know that Mazwakhe won't be pleased with this dress,” Zanamuhla says.

“Don't worry Sis, Mazwi will change his whole life perspective. In a few months he'll be the one buying bum-shorts for me,” I say.

“This relationship will be over before you can even spell s-e-x,” she says and walks out.

Negative environment!

I put my ankle-boots on and call to check how far he is. I'm not sure about our transport, he doesn't have a car anymore. He just told me to get ready and wait for him.

He says he's outside and coming in. I try to ignore the sudden rapid heartbeat. I'm bold, Mazwakhe mustn't change who I am, I fear nobody's presence.

“You're sexy though,” Bontle says when I walk past

her.

Trust her to give a compliment and end it with 'though.'

"Black is my colour," I tell her.

"No, it's for witches. Have you seen them in the movies? They wear weaves like yours, long nails and....."

Zanamuhla pushes the door and disturbs us with her laugh. She's a good girl, free spirited and all, but she never laughs this hard. The joke must be really great. Maybe Trevor Noah is in the building.

"He is waiting for you in the lounge," she says when she finally calms herself down. I don't know Mazwi as a comedian, maybe they shared a family joke.

I grab my purse and walk out. Taking a jacket with me makes sense, but I don't want anything to hide my stunning dress. I want Mazwakhe to see all this flesh, it will be his to admire and....WTF!

"Mazwi!" I'm almost yelling.

He looks up and rises up from the couch. Is this guy



trying to turn me into a laughing stock or what?

“Sawubona MaZwide.”

“Mazwi, I thought we were going out.”

He frowns. “Yes we are, are you ready?”

“I’m the one who should ask that question.”

He rolls up the sleeve of his overall. Yeap, you heard that right, he's wearing a navy overall and boots.

“I’m here to pick you up,” he says.

“Dressed like this?” I ask.

He looks at himself and his eyes spark nothing but admiration for his own fashion sense.

“Yes,” he says.

“You cannot go out dressed like this.” Gosh, I can't deal. I booked a table in the most expensive restaurant in town and this is the guy I'm going with?

“We don't tell each other what to wear, remember?”

“But you can't wear.....”

“I can wear whatever I'm comfortable in, and so can

you.”

He has a score to settle. I thought he was done fighting me over my clothes. How am I going to look at people in the eyes? Forget that, how am I going to hide from my fellow students who are scattered all over the parking lot?

“Shall we?” He takes my arm and links it to his. He came prepared to embarrass me. I wish I can love him less.

The devil really works overtime, we walk on J ulani stepping out of the lift. Mazwakhe does the unthinkable. Remember he rolled one sleeve up, well he just took one arm out like Sdumo. My eyes meet J ulani, his face tells me one thing, I'm going straight to Trending SA. I can see the pity in his eyes, he gives me a sad wave and walks past.

“Are we riding a taxi?” I ask while praying hard for the opposite. Imagine the eyes I will get in the rank. Taxi drivers will cheer him for scoring a slay-queen, and he looks like one of them. Not really, they look

better than him, he's like a garden boy.

“No, there's the car.” He points to the other side of the world. We'd have to cross the road, pass a number of student groups who'll take pictures and upload them in Ladies House and I'll be the laughing stock of a century.

Mndeni steps out of the car and opens the door for us at the back. I have no doubt, this whole thing is his idea. I regret feeling sorry for him when Julani was chasing him up and down.

“Vuyiswa you look nice. Your hair is longer than your dress.”

Did he just fire a shot at me? My hair isn't longer than my dress. Yes the dress is short, but....

“Bafo you look handsome too,” he says to Mazwakhe.

“Well, I try.” His eyes turn to me and his lips curve into a smile. I have never seen him smiling before, this whole thing must be really amusing.

“Mooi Royal Restaurant?” Mndeni asks with his

hands on the steering wheel.

I nod my head in response, he starts the car.

“You didn't send the pictures yesterday,” the garden boy next to me says.

I just need to release a sigh before responding.

“I said you'll find them on Instagram,” I say.

“My phone doesn't have it,” he says.

“That's what PlayStore is there for, to download the apps your phone doesn't have. It's that simple!”

He chuckles and links his hand on mine. That chilly feeling resurfaces. Can I be not charmed by this guy for once?!

“You look angry. What did I do?” he asks.

He knows what he did. I pull my hand and fix my eyes outside the window. I can feel every glance he steals, his eyes leave a burning sensation on my cheek and I'm fighting to keep my composure.

We are here, white people are all over the place,

they'll laugh at me in Afrikaans and I won't hear a damn thing they say.

“Hello, welcome to Mooi Royal restaurant. My name is Keisha and I'll be your waitress for the day. Do you have the table or I should....?”

“No, we don't have a table here,” him.

Deep breath Vuyiswa! You've been through the worse.

“Yes we do have table Keisha, I called earlier.” I ignore the stare he's giving me. I can feel everyone's eyes on me and I wonder what's gracing their mind. Maybe they think I'm his employer or blessee.

Keisha takes us to the table and brings our drinks shortly. Their service has always been great. I was introduced to this restaurant by one of the lecturers who was hoping for a relationship with me. He was a head-turner, always on point like he's stepping out of the magazine cover. But I turned him down, and here I am with the one I love. Mazwakhe, who look like he just stepped out of the kraal.

“You don't look happy,” he says.

“That's because I'm not happy. You could've worn something decent for my sake,” I say.

“But we talked about that, you cannot dictate what I wear and when. The same way you insist on going around half-naked,” he says.

“But I look nice,” I say.

“Your own observations. I look nice too, you heard Mndeni complimenting me.”

Fuck Mndeni!

“You don't look nice at all,” I say.

“Neither do you.”

Wow! This is how we start things off.

“What do you want me to wear?” I ask.

“Just cover your thighs and breasts. I understand if you're indoors or gym, but in public you need to look like someone's future wife.”

“Someone's?” I ask.

“Mine,” he says with a bit of the smile I'd like to see everyday.

“I guess I can do that, but only if you get rid of the overalls as well,” I say.

“Deal!”

We link pink fingers to seal it off. I guess I'll have to cancel my tattoo appointment, what would be the point of having a tattoo under long skirts and dresses?

“I think you already know why I'm here.” Now he's the serious Mazwakhe I fell in love with.

“No, I don't,” I say.

“Vuyiswa I want us to have a relationship. My definition of a relationship is two people who love and respect each other. Two people who are willing to stand together against hurricanes and storms. I have never been scared of loving a person, even though my heart has been broken a number of times, I still give love a chance. I'm willing to be a man, to love you and respect you as my woman. It will come with a lot of compromises and I'm willing

to go up and down with you,” he says.

“Okay,” I say.

“Okay?” he asks.

“Yes, I love you.”

“What are you going to be in our relationship?”

What a question! What else could I be, I have a vagina, obviously I'll be the girlfriend.

Oh no, it's a trap!

“I'll be a lover,” I say.

“Girlfriend or boyfriend?”

“Girlfriend, you win. But don't think you'll tell me what to do Mazwi, you are not my father, however I will respect you and know my place,” I say.

“And that's all I'm asking for, respect. Start respecting me by deleting all those fools in your phone. You're mine now,” he says.

“Now?” I ask.

Zamani promised me money and there's another



one who owe me a pair of shoes.

“Yes, now.” His look confirms his words. He's not kidding, he wants all of them deleted both in my phone and life.

Didn't I say I'll stand my ground? He just made me swear to get rid of my bum-shorts, and now I'm deleting my friends with benefits.

“I think you're controlling me,” I say punching my phone and deleting every man contact I'm not related to. I can't say I won't miss their money but Mazwi is all I need. Even if he becomes the only man I text and call, it'll be enough.

“When am I going to touch your cookie?”

Did he just ask me the unthinkable? Who asks a girl this question? I hope these white people didn't catch a word, otherwise I'll trend in 7 de Laan and Fokus as well.

“Mazwi are you crazy?” I'm whispering.

“It's only fair, you weighed my balls the other day.”

What the.....! I was in the bathroom and we are in

the restaurant for crying out loud.

“I love you too MaZwide.”

My anger becomes history, I'm melting and blushing like a fool.

[11/19, 09:52] : Chapter Twenty Nine

“Mthonga High School? How far are we?”

They all keep quiet. He's been asking them stupid questions as if they've been here before. According to what they heard, they'll drive past a forest known as Makhabukhabu or something close to that name, and they'll arrive in a clinic shortly after that. When they get there they'll ask around, Moyana is a well-known traditional healer in this place. They won't get lost once they get to the clinic.

“Can't you drive a bit faster? I'm thirsty.” Mndeni again.

“Why don't you jump to the front and drive yourself?”

He keeps quiet. He's not about to log out of social networks to drive. At least he's not feeling the journey that much, his phone is keeping him entertained.

They arrive at the clinic. There's a shop nearby, Mndeni wastes no time, he rushes inside and buys drinks.

There's a group of five men sitting around one bottle of beer and having a loud chat. His brothers are still inside the car, waiting for a God-sent who'll come and tell them where this Moyana man lives.

“Sanibona boBaba.” He stops next to them and bows his knees a little bit.

Seeing the car he stepped out of and the clothes he's wearing, he quickly earns their attention and the 'Ngamla' name.

“I'm looking for a man called Moyana. I don't know if you could help,” he says.

“Don't tell us a boy like you has problems. It's us who need Moyana's short-boys and his rats that bring money.”

“That's a fairytale. He lied!” Another one says and they all break into laughter.

“Explain why did he die poor if his rats really worked? He was a scam!”

Laughter again!

Mndeni clears his throat. It seems like they've forgotten what he asked them.

“Where is his home from here?” he asks.

“See that mud home surrounded by tall trees? That's where his mother and wife lives,” one of them replies.

“And where is he?” They need to see Moyana more than Khwezi. He has a lot of answers to give.

“He's cold underground. Why do you need him, son?”

“Never mind Baba. More beers?” he asks taking out a few notes out of his wallet.

There's a cheering. He's being recited on and wished a safe journey as he climbs down the concrete staircase from the shop.

“You won't believe this. The motherfucker is dead!”

“Whaaaaaat?” they chorus in shock.

“That's his home, they said I'll find his mother and wife. I hope the wife is Khwezi,” Mndeni says.

“He is lucky death got him before us,” Busikhaya says angrily.

The journey continues. They park below the mud homestead and walk in through tall trees. It's strange how one would surround his home with such trees. Everyone wants to be safe from snakes, and these trees might be a nest of thugs.

The boy sees them first and yells out for his mother. His clothes could be cleaner despite their long and probably overdue existence. His hair could've been trimmed nicer and he'd look like a normal young boy.

A woman emerges from one of the huts and follows the boy's eyes. She must be his mother. When her eyes meet four men standing confidently on her yard, she quickly wipes her wet hands on her apron

and greets them.

“Is this Moyana's home?” Ngcwethi asks.

“Yes and I'm his wife.”

They look at one another. Did they come all this way for nothing? How are they going to tell Mnotho the truth if both Moyana and Khwezi are not here?

“We were looking for him and the young girl he married.”

“I'm his wife,” she repeats.

“Oh!”

Silence.

“You have grown.” She's looking at Mndeni.

He frowns.

“Me?”

“Mndeni, right?”

It clicks. They're standing in front of Khwezi. She's now a grown, poor-looking woman. She used to keep her afro hair short and wear colourful leggings.

This woman standing in front of them, with a doek tightly wrapped on her head and long skirt peeking under her apron, she's completely unrecognizable.

“You have a child?” Ngcwethi asks.

They all knew she was married for a long time and there was a good possibility that she had children with Moyana. But Ngcwethi had hoped it wasn't the case because Mnotho is still waiting for her.

“Yes, his name is Mnotho.”

Their eyes widen in shock. She named the traditional healer's son after their brother?

“How is he? Why didn't you bring him with you?” she asks. Everything is normal to her. She's just happy to see people from her past.

“Khwezi everyone thinks you drowned and died in the river. Your mother buried your clothes,” Mndeni.

“Aawww. That's a bit dramatic, don't you think?”

“Dramatic? Your uncle married you off without anyone knowing. He trafficked you to his friend!”

“It was for the best. I'm happy and Ma needs me

here. Now tell me, how Mnotho is?”

Heavy sighs! This is not how they pictured their journey. They were going to cut Moyana's neck open, take him to Uthukela and feed him to the crocodiles. Then they'd free Khwezi and bring her home with them.

An old wrinkled woman comes out of the same hut with a walking stick. She looks at them, one by one.

“Who are these people MaNdllovu?”

“They're....they were looking for Baba kaMnotho. They're many of those who didn't hear about his death.”

They frown. She gives them a weak smile.

“You were looking for him, right?” she says.

“Yes, we wanted to kill him and take you home,”  
Busikhaya.

Ngcwethi nudges him with an elbow. He shrugs his shoulders and looks straight at the old woman's wrinkled eyes.

“What are they saying?” she asks Khwezi.



“Nothing to worry about Ma.”

That weak smile again! In her mind she believes that she's happy but her face always refuse to confirm that.

“Come inside and have some lemon juice.” She directs to them and leads the way to one of the huts that could fall anytime heavy rains attack.

“I don't drink lemon juice,” Mazwakhe says behind them.

“Nobody cares. This is not a restaurant,” Busikhaya.

“Well, fuck you!” Mazwakhe.

Ngcwethi ignores this one. The sooner he learns to channel his ears to what matters the better.

Busikhaya and Mazwakhe will not get along any time soon. Their fights are not those of enemies anymore. It's a competition of who's older and who's right. It can last forever if neither of them look at his ID attentively and realize how old he is.

“I don't understand what the fuck is going on here,” Mndeni whispers.

“She's not herself. You can see that something was done to her,” Ngcwethi says.

“I see an old-young woman who is crazy,”  
Busikhaya.

Khwezi turns around and looks at them. They pick up their pace.

“Shut up!” Ngcwethi warns.

She nearly caught them. They're not here to hurt her feelings.

“Vele mdala kodwa mncane,” Busikhaya.

“Mnotho will kill you,” Mndeni says.

“Which one? There's another one.”

Ngcwethi has to call them into order again. They'll discuss this when they're in the car. Now they need to act like guests and have lemon juice and whatever it is that they're being offered.

She lays a reed-mat on the floor. They remain standing and look at each other. Ngcwethi has to give them a firm look before they sit.

Moments later Khwezi comes back with a jug of lemon juice and a plate of cookies.

“She can be a bit crazy that's why I didn't want her to find out who you really are.” She's referring to her mother-in-law.

Ngcwethi takes the jug and pours the juice into the glass. He passes it to Busikhaya.

“Why me first?” he asks.

“Mndeni drink,” Ngcwethi says annoyed and passes the glass to Mndeni.

“No, I'm allergic to lemon remember?”

Khwezi's eyes drops to the floor.

“Is amahewu okay?” she asks.

“Yes, they're fine,” Ngcwethi answers on his behalf and gets an elbow on the side of his waist.

She walks out. They all turn to Mndeni.

“Since when are you allergic to lemon?”

“Those men said Moyana had short-boys and rats that stole money,” he says in a low voice.

Their eyes pop out.

“Say what? As in imkhovu?” Mazwakhe asks and pushes the tray far from his feet.

“There's nothing here,” Ngcwethi says and pours himself a glass of juice.

Well, they're not taking risks. Ngcwethi can protect himself, he fights demons in his sleep. Imkhovu must be watching them somewhere. What if they follow them for drinking their juice? No.

Khwezi comes back with amahewu. Mndeni places the cup below his lips and pretends to be drinking.

“Mnotho misses you,” Ngcwethi tells her.

“I miss him too.” She smiles, not weak this time. There's curiosity in her eyes, she'd like them to tell her more. How tall is he now? Did he finish school? And what is he doing now with his life?

“When are you coming to see him? He needs answers. His life is on a standstill because of you,” Ngcwethi asks.

“Because of me?” She points at herself and frowns.

“You just disappeared. Your mother died and you didn't even attend her funeral. Why didn't you run away or went to the police station when you got the chance?”

“Why would I have done that? I'm married. My husband died and left me with his son and mother. I have so many duties to fulfil and this home to look after,” she says.

“But it was not your wish to be here. They forced you.”

“No they didn't. My uncle loved me, he knew what was best for me,” she says.

“And Mnotho? What about him?”

He's one thing she'd go to her past for. Their memories have kept her happy for years. When she got her baby after two miscarriages, she decided to name him after the boy she had loved more than anything. The boy she shared so many beautiful childhood memories with.

Even though Moyana sold the watch Mnotho gave to her, she still knows exactly how it looked like and

its meaning will never be erased from her heart. Not by the razor marks that were opened to insert black powders all over her body, and not by the buckets of sticky water she had to drink when she first got here.

He's always been there at the back of her mind. Nobody understood him, they said he was full of himself and cruel. Probably because he hardly smiled at other children. But she knew him like the back of her hand. She knew how to get him smiling and he'd smile only for her.

She tricked him into playing Zonke with her. He hated it at first, he said it didn't make any sense. But with time he started liking it and hated it when Khwezi shot his people.

“I would like to see him, even if it's for a few hours, I miss him,” she says.

“Why don't you come back home? Your so-called husband died.” Mndeni asks.

“I have to take care of Ma.”

“Yours died and you weren't there.”

“Mndeni!” Ngcwethi snaps.

There's some silence.

“What must we tell him? He's the reason why we are here. Do we say he must stop worrying and move on because you're happily married?” Busikhaya asks.

He just wants to get over with this and leave.

“Ask him to meet me Eshowe on the 3rd this coming month, I will be taking Ma to the hospital and I'll have a chance to meet,” she says.

“Are you forced to stay away from everyone?”

“Nooooooo!” she says quickly.

They're happy to put her drinks back on the tray and leave. Any movement from the trees Mndeni jumps up and runs.

He peeks through the window before opening the door.

“Mazwakhe you're driving now,” Busikhaya says.

“No!”

“Then who's driving?”

“You again.”

They all get inside and leave him pissed next to the driver's door. They're in for a race!

“Put on your seatbelts and hold on to your seats.”

“Why?” they ask.

He settles on the seat and starts the car.

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They haven't told Mnotho anything. They don't know where to start. Things didn't go according to plan. It would've been less complicated if Moyana was alive. They would've killed him, took Khwezi and left. But Khwezi seems to have lost her common sense.

Mndeni leaves to check on his beloved girlfriend. Ngcwethi has to wash his feet. He always does this after stepping into one of his kind's premises.

“Where have you been the whole day?” Mnotho



asks walking through the door.

“Ngudwini,” Busikhaya says.

“Doing what there?”

“You'll find out soon.”

He nods his head and passes to his mother's room. They do keep some things from him and he doesn't mind. He has his own things to worry about, as long as the Mthembu legacy is not at risk he's good.

Qophelo walks in and finds Busikhaya with his eyes.

“Baba, tomorrow I have a match and everyone will be bringing their fathers,” he says.

“I'm busy tomorrow. Your uncle here will go with you.”

“But I need you to come Baba, this is important to me.”

“I'll come later during the day. He will be there with you and he knows soccer better than me,”  
Busikhaya says.

“Really?” Qophelo looks at Mazwakhe a bit excited.

Maybe it'll be different going with him. His father is always impatient for the match to end so that he can attend his business.

“Yes. I'm a Pirates and you?” Mazwakhe.

“Well, I'm an enemy.” He shrugs his shoulders and they both share their first smile.

“What time does the match start?” Mazwakhe asks.

“12h30, but we have to be there before 11.”

“We'll be there,” Mazwakhe says

Qophelo walks out in a better mood. He was a bit averse about having any kind of relationship with this new uncle, but his fathers have taken him anywhere with them and he hasn't attempted to kill any of them. Maybe, just maybe, they'll bond over soccer. But it bothers him why he likes Orlando Pirates, everyone should be supporting Kaizer Chiefs, it only makes sense.

“Thank you,” Mazwakhe says.

“Huh?” Busikhaya turns his eyes to him and lifts his brows.

“I said thank you. This means a lot to me. I'd do anything to spend time with him,” he says.

“Just don't say anything bad about Kaizer Chiefs, pretend to love it.”

Mazwakhe chuckles and rests his head back on the couch. He'd kill for Qophelo, but Kaizer Chiefs is just crap and he won't be able to pretend. Hopefully he'll grow up and realize which one is the right team to support.

“You're still on the 90 days sentence?” He's back at being Mazwakhe, scratching his chin and giving Busikhaya the fake pity look.

“How is that any of your business?” Busikhaya snaps.

“It might help you glow. Have you looked at yourself in the mirror lately?”

“I don't need to glow, I'm not a bitch.”

“You are. Look at how one woman is driving you crazy. She has you wrapped around her little finger. Soon she'll ask you to wash her panties for 90

days.”

“I won't do that!” Busikhaya says with his brows snapped.

“Why not? Aren't you begging for her love?”

“I just want her to be comfortable,” he says.

“Even if it means you won't be comfortable?”

“What is your point? Why are you in my business?”

“Just go there, strip her clothes off and tell her you're fucking her. Be done and leave,” Mazwakhe says.

“What? I can't do that!”

“Pussy!”

“Ungangidakelwa!” Busikhaya says angrily.

What makes Mazwakhe thinks he's a better man than him? He easily took Nombuso from him. What makes it hard for him to have his way with Ntobe? She is really making him look weak.

--

He wastes no time. As soon as everyone goes to their bedroom he sprays his perfume and puts his jacket on.

He'll do exactly what Mazwakhe thinks he can't do. He'll walk in her house, go to her bedroom and strip her clothes off. His manhood will do the talking. He has to make sure that it's the night she'll never forget. She'll be the one running behind him after this.

He can't just be weak.

Mshibe meets him at the door. He's confused because Busikhaya didn't call to tell him he was coming. He always tells him whenever he's coming over.

“Is everything okay?” he asks.

“Yeah boy, it's all good. How are your sisters?”

“I guess they're good.”

“You guess?” Busikhaya lifts up his eyebrows.

“I'm scared to go see them. I don't want what happened the last time I went there to happen again.”

“You cleansed, didn't you?” Busikhaya asks.

“I'm still scared. I don't want to bring any darkness to my sisters. Benzi senses things easily. I cannot take that risk.”

“So what? You're going to abandon your sisters? You're all that they have now. That woman is just looking after them because you pay her, they need you.” He leaves Mshibe standing like a statue.

What got him here? Well, he's a boy without a Dad. He had to figure this life thing on his own, and he has two little girls who need him. He has to do anything to make a living, even if it's working with blood, all he wants is a good life for his sisters.

He hasn't done much lately. He's just shadowing Busikhaya's girlfriend and popping on the streets every now and then. But he's still scared to go home to his sisters, Benzi nearly died the last time he

came near her. She screamed and said there was blood all over his clothes.

They did everything. Busikhaya brought inyanga that Ngcwethi had recommended and he cleansed him. But he's still scared. He doesn't want to see his sister getting like that again. It was too scary to watch her screaming and struggling to breathe like she was seeing a ghost.

--

“Ntobe,”

She looks up and sees him standing by the door. She didn't expect him at all. And why does he look like this? He's that Busikhaya he saw in the hospital for the first time.

“Are you okay?” He walks in, takes his jacket off and throws it on the floor.

“Yes. What brings you here?”

“My car.”

Oookay. She watches him takes his clothes off and climbs on bed.

“I love you,” he says.

“Random, but thank you.”

He unties her robe and kisses her breasts. She looks at him in confusion. Is he drunk? He knows that 90 days isn't over yet.

“Why are you being so hard on me?” He rubs her cheek and stares at her eyes.

“Hard?” she asks.

“Depriving me your body to prove a point.”

“You think I'm trying to prove a point?”

“Are you denying it?”

She keeps quiet. He throws the whole nipple inside his mouth and separates her legs with his knee.

“Busikhaya what are you doing?”

He doesn't answer, he goes up to her lips and sucks them slowly. Her body is slowly betraying her, his fingers are doing a good tapping game on her clit.



He fondles her nipple with one hand and sucks her lower lip while staring at her eyes. She's starting to breathe uncontrollably, his fingers have slid inside her and he's rubbing her right places tenderly.

“You're so warm,” he whispers in her ear.

He brings his fingers to his mouth and sucks them. He wipes them off and sneaks them inside her again.

She moans and calls out his name. He looks more turned on by that. He gets off her and looks for something in his jacket.

Condom!!!!!!

“No Busikhaya!” Ntobe says as her senses crawl back in.

“What do you mean?”

“We are not having sex.”

He lies on top of her with the condom slid between his fingers and his hard shaft on her thighs.

He kisses her lips again. She responds to it for a few seconds then turns her head to the side.

“Please, I promise I'll wait for your 90 days, I only need this once. Just once, it won't make any difference.”

“Busikhaya don't!” She pushes his knee out of her thighs.

“Ntobe please look at me.” He links his forehead on hers and stares at her eyes.

“I won't hurt you,” he says.

“I know, I'm just not ready.”

“What do you want me to do?”

“Get off me,” she says.

“How? You're just going to punish me like this?”

She pushes him off and rolls to the other side. He lies down on his face and stays silent. He must be calming himself down. Ntobe adjusts her robe and pulls up the covers.

It takes a few minutes for him to drag himself off bed. He collects his clothes from the floor and puts them back on.

“You're leaving?” Ntobe asks.

Silence.

“Do you need something to eat?”

Still, no response.

“But we talked about this long time ago and you agreed to wait until both of us are ready.”

He puts his jacket on and heads to the door. She jumps off bed and follows him.

“So this is it? You didn't come here to see me, you only wanted sex?” she asks.

“Yes.”

She gasps, “Just like that?”

“Yes just like that Ntobe.”

“Oh, okay!”

She stops following him.

He turns around and looks at her briefly.

“Keep well,” he says.

Noooooo!!

“Busikhaya!” She runs after him again.

She gets to him and grabs his hands. He's not making a sound but tears are running down his face. There's no emotion accompanying them. He's just plain and looking at her.

“It can't be sex. What have I done?” Her weakness is seeing people unhappy. He's not even a crying type, at least that's what she had in mind, she must've hurt him badly for it to get to this point.

“I'm just an experiment for you, right?”

“What???” She frowns.

“My heart pumps blood Ntobe. I'm not a rock, I have feelings. This hide & seek makes you feel good, right? And that's all you care about, being a woman on charge, and to hell with my feelings.”

“I'm not playing any hide & seek,” she says.

“So you think I'm going to follow you around for fuckin' 90 days? You can't even tell me you love me. I have to be a rock for 90 days to prove that I can't breathe without you!”

“That's not what I said Busikhaya,” she says.

“Where must I store my feelings while you live by the book's rules? This is not your grandfather's dick, it gets up and it needs to be fed.”

“Alright.” She nods her head. She's pissed but she has never been the type that raises the voice at anyone. She lets people walk all over her and that's exactly what she was trying to do differently.

“So, when are we fucking? Don't give me the 90 days crap. You have slept with men who didn't give a damn about you, and me who'd give you the world have to wait months to get it? No, I'm not playing this game anymore.”

“Alright,” she says.

“Ntobe???”

“What do you want me to say?”

“Tell me when am I fucking you.”

“Anytime you feel like.” She turns around and leaves. This is what he wanted, right? Then why is he not following her and fucking her right away.

[11/19, 09:53] : Chapter Thirty

Zanamuhla

**\*\*We are going somewhere after your classes\*\***

That was the message. No explanation or whatsoever. He knows that I don't like surprises. It's mid-week and I'm in the middle of my exams.

Mnotho told me to stay focused and forget about bathroom sessions for a while. That's what I was trying to do until I got this text. I could've said no, but I don't say no to him. I mean this person can arrange a lightning for me within minutes, so here I am dressing up in front of Gert-Johan who's criticizing everything I put on.

“Don't you have a better top?” her again.

“How do I look Bontle?” It's only her opinion that would matter to me. She likes what I like and thinks like me. We have a lot in common actually, that's beside religion and preaching of course.

Vuyiswa can shove her stupid opinions where the sun doesn't shine.

“It doesn't match,” Bontle says

I nearly ask her what she knows about matching, I mean she's wearing a purple dress and red cardigan over it, but I asked her opinion right? And she's dishing it out fresh.

“Come on, let me give you a make-over,” Vuyiswa says.

“What do you mean?” I ask.

“Sit down and relax.” She pushes me down on the couch, takes her phone out and calls Julani. She tells him to rush to our room with his equipment.

“I don't even know where we are going,” I say.

“Surprise date, duh! I can already see the five-star hotel he's taking to, your dinner will be served by a hot Mexican guy and he'll make sure that you're comfortable. He will keep popping in to ask if you don't need anything, madam. Maybe he also hired a masseuse for you.”

Oh my gosh, I have only seen those type of dates on magazines. Vuyiswa is right, Ngcwethi is taking me

out on a surprise date. My birthday is around the corner, why wouldn't he spoil his beloved wife-to-be?

It makes sense and I'm doing this make-over thing. I don't want to go on a date looking like Mazwakhe. Vuyiswa and Julani will edit me until my looks match the standards of five-star hotels.

“What if they fall?” I'm asking about the long eyelashes.

“There's a glue sticking them on your skin, they won't fall.”

Great! I need to stop blinking like a robot doll. I shouldn't do anything that's going to bring me extra attention, people will know this is my first time with eyelashes.

“Your hands must stay away from your face,” Julani says slapping the hand that was attempting to scratch my itching forehead. This might be harder than I thought. I can't touch my face?

“How am I going to eat?” I ask.

“You'll eat like a lady. Fork the meat or whatever



you'll be having and push it between your teeth. There's no need for you to gobble food with your lips and remove my expensive lipstick," he says.

Vuyiswa comes with one of her wigs. I don't think I can live this beauty life but today I'm up for it. I let her push it on my head forcefully and leave it hugging my shoulders.

"It's creeping on my skin," I say.

"It's worth all that. Look at you, Pearl Modiadie."

I'm not sure which celeb is that, but all Pearls are beautiful. I have never met an ugly Pearl.

It's time to stand up and start walking on high heels.

I'm not bad as I thought. My knees can handle the new height, but I must not get carried away, I have to stick to two-steps-a-minute.

He calls and asks if he should come up and fetch me. Of course he should come, I don't want him to be shocked on the street. And I want to walk out of the building with my arm linked on his.

“Zanamuhla!” He's frowning by the door. His eyes are jumping on everyone like he's not sure which one is me.

“Here!” I raise my hand up.

He frowns even more. His whole face is squeezed up.

“Vuyiswa did you do this?” He looks at her and back at me again.

“Yes, do you like it? You have to pay for my services Sir.”

He doesn't hear any of that. He's staring at my feet.

“Are you going to be okay in those shoes?”

He's undermining my Kardashian side this guy! Of course I'm going to be okay. I'm Pearl Modiadie for goodness' sake!

“Shall we?” I ask.

There's a smile on Vuyiswa's face. I'm making my girl proud.

“Please take a jersey, it might be cold.”

Oh, and hide Vuyiswa's sexy dress? Is that what he's saying? I'm not bringing a damn jersey.

“Okay fine, asihambe,” he says when he realizes that I'm not budging on the jersey suggestion.

Well, we are not leaving arm-to-arm because he didn't get How To Be A Gentleman classes.

I'm turning heads, everyone is looking at this new Zanamuhla, except him. He's walking straight to the parking without checking if I'm okay behind him.

“Where's the car?” I ask when he stops next to the van.

“This is the car,” he says.

“A van???”

His eyes go to my shoes then to my face.

“These shoes are changing you. Since when do you care about cars?”

“I always care,” I say.

“How many cars do I have?”

Oh well, I don't know. He comes in different cars

and they always drive each other's cars.

“You are full of surprises today!” He chuckles and shakes his head then opens the van door for me.

My father owned one car and it was a van. He hardly gave me a lift, my whole life has been in and out of ranks and travelling by taxis. But today I'm looking down on a van because of borrowed high heels? Life has no balance!

“Look at me,” he says after settling on his seat and fastening the belt.

“Do you like the new me?” I ask.

“Are you always going to be like this?”

Why does it sound like he hates it when I'm beautiful?

“No, I only did this because today will be special.”

“Special? How?”

“Going out with you is special to me.”

He still doesn't get it and I don't expect him to.

“So, am I allowed to kiss you?”

I didn't remove my lips, did I? I go over him and peck his lips.

“I want a real kiss,” he says.

“What about my lipstick?” He needs to be serious!

“Zanamuhla I haven't seen you since the weekend.”  
He reaches to the box of serviettes and takes one piece out.

He grabs my neck and wipes all my lipstick off.

“Ngcwethi!” I'm appalled.

“Come here.”

Jesus Christ! Noooo.

“My drawn eyebrows!” I scream.

He stops and frowns.

“You'll remove my eyebrows,” I say.

“Fuck Zanamuhla!”

I hate it when he curses. It doesn't suit him if he's not doing it on bed. He wraps his hands around my neck and brings me closer for the kiss.

It's hard for me to concentrate because all I'm thinking about is, what if one of my eyelashes fall? I don't know how much they cost, Vuyiswa will kill me.

“My bed is cold without you Zano.”

“You miss me that much?” I grin proudly.

“Yes, you and her.”

Mood killer!

“Not now Ngcwethi. We are in a car, in public, and I'm wearing a tight dress,” I say.

“But.....”

“No Ngcwethi, drive!”

He's unbelievable! I'm starting to think this whole thing was planned so that he can sleep with me. I have no problem with him lusting over me, but taking my dress out for him before people even see me? No, maybe he'll have it later.

Are we not supposed to head to town? What's this

dusty road he's taking? There are no five-star hotels this side.

I stare at him with my eyebrow lifted.

“Yini?” He's not in a good mood.

I can't believe he's angry over my private organ!

“I'm just looking at you and wondering why we are heading this way,” I say.

“Ungigabhile wena.”

Poor MaMbonambi's son. Let me take off my dress, ruin my make-up while at it, and open my legs wide for him. I'm going to die if he stays angry at me! His sexual needs are that important. More important than my eyebrows!

He's driving around a tall fence, I can't see any building behind the fence.

“Where are we?” I ask.

“John's farm.”

What the fuck are we doing in John's farm? Who is

John?

“Are you lost?” I ask.

“No, I'm fetching the goats we ordered.”

Is he trying to give me a heart attack? How does ordered goats concern me and my make-up?

“And why am I here?” I ask.

“I asked you to accompany me after your classes. It's a long journey to drive alone.”

Breathe in Zanamuhla! Out!

“What???”

“He helped my father start his own farm. He grew up here, attended school here and joined his father's farm. Even his wife is from the neighbouring farm, he's never left this place. Can you imagine?”

“Can I imagine what?” I snap.

I'm pissed.

“John's life,” he says.



Who is John? Why the fuck would I imagine John's life and not imagine my own that is full of lies and empty promises?

“That's Ray, his son.” He's pointing at the boy wearing khaki shorts and opening the steel gate for our ugly van to drive in.

Ray speaks Afrikaans, which isn't strange, he's white and his father is a farmer. What shocks me is my own Ngcwethi talking Afrikaans back. I don't go beyond 'boerwors' and I'm about to finish a course in college. And he's having a whole conversation, not even stuttering!

Ray puts his thumb up and disappears. Ngcwethi's smile is still on.

“He's crazy.” He shakes his head.

“What did he say?” I'm still angry at him, but I want to know what makes John's son crazy.

“His girlfriend is pregnant and she's here, but his father doesn't know. On top of that, she's English.”

“She's English? Aren't they English too?”

“No, they're Afrikaaners. His father didn't want them to date out of their tribe.”

Hold on a second, white people have tribes?

“They're all white, there's no difference mos,” I say.

“You're also black and you're not Xhosa.”

Stupid comparison! White people are all white, and they're English. All of them.

“Are you going to help me?”

“Help you with what?” I ask.

“Getting the goats inside the van.”

This guy doesn't see me! Not even when he looks at me through the mirrors. Help getting the goats inside the van? What am I? A little goat-keeper?

“You know they're part of izibizo, right?”

Oh, that I didn't know. But it makes no difference, Mazwakhe won't even get one of those goats, so I'm not helping. I wish he can choose the thin ones.

“You'll find me here,” I tell him.

“No, come inside and greet Maria.”

Greet her in Afrikaans?!

“No, I'm not greeting Maria.”

He chuckles and pecks my lips.

“Today you're a drama queen.” He opens his door and climbs out of the car. Another white boy comes to him and they disappear behind the building.

I'm really slow. Why didn't I figure this out when I saw the van? It was obvious that we weren't going to the five-star hotel.

Do I need to keep these high heels on? It's not like the goats will be wowed. I snatch the wig off as well.

They load three goats at the back of the van. John is a tall white man with a balloon tummy. He wears shorts and hard boots. He's bald. It's rare for me to see a white bald man, so I'm taking this as a sign.

“Hello, njani?” He's talking to me through the window.

I usually go ga-ga over white people who speak broken Zulu. I find them clever for trying our language, and I don't give the same affection to the Zulu ones who try English.

But not today John. Today I'm not in a good mood dear John.

“Ngiyaphila, ngingezwa kuwe?”

He smiles. I keep my eyes on him. He must talk. He started me on Zulu because he thought English isn't my thing.

“She's asking how are you,” Ngcwethi.

Is he a translator now? Where did he obtain his linguistic degree? This guy keeps annoying me today.

“Siyaphila. Ilanga!” John with Zulu again.

“Ungidlulisele umkhonzo emndenini.” I want to spice it up with izaga nezisho, but none are coming at hand.

He smiles again and nods his head. His eyes are clueless AF.

Ngcwethi rubs his chin and doesn't translate this time. His ancestors are protecting him. He's annoyed me enough for the day.

“You're moody today. What happened?”

We are driving back with the goats and I'm staring outside the window with my arms folded.

“You took me to a farm Ngcwethi! I dressed up for nothing.”

“I didn't ask you to dress like this. You called it a NEWLOOK.”

He's laughing. All this is funny to him.

“I thought I was going to a five-star hotel,” I say.

“Awww. Who was taking you there?”

He is on Trevor Noah's level now. Very funny. He just needs the right audience.

“Zanamuhla? You're not talking to me now?”

“Who else Ngcwethi? Vuyiswa said you could be taking me out on a surprise date and I dressed up

like this.”

You know what, fuck these eyelashes too!

He's going to lose control on the wheel. Tears are rolling down his face, he's laughing to the point of passing out.

I'm still deciding on the silent period I'm going to give him. Two weeks? One month? Forever?

“What the hell is wrong with Mazwakhe's girlfriend? What made her think I was taking you out on a date? To a what-what star hotel I don't even know!”

“You could've told me that we were going to fetch goats,” I say.

“I didn't give you any ideas. I just asked you to go somewhere with me after your classes. Hotel? That I never mentioned.” He stops the van at the side of the road. He breaks into laughter whenever our eyes meet.

“Where are you going?” I ask.

“To pee.”

Typical van driver!

If I knew how to drive I would've jumped to the driver's seat while he's standing there and drove away. He would've used his big head to figure out how he'd get home.

“Can you see how quiet this road is?”

I shrug my shoulders. I wish he was quiet as the road. Have I told you about his ugly voice? One of these days he'll damage my eardrums.

“What do you think?” he asks.

“About?” I frown.

“Having a quickie.”

After laughing at me he thinks he has a chance to insert his dick inside me! He's full of jokes.

“Start the car whenever you're ready,” I say and shift my eyes outside the window again.

“Zolwandle look at me,” he says.

This name does things I can't explain, especially when it's him calling it. Just like that, I turn and look at him.

“I need you,” he says.

I draw in and exhale.

“You don't have to do anything.” He kisses my chin and my smile breaks without my mind's consent.

“I'll do all the work. All you need to do is open her for me,” he says.

His hand lifts up the dress. He massages my thighs and lifts it further up.

“But I hate you,” I say.

“Do you hate him as well?” He shows me his pointed front.

I'm normally a good person, I can't hate many things all at once. One at a time.

“No,” I say.

“I'll buy you a five-star hotel if you feed him.”

“I'm not a prostitute!” I say.

Thinking is not his biggest exercise. He just waits for whatever his left brain feeds him and talk.



“Okay sorry. Please lean on the seat and relax your legs.”

I do as told. The dress refuses to move past my hip. He forces it up and I hear something at the back tearing.

“Ngcwethi this is not my dress!” Vuyiswa is going to kill me. In Zulu they say into yomuntu umhluzi wempisi. Now I have a dress to pay. I don't even borrow people's clothes, she forced this on me.

Did this man hear what I said? He tore someone's dress!

“Ngcwethi you tore.....”

“Wait until I tear this cookie apart. Lift up your knee.”

I'm not sure whether I'm turned on or annoyed. It may be both at the same time.

“There's no space babe. Let's go out of the car, nobody will see us. I promise,” he says.

“Hhayi-bo Ngcwethi!”

He's out of his door and rushing around to my side.

This is going to be a good mess, both having sex on the quiet road and having my friend's dress torn.

He asks me to lie on the seat with my legs out. Right now he doesn't care about the dress at all. It keeps tearing and he keeps stretching it to have my thighs all out.

“What if one of the farmers drive past?” I'm nervous. The last thing I need is to trend for a sex scandal.

He pulls my legs on either side of his waist and rubs my mound with his shaft.

“Be fast,” I say.

I have no time for his teasing games. Not today.

“Tell me if you want me to slow down,” he says.

“Okay.” I nod my head.

He pushes in slowly, once he fits perfectly inside he lets go of my legs and wraps his hands under my waist.

It's a marathon. I want him to slow down, I didn't know he meant it when he said he'll tear me apart like the dress, but his pace is good under the

circumstances.

--

I'm wearing his jacket because the back of the dress is torn apart. I don't know how I'm going to tell Vuyiswa yet. She has a lot of dresses and she values each and every of them.

“Are you okay?” he asks.

“Yes,” I say.

“No pain?”

He looks worried.

“Just a little,” I say.

He grabs my neck and kisses me. I know him when he's getting turned on. We are outside the building now, there's nothing I can do to help him if he gets turned on. My fellow students have binoculars in their eyes.

“You know that I love and respect you, right?”

“Yes I do,” I say.

“Thank you.”

He looks relieved by my answer.

“I need some money,” I say.

He frowns. This is the first time I'm asking him money. The only person I bother is Mazwakhe.

“Oh, okay. Can I ask why you need money?”

“To do my things.” That's all I can come up with. I didn't expect him to ask questions. I mean he's loaded, he hires people to be my friends, he might as well just splash it around with no questions asked.

“How much?” he asks.

This is the question I want to hear.

“R500,” I say.

“Okay, I will make a transfer.”

Music to my ears! I lean over and kiss his lips. My own ATM with two feet!

“You'll get your jacket in the next life,” I say.

“Next life?”

“Bye!”

I blow him a kiss and close the door. I have decided, I won't tell Vuyiswa about the dress. I'll have it sewn in town during the weekend. I just have to sneak in without them seeing me and hide it somewhere.

The devil is not a liar! Guess who's waiting for me on the couch?

“And then?” She gets up on her feet and frowns. I left this place as Pearl Modiadie and now I'm coming back as Patshutshu. I have the shoes and wig in my hand. I don't need a mirror to know that I look like a mess.

My phone beeps. I stop her with a hand and check the message first. Anyway she might need a glass of wine to digest today's episode.

It's my money with an extra zero.

“Why are you smiling?” she asks.

“Life is good Vuyiswa.” I throw everything I had in

my hand on the couch.

Money makes me feel hot. I take the stupid jacket off and throw it on the couch as well.

“Do we have juice in this home?” I ask turning around and making my way to the kitchen.

“Bitch what did you do to my dress?”

Oh Hell No!!!!

[11/19, 09:53] : Chapter Thirty-One

Mnotho walks in and looks at his brothers with a frown on his face. Why have they called him here? Meetings that happen at this time of the day are usually not good ones. Hopefully they are not planning to kill anyone. Mazwakhe being a part of the Mthembus means they're less likely to get involved in random fights.

He's also here with them, wearing his overall on one shoulder. Vuyiswa needs to do something about his wardrobe.

“Sit,” Busikhaya tells him.

He grabs a seat and looks at them curiously.

“Who are we killing?” he asks.

None of them get the joke, they just look at him with faces he cannot read.

“Is everything alright?” he asks.

“We found her but she is not the Khwezi you know,” Busikhaya says.

The world comes to a stop for a second. They found her? Did he hear the name correctly?

“You found Khwezi?” His heart is beating off his chest. He never doubted for a second that she was alive, but hearing it and confirming what his heart has known all along gives him thousand feelings all at once. She is alive! His Khwezi is not dead.

“She was married off to inyanga in Ngudwini. He is not alive anymore, he passed on and left her with his mother and son.”

“Who married her off?” His veins are pulsating. He knew something had happened to her but not

MARRIAGE. She was a child for crying out loud! “Bhekani, and she’s grateful. She said it was for the best. It looked like some screws are loose upstairs,” Busikhaya.

“No, they did something to her sanity. She remembers you, she even named her son after you, but something about the way she views life has changed. All she wants to do is look after her mother-in-law and take care of the rondavels,” Ngcwethi explains.

“Did you kill the Bhekani?”

His question sends their eyes wide. Is that all he heard? A son of a stupid nyanga that abused his wife or whatever he calls her in his mind, is using his name! He should be shocked, that’s what they expected.

“It’s his family that should handle this matter. The first thing you should do is go meet her at Eshowe, then after talking to her you’ll know what to do. Killing the bloody uncle may cause more rivalries



for us and make her hate you. In the state she is in right now she adores Bhekani, you don't want to get on her wrong side, she still loves you."

"He is not seeing the next sunrise," he says and gets up on his feet.

"Mnotho!"

"Where are you going? Think about this."

They expected him to be angry. But they didn't think he'd go far as proposing to kill Bhekani. This isn't something to be harshly acted on. They might need Bhekani in the long run, that's what Ngcwethi told them, he needs to see if he can help Khwezi gain her senses back. Bhekani knows what was done, he knows exactly which knots were tied and which powders were mixed and inserted in her body. He cannot help them if he is dead and Khwezi still needs to see him for who he is.

By the time they walk out to look for Mnotho he is nowhere to be seen. Mndeni goes to his room and finds the sandals he was wearing thrown on the carpet next to bed.

He changed his shoes? They need to hurry to the Ndlovu homestead before he does something he'll regret.

"He's gone," he tells them.

"We need to stop him before he does something stupid," Busikhaya says.

Mazwakhe stretches his arms and yawns.

"Count me out, I'm going to sleep."

To him Mnotho is a grown man, they cannot police how he's feeling and how he handles things that personally affect his heart. If he wants to kill Bhekani so be it, they will go dig the grave and eat salads.

"I said we were going to the Ndlovus. Nobody is going to sleep," Busikhaya says. Nobody goes against his word, except Ngcwethi because he's always ancestral right. This thing of Mazwakhe doing things his own way and defying him every chance he gets is starting to annoy him.

“I guess I’m nobody because sleeping is what I’m going to do right now.” Mazwakhe whistles and goes back inside the house.

“Go, I’m coming just now,” Busikhaya tells Ngcwethi and Mndeni.

They know what’s about to go down but today Mnotho is more important than the stupid brothers’ fights. They run out of the yard and head to the Ndlovus.

He pushes the door and finds Mazwakhe taking his vest off, the overall is on his waist with its arms tied around. He doesn’t carry the gun around but it always comes out when he needs to use it.

“You will come naked?” Busikhaya.

“I said I’m not coming, I didn’t speak French.”

“Hey Baba!” Busikhaya grabs his arm and forcefully turns him around.

The devil in Mazwakhe unleashes. He’s been thinking a lot lately, about his future and how he is

going to stand on his own feet again. As much as being at the Mthembus has been good and everyone treated him like family, he still fears being dependent on anyone. He is done taking over other people, things change, hidden secrets come out, now he wants to build his own legacy from scratch. But it's such a tough decision to make, he has found someone, she is fully based here in the village. He can't just up and leave, she will be angry and their thing just started.

But he needs to man up for her. Vuyiswa is the 50/50 type of a girl who want to have an equal role with a man in a relationship, nevertheless the man must still maintain her. He also has a son, he loves being around him even though they don't talk that much. He wants him to have a bright future, he has to work hard for him. The last thing he needs is someone to piss him off. Especially Busikhaya, they will just kill each other.

“Get out Busikhaya,” he warns and removes his hands off his shoulders.

“You want me to drag you out of this room by

balls?”

They have not tested each other in a long time. One of them must have developed new muscles.

Busikhaya closes the door and locks it.

A fist welcomes his face back. The fight is nothing they have done before. No one is shouting and cursing. There are no guns or any form of weapon. It's just them, fist to fist in a locked room. There is no sound, MaMbonambi is quietly watching her favourite gospel show in her bedroom with no idea of what's going on in her home.

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MNOTHO

He has never killed one on one before. He doesn't find a hobby in taking a life a life, but he never had a problem spilling blood of the enemies. Busikhaya taught him how to cock a gun and where to aim if you want to kill. If he has ever killed before it was

from a distance, he aimed, shot and left. But tonight he wants to be close. He wants to personally separate Bhekani's body and soul. He will do it slowly and watch blood running down his slit throat.

"I already told your brothers where she is," Bhekani says. His wrists are tied together behind him. He's being forcefully taken to the river. He is no fool, he knows what these boys are capable of, this river visit won't be a pleasant one.

"You said she drowned and died. Who is a fool Bhekani? You think drowning is a joke? I want you to experience what drowning is, when you get to hell you'll know better than to joke about drowning."

"Son, I'm begging you. I can pay back ilobola money and bring her back home."

Mnotho chuckles. There is a thunderous sound, Bhekani cries out as his cheek stings like someone just threw a brick on it. He has never been slapped by a young boy, let alone being slapped so hard that he went blank for a few seconds.

"One more stupid offer from your mouth and I'm going to make you drink petrol and light you alive," Mnotho

says.

There is some co-operation until they get to the river. Mnotho tears his clothes off with a pocket knife and asks him to jump inside the river.

“I’m freezing,” Bhekani cries out and steps back.

“What are you? A chicken. Get inside the river Madala, don’t waste my time.”

“Ndodana please think.....”

He shoves his ass with his foot and watches as he fails to balance on the rock and falls inside the water.

There is another huge splash of water as Mnotho jumps in after him.

He presses his neck under the water for a couple of minutes then pulls him up. When he’s starting to gain back his breath he shoves him under water again. [

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## BACK AT THE NDLOVU HOMESTEAD

Mndeni sits on the bench. In front of him is a paraffin lamp that's burning low and Ngcwethi standing next to it. He prefers being on his feet than to sit. Some things just don't accommodate Mr Ancestors, like the wooden bench Mndeni is comfortable on and the old mattress that looks like a nest of cockroaches.

"Why is Busikhaya not here? He said he was coming, now we have to burn the body alone," Mndeni complains.

"What body are we burning?" Ngcwethi enquires with his forehead furrowed.

"Obviously he's dead, Mnotho don't have a heart. I wouldn't be surprised if he cut his dick and fed him before he sent him to his ancestors."

"No he is not dead, Mnotho wouldn't just kill him so quickly. He is somewhere torturing him," Ngcwethi says.



“Busikhaya needs to come. I wouldn’t be surprised if he went to Ntobe to beg for pussy instead.”

They both laugh. It’s funny to watch someone driving the Mighty Busikhaya crazy. He always pretended to be on top of things, controlling everyone and standing by his word. But this girl just proved to them how weak he actually is.

The moment is disturbed by the door opening. A man coughing is thrown inside. He falls and lies on the floor next to Mndeni’s feet.

He’s on his birth suit. Mndeni peeks between his legs, he’s not sure if this man has a penis or not.

“What happened to his dick?”

“Fish tail? It went back to his stomach, not big enough to stand up against cold weather,” Mnotho says making his way in with Bhekani’s clothes in his hands.

“What did you do to him?” Ngcwethi asks.

“We went for a swim,” Mnotho says.

“Oh, okay. We need to take him to the storeroom for now.”

“No, this dog doesn’t deserve to live.”

“I know J ama, but we need him for now. You have a chance to get Khwezi back, in her truest form, and he could be our help in doing that.”

That seems to calm him down, but it doesn’t stop him from punching Bhekani's face repeatedly.

Mndeni is having a time of his life, he hasn’t watched wrestling in a while, he found out that everything is scripted and stopped, but seeing his brother punching this old man reminds him of Monday Night Raw.

Ngcwethi with his boring tendencies pulls Mnotho back and asks him to stop. If Busikhaya was with them he would’ve allowed it to go on. He has a sense of humour.

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They take Bhekani to the farm storeroom and lock

him inside. It's around 00:30 midnight when they get back home. Busikhaya didn't keep his word. He is not in his room either, this makes Mndeni's suspicions true. He left them in a sticky situation to go beg for sex.

Mndeni decides to go sleep with Mnotho. He wants to make sure he is okay and he doesn't sneak out to go finish Bhekani off.

Ngcwethi heads to his own bedroom. Did he forget to turn the light off when he left?

The door is not locked. There is a familiar scent that causes his heart to leap. He walks in slowly, convinced that he's not making a sound.

He tiptoes inside the bedroom and takes his boots off. He will figure out what he's going to tell her in the morning. He can say he went to his uncle's house for an emergency.

“Where are you coming from? Help God and answer truthfully, because God will have to put his life on hold to save you if you dare lie to me!”

She had her eyes closed. He is sure of it, he saw her.

He even heard a little snore.

Are women human beings?

“Umhhh...can we talk about this in the morning? I will tell you the whole truth,” he says.

“How am I supposed to sleep not knowing what’s going on?”

“You will wrap your leg around me and.....”

She slides under the covers. He calls her name, he’s not sure what he said wrong, he was advising her. He will tell her what’s going on in the morning, it makes no difference. She knows that he’d never do anything to hurt her, this concerns the family and he always keep her updated with everything.

“Why didn’t you tell me that you were coming?”

Silence.

“Zolwandle?”

She removes the covers and looks at him. She is angry for unobvious reasons.

“I’m happy to see you. This is a good surprise,” he

says.

“It’s not a surprise, I told you I was coming,” she snaps.

He frowns. Why can’t he remember? They talked on Whatsapp but he doesn’t remember her mentioning coming.

“You told me?” he asks.

“I sent you a GIF- See you later.”

He is not sure what that is, but he apologizes.

“I’m sorry sthandwa sami. Can I come on bed?”

She shifts and sets the pillow for him. All is forgiven!

He smiles and climbs on bed. She is the best thing that has ever happened to him. He loves every moment with her. GIFs, confused dates and tantrums.

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Everyone is up. MaMbonambi was feeling fresh this morning, she woke up and prepared a feast. She set

the table and now she's waiting for everyone in front of the TV.

Zanamuhla is the first one to arrive and she's disappointed to find her mother-in-law up before her. She has done everything, even washed the pots she used earlier. Mamezalas like her are a problem, they wake up before you and do everything to make you feel bad. She's like those kids who were always early at school and making her look bad to the teachers.

“You are up? Let's go to the table, your husbands will find us halfway,” MaMbonambi says.

She is a bit relieved. MaMbonambi doesn't seem to care about who is awake and who is not. She looks at her as a daughter, not necessarily a family makoti.

Mndeni joins them shortly. He's wearing his best smile, no matter what happens in his personal life he never lets it show to his mother. Her health is his top priority.

He greets his mother and then looks at Zanamuhla.

“I didn’t know you were home,” he says.

“You were not here when I came.”

He rubs his neck, “I was visiting a friend.”

He cannot tell her the truth in front of the lioness.

She is about to ask more about the late night friend but Ngcwethi and Mndeni join in with their loud chat.

“You will continue your discussion after breakfast,” MaMbonambi says and they go quiet immediately.

Everyone dishes up and start eating. Nobody is aware of two missing brothers until Sangelihle asks where her father is to cool down her tea. Mnotho offers to do it but no, today she only wants her father to do it.

“Ngcwethi can you stop eating and worry about your brothers?” MaMbonambi says. Ngcwethi is the second eldest, it’s his duty to know about the two older ones.

“But MaMbonambi they’re your sons, not mine,” he says.

“You don’t want me to slap you so early in the morning,” she threatens. Everyone knows who she’d slap if she was capable of slapping and Ngcwethi is not on the list.

“Morning,” Busikhaya walks in followed by Mazwakhe.

His lower lip is swollen, he doesn’t look at anyone in the eye, he takes the cup in front of his daughter and does his duty. Mazwakhe sits next to him, his lip is swollen as well. No eye contact. He takes the plate and fills it with slices of bread.

“Must I put for you?” he asks Busikhaya.

“Yes, please,” Busikhaya says.

He takes another one, fills it with bread and passes it to Busikhaya.

“So nobody will explain what happened to the two of you?” MaMbonambi asks staring at both of them.

“They fought,” Mndeni jumps in. He missed this one. It looks like things were pretty ugly. Must've been fun!



“We fought?” Busikhaya asks with his forehead creased.

“When?” Mazwakhe asks glaring at Mndeni.

“Vele you did last night,” he says.

“Mazwakhe? Busikhaya? What happened?”

MaMbonambi. She’s getting worried. She thought they hatched things out. This is not how she wants her sons to be. They should be standing together against outsiders, not fight one another.

“Mndeni attacked us last night,” Busikhaya says.

“Whooah! I wasn’t even home last night, I came back after midnight,” Mndeni.

“You weren’t home???”

“MaMbonambi I was.....”

“What did MaMbonambi say about coming home late at night?” Busikhaya asks.

“Yey this isn’t about me. I’m an adult,” Mndeni says. He is annoyed. MaMbonambi will start shouting at the wrong person, and he wasn’t the only one who came home after midnight. Why is Mnotho and

Ngcwethi not coming to his defence? He can expose them as well.

“You are an adult in whose house?” MaMbonambi.

“Just say you’re sorry,” Busikhaya advises.

Mndeni gives him an icy stare then apologizes for coming home late at night.

“And for attacking us,” Busikhaya says.

“Uyoyithola kunyoko!” They’re lying about him, now on top of that he has to give them an apology! Not in this lifetime.

MaMbonambi puts her cup down and glares at Mndeni.

“Leave my table, now!”

“But I didn’t say anything wrong, I only said he’ll get an apology from....” He clears his throat and rubs his chin.

“Me. Say it,” MaMbonambi challenges him. He knows better than to repeat his words. He snatches a slice of bread and leaves with his cup.

“Wet mouth,” Mazwakhe whispers.

“Yeah, he needs to be taught a lesson.”

When they look up MaMbonambi is staring at them.

Silence.

[11/19, 09:54] : Chapter Thirty Two

Nontobeko

He hasn't called the whole week. I miss him like crazy, but I'm scared to reach out because I don't know what's going on. Even if it's a single -Hi, he always say something.

This time it's strange. I'm getting frustrated checking my phone every second, hoping to find something. I wish he was a social media person, it'd be easy to follow him and know his head space. I expect to see a status update on Whatsapp, maybe a sad picture or crying emojis. But his profile picture has a pair of shoes and his status message has been written “AVAILABLE” ever since. Why can't men be normal? Social apps are there for your

life updates.

I just want to know what's going on.

“Mshibe have you heard anything from Busikhaya?”

I ask.

“Yes, he called earlier. He found me another job, I'm leaving later today.”

What? No. He cannot take Mshibe away.

If he wants to leave me it's okay, but forcing Mshibe to leave my house is taking it too far. I'm safe around him, he makes this place feels like home. I'm always looking forward to cooking dinner for him. He never leaves food on his plate, he eats and finishes even when it's not his favourite food. He snacks on every bite with gratitude and always say thank you before taking his plate to the sink.

“Don't worry, nobody is going to terrorize you anymore. You are safe.”

Is that supposed to make me feel better?

“So, this was just another job to you? You are just going to leave and jump on to another fragile

woman to follow around?” Anger or disappointment? Maybe both.

“Do you want me to call him?”

This boy! He thinks this is about Busikhaya. Have I ever meant anything to him? But why am I surprised, everyone does this to me, he wasn't going to be any different.

I take my purse and car keys. He stands by the counter and watches with his hands tucked inside the pockets. He does this when I'm cooking. He doesn't like TV that much, so he usually runs out of things to do in the house and just stands here to watch me cook.

“Lock on your way out,” I say. I'm sure they have keys to every room of this house and all the passwords.

“Sis Ntobe?” He follows me. Now he wants to act like he cares! I've never been anything more than a piece of job to him.

“It’s fine Mshibe, good luck on your new job.” I close the door behind me.

I hear it opening and closing again. His footsteps are thudding behind me.

“I have to tell you something,” he yells.

Why isn’t he saving it for his next piece of job.

“Save it!” I yell back.

“He loves you.”

I stop and look back at him. He takes the beanie off his head and walks closer. He never interferes in our business. He has never given his opinion even though he knows everything that’s going on between us. He stays professional and only involves himself where he’s needed.

“I may not believe in love, but I know that BK would do anything for you. He loves you.”

BK? This is the first time I hear him calling Busikhaya this way, and by the look on his face he regrets it.

“You’re not the first one after her,” he says.

I guess he's talking about Nombuso. If this is his strategy of making me feel insecure, it's working wonders.

“But you're the first one he has drove a distance to make a cup of tea for, hired someone to look after and shed tears for,” he says.

My heart is accelerating and beating against my thoughts. I don't want to run after him. I'm trying to be a different woman. But my heart is not at ease, it hasn't been since the day he left the house angrily and never looked back.

“Give him something, a sign of affection or a glimpse of hope. He hasn't done anything wrong, even if he does, it wouldn't be on you,” he says.

By that I guess he's referring to what Busikhaya really wants. The core of our problems; sex. Now they call it a sign of affection!

“You are really working overtime for him, hey.”

“Sis Ntobe.” He closes the distance between us.

I lift up my eyebrows.

“Yes Mshibe.”

“Thank you,” he says.

“For what?” I ask.

“For giving me a home, in a short period of time I’ve felt like someone was taking care of me. In fact you turned things around, it was me who was hired to take care of you, but you took care of me instead.”

Exactly! This is what I do all the freakin’ time.

“And I’m going to do the same to Busikhaya and he will leave just like you’re leaving today,” I say.

If anyone is marking the register for fools she must mark me present twice. I keep doing one thing, over and over again. I don’t learn, only God knows how I passed school and made it this far!

“You are a good person Sis Ntobe,” he says.

“Yeah right, a good person who is never good enough for anyone!”

He stands where I left him until I drive out of the gate. My heart breaks, when I come back he won’t be here. All because people have the power to walk



in and out of my life whenever it suits them.

I have mourned friendships, parents who died while they were still breathing, fake business partners, lovers and now bodyguards. It's too much!

He should've left me alone. Within three or four months I would've healed from Thulani. He shouldn't have come into my life, introduced me to people and even brought them to my house for me to grow close to, then take all that away when his physical needs are not met.

I also blame Thulani. I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for him. I wouldn't taken that drive, I wouldn't have ran over his brother and crossed paths with him.

I regret everything, meeting him, thinking he was different and for some silly reasons, thinking he wasn't after anything but my heart. Yes it wasn't money, connections or business deals like the rest of them. He only wanted what's between my legs. He was after my body.

I have never set my foot here before. The offices

are not what I expected. This is a village, there's enough land for everyone but people don't go too fancy on the buildings. They prefer letting their livestock graze on the open land. They build far from one another to avoid livestock fights. You can actually drive from one homestead to another if you're lazy to walk like me.

The herds of cattle are scattered on the green fields and nibbling on the grass inexhaustibly. Shadows of their keepers are roaming around and disappearing in the bushes in search for wild fruits. They're impatiently waiting for the clock to tick 17:30 and head back home.

There are cars parked outside. Not just any cars, late SUV models and BMWs. Mr Mthembu left a huge legacy, and by the look of things everything is on the right hands.

The farm is not in sight if you're here. Maybe one day I'll get to see what the Mpofana hype is all about.

Sliding doors, pure white walls and tall double-glazed windows. Well kept flower garden that I doubt any of them ever pay attention to. It's just here because it makes this whole place look beautiful and they have seen it from many other people. I bet Busikhaya doesn't even know what flowers are planted here.

The door slides just as I'm tidying my gladiator sandals on the WELCOME mat placed before the door. I have never gone anywhere with ugly shoes. I always make sure that my hair and shoes are on point no matter what. But today I'm just a mess and it's all Busikhaya's fault.

“Who are you?”

Is this how they greet people in this side of the world?

I look up and meet his eyes. He is young, maybe a bit older than Mshibe, but the way he looks at people makes me think he doesn't care who is what

age. He just doesn't give a fuck about people he doesn't know.

"I want Busikhaya," I say.

He frowns and scans me with his eyes.

"About?" he asks.

"About how much is he willing to do to ruin my life."

He takes a step back with a 'holy crap' expression on his face and moves to the side.

I storm inside and look around. The reception area is too wide. I don't even know which direction to take. Do they need complicated offices to run a farm? Now I have to go over that mopping lady who looks pissed and ask for directions.

"On your left, the middle one," says the voice behind me.

It's the young boy with an attitude for centuries. He's walking quietly behind me. I didn't even realize that he was following me, he was heading out when I walked in, why did he turn back?

"Thank you," I say and follow the directions he gave

me.

There are voices coming inside the office I'm standing in front of. Something is being discussed in the nasal English. It must be pure business because Busikhaya is a Zulu speaker by origin. Sometimes he confuses me too when he goes deep and using the Zulu words from his village.

Well today I'm a woman who's fed up. I have my hair combed up and not tied, gladiator sandals on my feet and I'm wearing no bra under this shift dress.

"Ntobe?" It's the one I ran over with a car. There's a white man on the chair. He must be a business guest.

"Oh, hello you," the other one I don't know. His eyebrows twitch up. He cracks a badboyish smile and covers his mouth with a fist instantly.

I think I've heard about him. He's exactly how he

was described.

“Khaya we need to talk.” I’m trying to be polite for the sake of the white business guest who’s sipping on a glass of brownish drink while holding a meeting.

“Khaya? You are Khaya?” Bad boy again.

He stands up from his seat, says something to the guest and sends a message to Ngcwethi with his eyes.

It’s my first time seeing him in a suit. He looks nothing like the Busikhaya I know, today he’s just a multi-millionaire businessman who steps in and out of magazine covers.

“Let’s go to Ngcwethi’s office.”

No, we are standing right here in the passage.

“I know that Mshibe was brought by you in my life, but you don’t have the right to throw people in and snatch them out of my life whenever it suits you.”

“Okay.”

Just okay? I’m here for an argument. I prepared a

lot of things to say.

“You can dump me, it’s not something I haven’t been through before. I’ve had people who meant the world to me leaving me. If you think for a minute that what you’re doing is hurting me you need to ask around, they will tell you about all the shit I’ve been through in my life.”

He sighs and rubs his eyebrow with a finger.

“Mshibe was not permanently hired to guard you. He is not even a bodyguard, he was just the right person for the job at those moments when I couldn’t be there to personally protect you.”

He is too calm today. I feel tears burning my eyes and threatening to break out.

“So, what now? You are taking him off the job and you won’t be there to personally protect me either? You don’t care?”

“Ntobe!” He brushes his face and lets out another long sigh. “What do you want from me?” he asks.

“I want you to love me Busikhaya.” I cannot fight

tears anymore, they roll down my face like someone opened a tap.

“But I love you. How do you want me to show you?”

He pulls my arm and wraps it around his shoulder.

“Don’t break my heart and don’t leave me.”

“Anything else?” he asks.

“Don’t lie to me. I hate it when people lie to me, no matter how bitter the truth is, tell me.”

“Okay sthandwa sami. What else?” He puts me on the desk and wrap my legs around his waist.

I don’t remember him walking. He scooped me up, asked what I wanted, I answered and now I’m in the office I protested to come in.

“Don’t hurt me,” I say.

“You are the queen of my heart. I’d never hurt you, I need you to trust me. Okay babe?”

I nod my head and welcome his lips on mine. The gum he just threw away didn’t take the cigarette smell. There’s that raw emotion it gives me when he’s curling his tongue inside my mouth. He’s



breathy, his hands are lifting my dress and reaching up to my bra-less boobs.

“I won’t leave you Ntobe,” he whispers in my ear and the tear involuntarily drops from my eye. Nature!

“Okay.” I nod my head.

The tip of his shaft rubs on my vestibule. I don’t know when my panty went off. He buries his head over my neck and releases a low moan.

“Mama please allow me in,” he says in a brittle voice.

We have been in this position many times before. I always fight and escape. But today his pleading is different. I can feel his heart beating against mine, he is here and not going anywhere.

I take the leap of faith and rock my hips up. He lifts his head, his eyes are half lidded and canopied with lust.

He comes up to my lips and onslaught me with a lizard kiss.

I don’t know where to keep my attention, the intense

tongue game or his shaft penetrating me inch by inch.

Before I realize he is all in. He pauses and takes a second to look in my eyes. I expect him to say something but he buries his head over my neck, pulls out and pushes in again.

I rest back and enjoy the waves of ecstasy spreading throughout my body. It's been months and my body needed this.

“Ntobe.” He pulls out and pauses, “I love you. I really do.”

“I love.....” I don't carry my confession through. My legs are about to break. He's shoving himself into every corner, there's no time to adjust myself to the new pace.

I don't know how I ended up on the floor. I remember screaming about my back being pressed painfully against the desk and next thing I know we were on the floor with him on top, pumping into me mercilessly.

His cum is spread on my thighs. I don't know what he did that for, he could've emptied himself on the floor.

“You think I'd leave all THIS? Ntobe you have never fucked yourself and felt how hot you are?”

Post-fuck madness.

“How can I possible fuck myself? Get a wipe and clean off your cum,” I say.

He kisses my cheek and stands up with his pant on the ankles. He looks weird with a tie over the unbuttoned shirt, he's naked below, and his shaft is dancing sideways. Anyway he doesn't care. Men don't care, they're the most confident species on earth.

“Don't you use dick dolls like other girls?”

Dick dolls? I have never.....

“Dildos?” I ask.

“Yeah, I hate them.”

Maybe not so confident, they are just secure with their bodies. He's threatened by a 'dick doll!'

“Why?” I ask.

“Because I don’t like sharing with plastics.”

“Well, I have two in the house. Large and medium.”

“Large???” He pauses every move and looks at me with his eyes bulging out.

Lord, I shouldn’t be giggling so loud.

“Get rid of those things today. This is your new toy.” He points at his shaft. No lie, I love my new toy.

“I cannot take this one in the bag with me everywhere I go.”

“Don’t worry, J ama will get anywhere you are. Even when we are both dead I will sneak out of hell, swim across J ordan and come fuck you,” he says.

“You are not going to heaven?” I’m just shocked about how normal he’s making it sounds. I mean everyone is here on earth to secure a seat in heaven.

He bursts into laughter and kneels next to me with a wipe.

“I have not followed a single thing in that book.”

“Does that mean you have stolen, got jealous over your neighbour, lied, killed and....”

“Yes,” he says.

“Which one are you saying yes to?” I ask.

“Yes to all. And I just fucked you before marriage. God is watching and writing everything on the sinners’ book. You think they have Sappi up there? How are they getting so much paper? I sin everyday.”

“Busikhaya do you want more sex?” I don’t think anything else can shut him up.

“Yes, must I come sleep over?”

“No, don’t talk about God.”

He grins and continues to wipe my legs. Is it me or he’s doing slowly between my legs.

“You know one of the things my father worked hard for?”

“Ummm...no.” Can he finish already? It’s getting weird. I have my legs wide opened in front of him and he’s wiping like a tortoise.

“He didn’t want us to go hungry,” he says.

Finger on my clit? No.

“Don’t starve me Ntobe, I love eating my food.”

“Well, I love cooking,” I say even though I’m not sure we are on the same page.

“Can I give you the combo?”

Oh, maybe we are talking about food.

“Which one?” I ask. There are so many combos to choose from, the most wanted lately being fries, sausage and vetkoek.

“Blended orgasm, vaginal and clitoral combo.”

“Busikhaya I thought we were talking about....”

“I still want you. We’ll close the door, nobody will see us.”

What is that supposed to mean? We will...? Weren’t we?

[11/19, 09:54] : Chapter Thirty Three

Umkhonto has already been fetched. It's been a busy week for everyone, preparing for izibizo and making sure that everything is bought because the last thing the Mthembus need is having the Ngwanes finding a slight fault and starting the drama.

For Ngcwethi it's been an emotional restless week. Knowing that Zanamuhla is with those people, who'd try anything to get rid of her, also adds to his restlessness. And he's been having bad dreams. This morning Mnotho is leaving, he's finally going to see Khwezi. Something about them together doesn't settle well with him.

He could stop him from going, but it's been years since he last saw her, this is the day he's been looking forward to, he cannot do that to him. Especially because he doesn't have a clear explanation of why he doesn't want him to go. Just that he doesn't feel good about it, voicing it out unsteady as that may solidify Busikhaya's time-to-time claims that he's the egg of the family and his voice matters above everyone's.

“Where is this one going? Umemulo is tomorrow, everyone should be helping,” MaMbonambi asks, looking at Mnotho standing outside the kitchen’s window with a comb and looking at his reflection through it. He does have mirrors inside his room, but he always prefers the kitchen one because it gives him a full body reflection and he doesn’t need to clean up when he’s done combing his hair, the wind does the job from him.

“I sent him somewhere,” Busikhaya comes in defence. They all agreed that it wasn’t the right time to tell her about Khwezi. She’d ask lot of questions and they don’t have answers yet.

When she disappears back inside the house mumbling her frustrations of having children who don’t want to take responsibility of anything, Busikhaya walks around the kraal and stands above the dwarf bench Ngcwethi is sitting on. He’s lost in his thoughts he doesn’t even hear Busikhaya asking him if the boys have arrived. The boys who herd the family cattle, some days they come late and make a lot of excuses, and they end up voting who’ll take



the cattle among themselves.

“Where are you bafo?” he asks a little bit concerned. It’s normal for Ngcwethi to wake up in a bad mood, it happens anyday but just not the day before he is sending izibizo and his fiancé is having umemulo. It’s strange, given the light mood he slept on yesterday.

“I don’t know. Somewhere in Eshowe, trying to see if my brother is safe. But it’s blank,” he says and shrugs his shoulders.

“Mnotho? Why? Do you suspect something?” Busikhaya asks. He’d tell Mnotho not to go without any hesitation. Feelings are never something he considers, especially feelings of men. He does what needs to be done.

“No,” Ngcwethi says and zones out again.

Mnotho runs down to his car and turns the engine on. He sees his brothers and decides to go say goodbye.

“I’m on the way,” he tells them.

Busikhaya looks at Ngcwethi, hoping he'd say something. Maybe he's seen the vision clearly now.

“Sure bafo,” Ngcwethi says.

Busikhaya sighs with relief. This means all is well.

“Don't forget that it's your turn to see the workers clock out today,” he tells Mnotho.

“Again?” Mnotho asks.

“What do you mean ‘again’? It's your turn.”

He has started with his bullying. When did he last had a turn? All he does lately is go to lunch dates with Ntobe and miss his meetings.

“Be careful Jama. Don't be too cosy, and please try not to touch her,” Ngcwethi says.

“Why?” Mnotho frowns.

“Maybe if I knew this new Khwezi I'd be sure, but right now I don't know that's why I'm asking you to be careful.”

He nods his head even though he doesn't understand his riddles.

He goes to his car, climbs in and drives off. He's scared, not because of what Ngcwethi said, but because he's meeting her. He doesn't know what to expect, but this is the day he's waited for a long time. This day is what got him here, to this day, still in one piece. It was the hope that this day will come.

He makes it to Eshowe town before 11am. He's not sure where he'll find her, so he decides to go straight to Mbongolwane rank and asks around. Someone must know her, a driver or street-vendor. "How does she look like?" one woman asks.

He doesn't know what she looks like now, they said she has changed. The woman shrugs her shoulders and attends her customers.

He stands and watch taxis arriving and emptying passengers inside the rank. He's looking at any woman, trying to compare the features of her he knows to theirs.

Eventually, a young makoti gets off the taxi, she pulls out a young boy and briefly looks around.

When her eyes lands on a tall man in a lime shirt and jean, leaning by his fancy car not too far from the taxi stand, she pulls the boy by his arm and makes her way towards him.

“Hello,” she greets in a low voice.

Mnotho turns around and frowns. Then he sees the boy and relaxes.

“I’m waiting for someone,” he says, assuming that they’re also approaching him to ask for directions or something.

“Yes, you’re waiting for me,” she says.

“Khwezi?” He’s shocked.

“Mnotho.”

When she smiles, he sees her. The Khwezi he played with and planned a future with. He pauses halfway to her with his arms opened. Ngcwethi!

“You’ve grown,” she says awkwardly.

“I know,” he says.

They stand there, staring at each other and fighting

the burning urge to touch one another. One has been instructed not to, and one is just scared, scared because this man standing in front of her knows her better than she knows herself.

He saw Nandos on his way. They need somewhere to sit, somewhere private than the taxi rank, where they can sit with the table dividing them and talk.

They get the table. Khwezi sits at the opposite side, her son stands with confusion written on his face, Mnotho scoops him up and sits with him on his lap.

“Mnotho!” says Khwezi with her eyebrows snapped.

They both look at her. Which one? Then she narrows her eyes to the boy. He untangles his little hands from Mnotho’s neck. He held tightly onto him when he picked him up. His nails dug in on Mnotho’s skin and scratched him a little bit. But it’s nothing, he’s not feeling anything, his whole attention is on Khwezi opposite him.

The boy looks at his fingers, he starts shaking with fear when he sees the man’s blood drops seeping

deep into his nails. He has hurt him. He knows how his mother handles bad behaviour, so he hides his hand under the table.

“Do you remember anything?” Mnotho asks.

“Yes, I remember you,” she says.

His heart warms up. He lets a brief smile cracks out.

“Did you remember me all these years?”

“Yes.” She nods her head.

“Did you not want to see me again?”

“I did, but it was impossible. I’m married, I can’t just leave my house and go back,” she says.

“Why not?” he asks.

“Because of him,” she says, looking at the young Mnotho.

He’s trying to figure out what this is supposed to mean. He’s asked too many questions already.

“Mnotho go play outside,” she instructs the boy.

Mnotho frowns.

“There’s no outside, we are in town, he’ll get lost.”

“He won’t,” she says and fixes her stare on the boy. He jumps off Mnotho’s lap and races out with his left fist folded.

“How old is he?” he asks, still confused.

“He knows every place,” she says.

He is still confused, but the boy is not the reason why he came here, his reason is her.

“Why did you give him my name?” he asks.

“So that he can have a special connection with you.”

Again, he frowns.

“Why?” he asks.

“It will protect you,” she says.

Why the hell would he need protection from a child? They were right, everything about her is strange.

“You have to come back,” he tells her.

“It would be complicated.”

“We’ll figure it out.”

She smiles and opens the can a waiter just placed in front of them, along with their food.

“No, I can’t and I don’t want to,” she says.

“Khwezi I’ve been waiting for you. I put my life on hold for you, I know this isn’t you. You had a purpose, a vision, this is not how you wanted to end up. You and I wanted greater things,” he says.

“Mnotho, our lives changed, I was a child back then. I was not tied to anyone, I had no child whose sanity depended on me being who I am, and no mother-in-law. Things are different,” she says.

“You’re tied?” he asks.

“I’m not Khwezi Ndlovu anymore. Those people and their ancestors don’t recognize me anymore. I speak to different people, I’m protected by different ancestors, I’m a senior in that family now. I’m in charge of umsamo, when things go south, I’m the one who kneels down with impepho and talk to the ancestors. I’m the voice, the connector and protector of that family.” She pauses and takes a



sip of her cold drink. He has to understand. It's not easy as he thinks. Even if it was, she wouldn't have been able to take her son with her. He wouldn't survive anywhere aside his own home where his chord was buried.

"It got even more complicated with Mnotho's birth," she says and shrugs her shoulders.

"Ngcwethi, my brother, can help you. He can uncomplicates this for us," he says, even though he's not sure what exactly

would Ngcwethi need to do in this situation.

"The one getting married?" she asks and he nods his head.

"No, he can't. A lot would be at risk for him."

He's not sure what she means. She doesn't know Ngcwethi to just decide on his behalf.

"Like what?" he asks.

"His wife."

No, Ngcwethi can lose everything, cars, shoes and his expensive watches that he never wear, but he

cannot lose Zano. Putting her at risk would never be an option.

“If you run away, leave everything behind, what’s the worst that could happen?” he asks.

“My son would turn into one of them.”

“Them?” he asks with a frown.

“You won’t understand.”

Food is drying in front of them. The only thing they have touched is their drinks.

“I won’t drag you into this Mnotho. I love you too much to let you go. I can’t make your life miserable.”

“Why did you call me here?” He’s angry.

“To ask you to let me go,” she says.

“Fuck you Khwezi!”

He picks his phone and keys on top of the table and rises up to leave. How can she ask him this? After all these years he has waited for her. She’s not even sorry, her life moved on. She has a son and she

gave him his name.

“Mnotho.....”

Deep breath! He turns and looks at her.

“All the best. Be happy,” she says.

He releases his breath and storms out.

He gets in the car and leaves Eshowe with a heavy heart. He brought himself more pain by coming here. Busikhaya has been right, he should've moved on.

The thought alone scares him. Where would he move on to when all he's ever wanted was a future with Khwezi?

He takes the dusty road he didn't take coming to Eshowe. It's leading him somewhere. He's not sure where, the only thing on his mind is getting home on time, before Busikhaya bites his head off.

The road leads him on and on. It ends in the middle of nowhere. He starts his own road that will lead him home. The side of his neck is heavy, he needs to get home and rest...So, he drives through the

bush.

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“Mndeni you’ll have to stand in for him,” Busikhaya says.

There’s no sign of Mnotho. He knew that he would disobey him, nobody ever listens to him in this home, and they all act surprised when he gets harder on them. It’s the only language they understand, Mnotho has to work on deliveries the whole week, without any assistance.

“Does Mazwakhe ever does anything though?” Mndeni asks.

“I’m not a farmer,” Mazwakhe answers from the couch. Just like Ngcwethi, today he’s not in the mood. He doesn’t trust the Ngwanes with his Hlahla. He thought about going there before the Mthembus but then he remembered that people still have unanswered questions, and something will surely

pis s him off and he'll end up ruining his sister's day.

"I'm not a farmer either," Mndeni says.

"What are you?" Busikhaya asks.

"I'm a pornstar," he says.

"Go be a pornstar in the farm then."

They laugh. He doesn't know that it's him who is a pornstar. He went from Mr 90days to being a pornstar that makes out on the floor with the door wide opened. He gave them such a show, if it wasn't Ngcwethi chasing them away they would've watched the whole thing.

Ngcwethi walks in, his eyes scan the whole room, then he releases a sigh and sits next to Mazwakhe.

"His phone is off," he tells them.

"You think he didn't even wait 90 days before hitting it with Khwezi?" He's on his way to the door, heading to the farm to close up the business day.

Nobody says anything, he didn't need an answer anyway. He gets in his car and drives out.

“Maybe he got held up somewhere and his battery died,” Busikhaya says and looks at Ngcwethi for a little hope. He doesn’t like it when he’s worried because half of the times his worries turn into nightmares.

“Possible,” Ngcwethi says and rests his head back on the couch and shuts his eyes.

His phone rings, he swipes the screen with his eyes closed and rejects the call.

Mazwakhe’s phone rings.

“Where’s Ngcwethi?” is the greeting he gets when he answers.

“He’s here,” he says.

“Give him the phone,” she orders.

Becoming a Mthembu doesn’t mean he’s their middle man and he’s going to pass his phone to Ngcwethi so that they can talk about sex.

“No, call his phone, this is my phone.”

“Hawu, Mazwakhe.....”

“Hlahla!” His tone delivers a warning.

She sighs and ends the call.

Ngcwethi opens his eyes and looks at him.

“Why are you staring at me?” Mazwakhe asks.

Instead of answering, Ngcwethi swipes the screen of his phone and calls Zanamuhla back.

“Mnikazi wento yami yokuchama,” he says, gets off the couch and walks out with the phone pressed against his ear.

Busikhaya bursts into laughter as Mazwakhe wipes invisible sweat on his forehead and clicks his tongue.

“They’re getting married soon,” he tells him.

“That doesn’t mean anything,” Mazwakhe says.

Busikhaya grabs a bottle of water and sits next to him. They’re starting to get along. They’ve had less arguments since their fight inside a locked bedroom.

“How is Vuyiswa?” he asks.

“Good, for now,” he says and shrugs his shoulders.

“For now?” Busikhaya lifts up his eyebrow.

“I have to go back to Johannesburg. I can’t just sit here. I have to do something that’s going to bring me something on the table.”

“You don’t have to leave. I know that you’re a plumber and you want to do your thing, but do you think it’s a wise move? I mean you can do anything you want here.”

“There aren’t many opportunities here,” he says.

“In life you don’t find opportunities lying on the ground, you create them yourself.”

“Yes, Pastor Zondo.”

He chuckles, buries his head between his hands and exhales.

“Ngcwethi is worrying me,” he says.

“Me too. He’s doing as he pleases with my...”

Busikhaya clicks his tongue and lifts his head up.

“She’s his wife-to-be! I’m talking about this Mnotho situation. Tomorrow we are abakhwenyana at the Ngwanes, he needs to be emotionally okay.”



“Mnotho is a grown man, he knows his way back home.”

“What if he met her and suddenly forgot where home is. Do you know how much he loves that girl?” he asks and they both laugh.

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“Who are you?” A man, too short for his age, asks staring at him.

“Mnotho,” he says. He has no idea where he is or how he got here. The pain on his neck is excruciating, he can hardly move it.

“Mnotho? How did you get here? Why are you here?”

“I don’t know,” he says, shrugs his shoulders and sits on the only wide thing he sees around, the basalt rock.

“Who did this?” the man asks.

He lifts his hand up and touches his neck. He doesn't know what happened, it also doesn't show that he's hurt anywhere.

“Come, let's get out of here.”

The shortest person he's ever seen scoops him up as if he weighs like a packet of chips, and throws him over his shoulder.

It's a long walk, across rivers and forests, and this man has not stopped even for a second to catch his breath.

“Who is this?” A person asks as the short man puts him down on what feels like a cemented floor.

“His name is Mnotho,” he says, finally catching his breath.

“How is that possible? How did he end up in the bush if he's Mnotho?” the other one asks.

“Are you going to ask questions or you'll start treating him? We don't have much time.”

“I'm just confused. How did he become a target?”

Well, he'll ask and answer himself. The short man has disappeared behind isigodlo and he's talking to someone, if it's a person, and apologizing.

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It's time to leave. Nobody knows where Mnotho is, not even Ngcwethi. He slept like a baby yesterday, not even his grandmother visited to just stare at him, he was blank the whole night.

"We'll have to leave without him," Busikhaya says.

"No!" Ngcwethi.

"What do you suggest we do? Go to Eshowe, leave umemulo and cancel izibizo?"

Silence.

"Exactly," he says.

Men arrive to accompany Ngcwethi to his fiancée's umemulo. Young girls load everything inside the taxis, goats are transported in a van. There's a truck

to transport larger items, like the fridge Mamkhulu demanded.

Mazwakhe left earlier, he went to his uncle's house to get ready with them that side.

Mndeni is sitting in front of the kitchen and staring into space.

Busikhaya is standing above the kraal, next to where his car is parked and watching them. He's also worried about Mnotho, but they need to go to the Ngwanes, they cannot cancel on Zanamuhla.

Ngcwethi just disappeared inside his house. He's still in his shorts and sandals as he's been since morning.

He kneels before his own ancestors, asking for a sign.

This is his brother, the little one, he's their responsibility. Yesterday he should've listened to his heart and stopped him from going.

"Ngcwethi," it's MaMbonambi.

He blows out the candles in front of him, pulls down

the dividing red sheet and goes to her.

“We are all worried,” she tells him.

“Why aren’t they showing me something? He’s their son, they should protect him or allow me to do it.”

He sits on the couch and buries his head in his hands.

“Umkhonto was fetched, the ceremony has been reported to the ancestors and isigcawu has been pointed. Who is it going to be? Zanamuhla? Or you’re going to look for your little brother?”

He has to decide and he has to decide now. Both of them need him where they are.

[11/19, 09:54] : Chapter Thirty Four

Zanamuhla

I haven’t been able to get any of them on the phone since morning. Everyone has arrived, the ceremony has already started with just a few Mthembu elders and their attendants. The brothers are nowhere to be seen.

Now I'm hoping that Vuyiswa is bringing something solid, she just went to speak to Mazwakhe who arrived with my uncle and his men. He must know what's happening over there. They should've been here about an hour ago, Ngcwethi has to take umkhonto and they need to pin money on my head as the fiancée's brothers.

"And?" Zandile asks, staring at her.

They are going to have a field day with this. Can Ngcwethi do this to me? Not show up on my ceremony. What about izibizo taking place later? These are joined ceremonies. What annoys me more is the fact that he was the one who asked for this date.

"They are coming," she tells her, passes a look to me and walks behind the line of girls singing.

I follow her. Zandile whispers something to Khethile just as I take one step away. Gossiping already? They don't waste time.

"What's happening?" I ask her.

"Qophelo will stand in for him."

What the heck?!

“A child? Why?”

“He’s gone somewhere for an emergency.”

“Gone somewhere on my day? These people are waiting for him. How important can that be?”

“Qophelo is a Mthembu, the ceremony won’t be affected.”

Okay, something is going on here.

“Do you know something?” I ask.

“I would’ve blurted it out already. Mazwi is not saying much, he said no questions, you know your brother treats me like a child.”

Well, I’m not here for their relationship problems. Yesterday he was treating her like a queen, today he’s treating her like a child and tomorrow he’ll be treating her like a tree.

There’s a car arriving. Busikhaya’s. He’s here with Qophelo and other two boys I’ve seen a few times at

the Mthembus. They're the ones wearing amabheshu and carrying shields. Vuyiswa was right, they're standing in for their fathers.

“Is he going to be umkhwenyana?” Khethile asks, loud for everyone to turn their heads, when Qophelo crosses isigcawu and go sits at the front of the crowd of men.

“Is the real mkhwenyana sick?” someone asks from the crowd.

“Did he dump you?” Zandile asks. She would love that, wouldn't she?

Vuyiswa starts a song. She's not a part of izintombi, she's dressed in her cocktail dress, stilettos and sunglasses, but she starts it anyway and everyone sings along.

Mndeni, Ngcwethi and Mnotho didn't come. Something MORE important came up. The ceremony continues, I sing, dance and give umkhonto to Qophelo. He's a Mthembu, obviously he has his own recite names and he can dance and



bring the whole crowd to a standstill.

They give me a blanket pinned with R200 notes on every inch of it. I suppose money is supposed to make me feel better. Busikhaya, the only Mthembu who actually loves me, comes and pins more money on inhloko.

Mazwakhe comes with a lousy R10 and pins it.

“Where’s the rest?” I ask in a whisper.

“It took you to school,” he says.

Oh, I see. Vuyiswa is telling him not to spend his money on me. Toxic girlfriend!

“I hate her,” I tell him.

He laughs and steps out of the way for others to come. My ex, yes that one who broke my virginity in a 10-minute sex that I never felt, he pins R50. Only one lousy R50! He owes me more than that. For my virginity and orgasm-compensation fund.

“Let’s take some of it off, otherwise it will fall,” Mamkhulu suggests, coming out of nowhere.

Where the fuck is Vuyiswa? She should be keeping

an eye on things like this. I will never smell the money she just took off my head with her sisterwives.

The ceremony comes to an end. Ngcwethi didn't attend. I don't know where he is or what he's attending to, all I know is that he needs to bring a mediator and bouncers because it will be nasty when we meet again.

The goats are slaughtered. Busikhaya is here, so are the Mthembu uncles who are in charge of everything. Everyone is happy, Mamkhulu and her sisterwives, they are receiving their gifts and ululating.

Vuyiswa made us buy matching outfits, I couldn't find the strength to put the dress on without him. This whole thing is meaningless to me. Earlier I was angry, but now I'm worried sick. Mazwakhe has left, in the middle of the ceremony, this confirms that something is terribly wrong at the Mthembus.

I call Qophelo aside and ask him if everything is

alright at home. The only thing he tells me is that Mnotho didn't come back from Es howe. I'm more confused.

Vuyiswa pushes through people and comes to me. She is no longer my eyes and ears, she's doing her own things and not paying attention to what we talked about. My only hope now is Bontle, she's sober and keeping an eye in the kitchen. She's been there the whole day.

"They are here," she screams in my ear.

"Who?" I ask.

"Ngcwethi and Mndeni."

I don't alert anyone I just get up and hurry outside.

They came in Mndeni's car. As I get closer to it, Mndeni steps out.

"What's going on?" the voice startles me. I didn't realize he was behind me.

"We found the car," Mndeni says and squats on the ground.

"Only the car?" Busikhaya again.

“Yes. It was inside the bush, damaged and lying upside down. He was heading to Babanango or somewhere on that line.”

“To fuckin’ do what there?” he shouts and leans by the car with his fist bumping on his forehead.

“The important question is, where is he? If he didn’t make it through the accident, where’s his body?” Mndeni says and exhales.

I haven’t had a chance to ask my own questions and I don’t think the time is right to do so.

“Where is Mazwakhe?” Busikhaya asks.

“He’s gone to look for him. He said we must come here.”

“Where is he going to start?”

Nobody knows and at this time, nobody cares. By tomorrow morning they all need to scatter across KZN and look for the young brother.

Ngcwethi eventually opens the car door and climbs out. He’s wearing a short, hoodie-jacket and flip flops.

“Babe,” I throw my arms around him.

“I’m sorry,” he says.

“It all went well. How are you feeling?”

“Useless,” he says and shrugs his shoulders.

“No Ngcwethi, don’t be hard on yourself.”

He’s not in a good space, but someone has seen them and a boy is sent to call them in.

They make him sit at the front. His eyes are bloodshot, he can’t even afford a smile and the cameraman is not stopping with his pictures.

“He doesn’t look happy to be here,” Khethile tells me. I’m not sure what to do with the information.

“We are going through problems,” I say.

“Already? What happened?” Her eyes are widened, curiosity is spread all over them.

“Maybe he’s seeing someone else,” I say and shrug my shoulders.

“Zandile come over here,” she whispers behind her shoulder.

She's here within a second, her eyes are jumping from her to me.

“Zanamuhla tell her what you just told me,” Khethile says.

“Ngcwethi and I are buying a house in town,” I say. She frowns.

“And Ngcwethi is seeing someone else,” she says, widening her eyes at me.

“Really? Who is she?” I ask.

She clicks her tongue and leaves. Zandile goes back to her spot with a confused look on her face.

Mazwakhe

He took the van, its keys were on sight, and he enjoys driving it because it reminds him a lot about his past life. The life he feels like he belonged to, mud houses, herding the cattle, managing his light finances and taking his sister to school.

He wanted to be successful one day, everyone dreams of it, but he didn't dream of expensive cars, luxurious offices and exaggerated brick houses hiding behind a tall fence. He wanted stability, normal life and family. Maybe for his sister, he always wanted her to have the best of everything, that's why he did everything in his power to put her in college.

He still wants his old life back, but being where he is now would make people in his life happy. And Vuyiswa would never settle for that life. She wouldn't want to spend her whole life in the village.

She wants greater things. The suburb house, Mercedes cars, kids that attend private schools and dream in English at night, and a husband that wear suits and go sit at the office with a laptop in front of him.

His life is also about this. Protecting his loved one. He was the eldest at the Ngwanes and he's also the

eldest at the Mthembus, leaving Busikhaya by 7 months. Ngwane taught him how to be a man, he gave him the responsibility to protect his siblings and mothers when he was out for work.

Which is why when Busikhaya told him that Mnotho is missing, he left in the middle of izibizo ceremony and went to the Mthembus. They were just arriving home, looking tired and helpless. He told them that Zanamuhla needed them and asked them to leave everything in his hands for the night and go to the ceremony.

Now he's here, for the second time in just a space of one month. He didn't even tell Vuyiswa that he was leaving and he knows that she'll ask questions and accuse him of treating her like a child.

Maybe it's time he tones her down a bit.

A dog barks and charges towards him as he makes his way inside the yard. He keeps walking, it gets nearer and jumps to his leg. The golf stick lands



across its opened jaws and leaves its gums bleeding.

He loves animals, but...just not today.

It's close to 3am and the woman is already up and sitting around the flames of fire in the kitchen. How normal!

He doesn't knock, he lets himself in, drags a bench that was leaning by the door and places near the fireplace and sits.

“Who are you? Who said come in?” the woman asks angrily.

He clicks his tongue, takes off the beanie on his head and warms his hands on the fire.

“Wena salukazi awulali vele?” he asks, not looking at her, just focused on his hands.

“I asked you who you are and why did you come in without my permission?” the woman says.

“I'm here for Khwezi,” he says.

“That’s not what I asked, I asked who you are.”

“You really think I wouldn’t have told you if it was important? You didn’t answer my question either, don’t you sleep? Your agemates are sleeping, in their graves mostly.”

The woman chuckles. She’s not sure if this is someone who needs help or a thug. Eitherway, it won’t end well for him if he came with this stinking attitude.

“Are you going to wake her up or what?” he asks, rinsing the dog’s blood off his golf stick in a bucket of water that’s sitting near the woman.

“Did you see the time?” she asks.

“You’re not the one to talk about time. Wake up your daughter-in-law, I want to talk to her.”

She won’t be sent around by a boy she doesn’t know. And Khwezi is still resting, she was in town yesterday doing grocery, she’s tired.

He takes the bucket of water and pours it on the fire. He’s done warming his hands.

“I’ll do it myself,” he tells her.

“Don’t you dare go to my son’s bedroom,” she says, trying to find her way to the door through the dark. It closes before she reaches to it.

He locks her in and goes to each rondavel, kicks the door open and looks for Khwezi. He finally finds her inside the third one, wrapped on the sponge with her son lying next to her.

He whistles, Khwezi wakes up immediately and looks around. He’s shocked by her reaction, but she’s awake and that’s what he wanted.

“Who are you?” she asks with a frown on her face.

“Me? I’m Bhekani Ndlovu.” It just slips out of his mouth. Something doesn’t allow him to say his name in this place. So, why not Bhekani’s?

“You’re not my uncle,” she says.

“I want Mnotho. What was he doing on the road to Babanango, what did you do to him?”

She frowns.

“Mnotho left,” that’s all she manages to say. Her

mind is jammed with questions. Why would Mnotho make his way there? Is he still alive?

“Where is he?” His voice is firmer.

“I don’t know,” she says, scratching her head and looking around in frustration. The one next to her is fast asleep. Mazwakhe makes his way to him. He scoops him up, puts him across his shoulder and covers him with a blanket he was sleeping on.

“You take my Mnotho, I take yours. When you have decided you’ll take a taxi, it will be up to you if you come via Mandeni or you go to Mbongolwane and comes via Eshowe. I’m sure you still know your way home, then we’ll exchange peacefully and you’ll come back to your....” He looks around, trying to find a suitable name to call this creepy home. “Your cave,” he says.

“You cannot take him,” she says.

“Watch me,” he says going to the door with the boy covered in a blanket.

He makes it out of the yard and goes to the van parked behind the trees surrounding the homestead.

He thinks about putting the boy at the front, but fight against it. He'll sleep comfortable at the back.

Zanamuhla

I left everything behind and came here. As soon as the ceremony was wrapped up in the morning I packed my bags and came with Ngcwethi.

Telling MaMbonambi wasn't the wisest thing to do, but one way or another she would've found out. She's sitting in her bedroom with two lit candles in front of her. Hearing about the car being in the accident has drained off all her hopes. Right now she's just waiting for them to find his body and bring it home for the burial.

"I think I'm going crazy," Vuyiswa says.

Yes, she's here. Nobody invited her, she just packed her bags, loaded them in Busikhaya's car boot and sat on the passenger seat with her seatbelt fastened.

There's a van driving in. It's the family one, it must be Mazwakhe.

"Oh, thank God!" Vuyiswa sighs out next to me.

We follow each other to the door. At least he's back, now everyone can shift the attention to Mnotho.

"Get inside and stay there," Ngcwethi says, standing in the middle of the doorway.

"We wanted to see Mazwakhe," I say.

"Zolwandle get the fuck inside the house and lock the doors!"

What the hell? Is Mnotho in that car? Badly hurt maybe.

"Okay, there's no need to scream," I say and push the door on his face and lock it.

They are outside, taking out something from the back of the van. Yes, we are peeking through the curtain, the kids are flat asleep in their rooms.

"Do you think it's his dead body?" she asks me.

I don't know why she makes death sounds so normal.

"I don't know," I say.

"It's him, look."

I look and it's not him, but a young boy. What I don't understand is why would Ngcwethi chain him up? I mean, he looks young and harmless.

"Are they kidnapping a child?" Vuyiswa.

"I don't know," it sounds like a verse now.

"Child trafficking, yoh!"

I don't think it's that deep. Yes, they're kidnappers, they did kidnap me once. But this one is a child and they're taking him to the rondavel at the back.

Ngcwethi looks angry, or frustrated, I don't know. But him and Mazwakhe are having a heated argument there.

Almost an hour has passed and we are locked here. Sango wants to go play outside, Qophelo has a

book to fetch from another house. MaMbonambi is in her bedroom and praying nonstop. Vuyiswa said it was too much for her, sitting in one place locked like a criminal, so she's drinking a beer she found in the fridge to feel better and I'm dealing with angry kids alone.

At last, someone is unlocking the door outside.

Busikhaya walks in first, he takes Sango with him and disappears in MaMbonambi's bedroom.

Ngcwethi follows, he comes and sits next to me.

When Mazwakhe walks in he finds Vuyiswa, who he didn't even know was here, sitting on the couch with a glass of alcohol in her hand.

"Oh gosh, you're back," she says, throwing herself in his arms.

Mndeni walks in lastly, he grabs Vuyiswa's glass on the coffee-table and proceeds to MaMbonambi's room.

Mnotho is still missing but now they look hopeful.



They're not shattered as they were before Mazwakhe got home.

“You look horrible. Come, I'll prepare you a bath,” she says and pulls his hand out of the door.

Ngcwethi looks at me with a frown, I shrug my shoulders. I don't know, whatever is it that he has a question for.

“You will go to Mission with the kids for a while,” he says, rubbing the back of his neck.

“What is happening?” I ask.

“Mazwakhe brought that boy here. It's just more complicated and not safe,” he says.

“Because of a child? Whose child is he? Is that why you chained him up? Where did Mazwakhe take him? Where is the mother? And where is Mnotho? Is he alive?”

He sighs, kisses my cheek and pulls me to his chest.

[11/19, 09:55] : Chapter Thirty Five

Mazwakhe

The last thing Mazwakhe expected was finding Vuyiswa at the Mthembus, comfortable on the couch and drinking beer. Even Busikhaya has not brought Ntobe over yet. They're traditional men and certain rules need to be followed when a girl comes to your father's house.

He's never been shy in his life, he always says what he says and does what he does. But not with Vuyiswa, she has this thing that makes him compromise on things he wouldn't have compromised on in the past.

She has a way of making him listen to whatever she's saying. Like right now, he's standing in the middle of the rondavel that is his bedroom, with his hands clasped below his chin and thinking of a way he's going to tell her to dress up properly and put at least a hat on her head. She's not just any girl, one day she's going to be a wife here.

She told him to bath and she's gone to fetch the

water.

She walks in and looks at him standing in his full clothes. Didn't she tell him it's bathtime?

"Here is your water," she says pouring hot water inside the dish. She adds cold water, pokes her finger inside and pours more. His mother used to do this when he was a child. He watches as she goes through her own bag, he doesn't know when she brought her bags here, some of her things are on the hanger being dried.

She pours something in his water. He doesn't know what it is, he bathes with water and Lux, he never puts anything else.

"It's ready," she tells him, pushes out her sleepers and climbs on bed.

No, he's never been shy, but is he supposed to bath with her staring at him like that?

He slowly takes his clothes off and kneels in front of the dish.

"Why don't you extend this house, build a shower

inside and have a sitting area, like Ngcwethi's?" she asks.

"I'm not rich like him and I don't have a problem bathing in a dish," he says.

"But I do," she tells him.

"You knew me Vuyiswa, you knew what I afforded and didn't afford and you said you loved me."

"That's not what I mean, you know I love you for you." She sounds apologetic.

"I will make a plan," he says. He also knew her, he knew the kind of life she wanted and he said he loved her. When things go back to normal, he needs to put aside his pride and ask Busikhaya for a job while he's still trying to figure out how he's going to pursue his plumbing passion.

"Let me know if you need help," she says and he nods his head. She knows that he won't do it, he'll never ask help from her because in his head a man does everything for himself.

"Do you need help?" she asks.

“No, I’ll tell you when...” She shakes her head, he’s standing inside the dish and washing his lower body.

“I’m talking about that bush around J ama,” she says.

This is what he feared, her sitting there and judging him.

She doesn’t wait for his answer, she unzips her small bag and takes out a bottle of cream.

“Vuyiswa....” She’s in front of him with the thing on the palm of her hand. She kneels down and puts it over his pubic hair.

He shaves his head, beard and under arms because he sweats. Nothing has ever made him think of removing his hair ‘around’ J ama and his past girlfriends never had a problem with it.

Now she’s the one rinsing him. Her hand keeps wrapping around his shaft and he keeps releasing heavy breaths.

“Are you done?” he asks and swallows at her soft touch.

“No, give me the towel.” It sounds like a plea, except that she grabs it from his hand without waiting for his reply.

He feels like a child as she takes on washing his lower body and drying him with a towel.

She brings his sandals close and tells him to step out of the dish.

“Let me throw out the water and I’ll lotion you,” she says with a wide smile on her face. Things like this make him feel like he’s just starting to live. Even Nandi, who he thought was a wife material, didn’t treat him the way Vuyiswa does. Between a traditional grounded girl who, sometimes, didn’t let him sleep on the same bed as her because lobola was pending, and asked him for money every week because a man is a provider, and the alcohol-loving girl who’d do anything for him, even shaving his private part and wiping his feet. He’d choose his alcohol-lover over and over again.

She comes back with an empty, rinsed dish and

pushes it under the bed. She goes to the tall cosmetic table and takes his lotions.

He's sitting on bed, waiting.

A chuckle escapes his lips when her soft hands applies the lotion on his face. He feels like a baby.

“At the back?” he asks when the cold lotion lands on his back.

“Yes, at the back” she says.

“But nobody sees my back,” he says.

“Do you lotion your body to be seen or to keep your skin moist?” she asks.

“To keep my skin moist where people see,” he says.

She heaves a sigh. The exhausted one she makes when she thinks he's stupid.

“So, how is everything? Any progress with Mnotho?”

She could've asked this as soon as he arrived, but she knows a man he is. She had to soften him up first.

“It's still dark, but Ngcwethi believes the boy can

help.”

“How did you get the boy? Where did you find him? Where is the mother?” she asks like all the questions were stored in her head in a certain order.

He cannot tell her the truth. He loves the way she looks in his eyes, like he’s her perfect creature. He can’t ruin that for himself by exposing his dark side.

“I got him somewhere in Ngudwini,” he says.

“And his mother?” She wants to know and she won’t let go until all her questions are answered.

“She’ll come fetch him when the time is right,” he says.

She nods her head and lotions his arms and chest. Then she pushes him down on the pillow.

His legs are on the floor and she’s lotioning them while on her knees. He’s trying to ignore it, but the feeling is there and burning him.

“Mazwakhe?”

He opens his eyes that he didn’t even realize were closed and looks at her.



She's done. Now she's sitting on bed and staring at him.

“You said something?” he asks.

She smiles and just stares at him.

He gathers himself up and goes to the wardrobe to find his clothes.

“Who are you saving me for?” she asks.

He freezes for a second. He's been waiting for the right time and the right place, right now he doesn't have what he can call his own house where he can take her and do as he please with her. One thing he fears is that she is wild, he's seen it when they kiss or hug, she always does things that leave him gasping. He's never been scandalous, he's private with his private activities, which is why Hlahla nearly fainted the day she found condoms in his drawer.

“Come here,” she orders.

He looks at her with a frown on his face.

“Or must I come to you?” she asks.

“Hhayi bo Vuyis wa.” He chuckles and grabs his clothes.

Arms wrap around his waist and turn him around. He laughs because, wow!

“We can do it tonight, I will organise a place. Right now I need to attend a family meeting,” he explains. By 12 a man Ngcwethi called will be here and he needs to be present.

“Can’t we be quick?” she asks.

“I don’t know how to be quick.”

“I will teach you.”

Is there another way of talking her out of her mind?

Before he knows it he’s pinned against the wardrobe and onslaughted with a kiss. His shaft is in her hand, stroked up and down.

She kneels down, licks him around the tip while staring up in his eyes. His hand is on top of her head, his jaws are firmly clenched. He’s silent and just staring at her with darker eyes and squeezed face.

No, she wants a sound, even if it's a suppressed moan. Silence makes her feel like she's not doing enough, which is why she spits on the tip, wipes it with her tongue and throws it deep in her throat.

No moan. He only sucks air sharply through his teeth and licks his lips.

She stops and goes up to his lips. He kisses her back for a few seconds then fails to hold himself and pushes her to bed.

Her clothes fly out, they're both fighting to get her naked instantly.

Getting a condom from the drawer feels like Mandela's long walk to freedom. He tears the foil and inserts it on with her hand helping him.

He places his arm under her neck, brings her leg over his waist and kisses her. He keeps his lips on her as he slowly penetrates through her.

He keeps shutting her screams with a kiss and thrusting deeper and deeper in a constant pace.

"Mazwakhe," MaMbonambi yells his name outside

the door.

They both freeze and stay silent.

She calls again, louder this time, with a steady knock.

“Ma?” he responds with his hand over Vuyiswa’s mouth.

“What are you doing inside there?”

There’s a grip that chokes his shaft. He looks at Vuyiswa with his eyelids weak and close to shutting.

“Baby,” he whispers and licks his lips.

“Huh?” It’s MaMbonambi outside the door.

“I’m dressing up Ma,” he says.

“Okay, come to the dining room immediately.” It sounds like she’s leaving.

Mazwakhe’s head drops on Vuyiswa’s chest. He releases a heavy sigh before looking up at her.

“Were you close?” he asks.

“Mazwakhe,” she says, exhaling out her frustrations,

and pushes him off.

“I’m really sorry about this,” he says, quickly wiping his front with a towel and getting in his clothes. This is exactly why he needed to be somewhere private with her.

“Malume,” now it’s Qophelo.

“I’m coming,” he yells and goes to Vuyiswa on bed and plants a kiss on her lips.

“I’m sorry sthandwa sami,” he apologizes once again. She just nods her head and lies on bed flat on her stomach.

He rushes out and closes the door behind. It sounds irresponsible of him, especially with Mnotho missing, but later he needs to take her somewhere and finish off what they started.

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MaMbonambi leaves when the meeting ends. Busikhaya assures her that they’ll get Mnotho home

safely. Ngcwethi asks her not to worry because he's still alive. He wouldn't miss the death of his own, no matter how blank he is. He'd know, the same way he knew when his father died.

“So, real talk, MaMbonambi is gone. What are we going to do with a child?” Busikhaya asks. He's a father, a parent, he has a soft spot for children. Even though the boy is not crying, just sitting where they left him and looking bored instead of scared, he still feels for him. He doesn't know what's really going on, he's just an innocent child.

“Ndlela will find a way to talk to him. There's something, a connection or something, that he has with Mnotho. When I walked there I smelled Mnotho, his blood and presence, from him,” Ngcwethi says.

“You did a good job bafo, thank you,” Busikhaya tells Mazwakhe. “But please don't do things alone, imagine if something happened to you there.”

“Busikhaya I'm an old man, I can take care of myself,” he says, shrugging his shoulders.

“So, Vuyiswa? She's official?” Mndeni asks.

“Meaning?” he asks.

“She’s here, preparing baths for you and locking you inside the house, then you come out with your eyes reddish and temper below zero.”

“We didn’t talk about it,” he says.

“You have to control her. As far as MaMbonambi knows, she’s Zanamuhla’s friend.”

“And she drinks here?” Busikhaya asks.

“Can you stop judging? I will talk to her.”

“Why do I get a feeling that she makes you weak? Are you sure that...”

“Mndeni!” His tone is delivering a warning.

“I’m just saying. I also want Nandi to be on my bed but I have to do things correctly,” Mndeni says.

“Nandi who?” Mazwakhe asks.

“You’ll meet her, don’t rush.”

“I don’t trust Nandis.”

“Do you trust yourself with Vuyiswa?”

He gives him a look. He's the most annoying brother, but what can they become without him?

Ndlela arrives. They all go to the rondavel at the back with him.

"This is not a normal child," he says as he sets his foot inside the house.

They know, that's why they called him here.

"Stay out of it. It's too risky for you," he tells Ngcwethi.

Then he looks at them, one by one.

"Who's the eldest?" he asks.

They point at Mazwakhe.

"This is your job, you've already started. You weren't alone, they were guiding you," he says.

"Who?" Mazwakhe asks, confused.

"The elders of the family," he says.

They wait for him to go on.



“You love children?” He’s looking at Busikhaya.

The question is confusing but he nods his head because he does love children.

“I will give him a bath and you’ll talk to him. He’ll be calm, but do keep away from his nails.”

“What do I say to him?” Busikhaya asks.

“Whatever you want to know,” he says and empties his bags on the reedmat laid before him.

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Busikhaya

He’s not sure what he’s doing. After Ndlela took the boy outside the yard and gave him a bath with whatever he used, he told Busikhaya that it was all in his and Mazwakhe’s hands.

He puts the boy on the stool, gives him slices of pizza and juice.

He's eating like a normal child, messing his chest with the juice, biting more than he can chew and using his fingers to push it to his throat.

"Mnotho what did your father do to you?" He doesn't know where he should start.

"He took me to the grave and said I must stay there."

"Stay there?" He's confused.

"Yes, he said I must come back as uncle Solomon but in the same body of mine," he says.

"Does your mother know?" Busikhaya asks.

"Nope...I want another piece of this." He points at the last bite of his pizza.

He gets him another piece and pushes it in front of him, careful not to get too close.

"Do you know Mnotho? The one who met your mother in town yesterday?" he asks.

"Yes, I hurt him, I scratched him. But it was a mistake."

“You scratched him?”

“Yes, here,” he says, showing Busikhaya exactly where he scratched Mnotho.

“And then what happened?”

“He was taken by Nkonyane to Mkhulu’s palace.”

“Where is Mkhulu’s palace?”

“I’m not allowed to tell anyone.”

“Mnotho is there, I need your help boy” Busikhaya says, desperately.

“Mama can take you there, but Baba said she’s weak.”

Now Mazwakhe have to go back to Khwezi and beg her to take him to that place. It’ll take him a lot to be able to beg, the only person she begs is Vuyiswa.

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Mazwakhe

He's standing in front of the chair Vuyiswa is sitting on.

"We'll have to postpone, I need to go somewhere," he tells her.

"Okay, let's make it tomorrow," she says.

"Sthandwa sami I'm not sure when I'm coming back. It could be a few days or a week," he says.

She's disappointed but she understands. The family is in crisis

and it warms her heart to see him taking the stand and fighting for his brother to come home.

"Mazwakhe," says MaMbonambi walking in.

She sees Vuyiswa and acknowledges her with a brief smile. Vuyiswa jumps off the chair and walks out to find Zanamuhla. She needs to pack and go home.

"This girl looks like trouble," MaMbonambi says.

He doesn't say anything. He also judged her before.

"Don't go after her type. When you're ready to settle down bring a girl home and we'll meet her family and see what kind of home she comes from."

She sits on the chair and looks at him.

"I want my grandchildren to have a good mother figure and grow in a warm home."

"I hear you," he says.

"I hear you've been appointed to lead the search because Ngcwethi is expecting," she says.

"Expecting what?" Mazwakhe frowns.

"Oh, never mind. They will make an announcement on their own," she says and places a wristband in front of him.

"I came to give you this. I found it in your father's clothes, it didn't come from me," she says.

He takes the band and looks at it. It has his mother's design.

"Did he ever wear it?" he asks.

“Early into our marriage,” she says.

He nods his head and slips it inside his pocket.

“Be careful around that girl,” she says before walking away.

Mazwakhe releases a sigh and downs a bottle of water.

He loves this girl and he’s not letting her go because of imperfections. But how long is he going to stand this judgement and criticism? He can’t change her and he loves her for being her.

[11/19, 09:55] : Chapter Thirty Six

Zanamuhla

Growing up I was a child, even after my mother’s death I remained a child, Mazwakhe made sure of it. I was the one being taken care of, not the other way around. Now I have two kids I’m expected to take care of, for a few days or a week, I don’t know. It could be more or less. I’m here with them until Mnotho is brought home.

They look like they've never been here before, judging by the way they're looking lost.

“Qophelo come, I will show you your room,” Ngcwethi says, taking his bag from the floor.

“Where is mine?” Sango asks.

“You'll sleep with Aunt Zano.”

Here is to the longest nights of my life! I will be sharing bed with the drama queen herself, talking about Masha and the Bear and being forced into her weak hairdressing skills.

Qophelo walks back to the lounge and tells me that his father is calling me to the bedroom. He takes something out of the fridge, a yoghurt, grabs two spoons and sits with his sister. He's such a good brother, protective like Mazwakhe.

I walk inside the main bedroom and find him sitting on bed. I make myself comfortable on his lap and ask what's going on.

“Things have been hectic, I miss being with you,” he

says.

I wish there was something I could do to help. I hate seeing him helpless like this.

“Can’t they show you something?” I ask.

“They’re protecting me on purpose. Mazwakhe will find him and bring him home. We just don’t know what it’s going to take, and that’s what frustrates me more than anything.”

“Why him?” I ask.

“Because he’s the eldest.”

“What are you being protected from?” This is confusing. Does this mean Mazwakhe is being sacrificed?

“I have to be pure for you,” he says with his hand massaging me around the waist. I hope he’s not thinking about sex, Sango is just a room away.

“I can’t go around attaching bad spirits and coming home to you and her,” he says.

Yes, I failed my first audition of boxing class in high school but he mustn’t test me. Ngalusa mina!



“Who is her?” I ask with my eyes narrowed at him. Instead of answering, he flips me over and puts me on the pillow. I’m fuming, he needs to give me the bitch’s name.

“Something happened,” he says.

Oh Lord, he made her pregnant.

“What happened?” The sharpness of my voice alone can stab someone and puts him in ICU.

He kisses me. This guy doesn’t know who I am.

“Ngcwethi!” I roll my fist and show it to him.

Yes, I can be dangerous like that.

“One of my seeds refused to leave your womb.”

This man, he thinks he’s going to change the subject just like that? No, this isn’t about the damn plants. It’s not about seeds!

“I want the truth,” I say.

“The truth is, you are pregnant.”

Me? He can’t be serious.

“Do you live in my womb?” I ask. If I was pregnant I would’ve known. There must’ve been something, a baby kick or any movement. Something was going to happen, like my periods stoppi....My periods!

“Ngcwethi” I’m almost yelling. I push him off my chest and sit up. My mouth is drier than Khethile’s bank account.

“Did you do it on purpose?” I ask.

“Nooooo!”

“Why are you smiling?”

“Babe I’m just...are you angry at me?”

Obviously, I’m angry. He said nothing was going to happen and I thought his ancestors were going to come on board with underground condoms that aren’t visible to the naked eye.

I can’t believe my own ancestors too, especially my mother.

I always talk about my dream of finding a job, get married and have my own money before becoming a mother. They had one job, only one, to make sure

that I don't get pregnant. And they've failed me. I will excuse my father, he's still a newbie in the ancestral world, probably still asking his way around to the ancestral shops and stuff. But my mother, I refuse to understand.

"You don't want to have my children?" He sounds wounded and I'm just appalled by his ability to make everything about himself. Can't I cry over my tiny waist that's about to be destroyed in peace?

"You said nothing was going to happen. Mazwakhe is going to be disappointed in me. He emptied his pockets to pay for my studies. He wanted me to have a decent job and afford anything I want. And now I'm just going to be a depending village wife, raising kids with a trade certificate lying on the dust."

"You're not going to be a village wife, I know you're capable of more. When our child is grown you can do whatever you want," he says.

"When will it grow? 1 year? 3 years? 5 years?"

He doesn't know. In MaMbonambi's eyes he's also

a child and she's been a mother since she gave birth to him. There's no break in this thing, once you are in you are in.

"When we move in to our house, are you going to hire a nanny to look after the baby so that I can look for a job?"

"Let someone else look after my child? No."

I stare at him. He holds my hands.

"I'm going to take care of you."

Urgh! He doesn't get it.

"Zanamuhla.....where are you going?" He catches me before I make it out of the door.

"What Ngcwethi? What?"

"Thank you," he says.

"For what?" I ask.

"For making me a father. I don't know if I tell you this enough, but I love you Zolwandle. You're the best thing that has ever happened to me. No matter what I go through, coming home to you makes

everything okay.”

“Are you trying to soften me up?” I ask.

“No, I mean it. I love you more than you think.”

“I love you too,” I say.

Fuck you mouth, I’m still angry at him!

“Don’t be soft on them.” He’s talking about the kids. I know that Qophelo will behave, the troublemaker is that little princess Cinderella.

“I don’t want anything to happen to my brother,” I tell him.

I know that Mazwakhe is going to give attitude when he finds out about the pregnancy, but I still need him to be around to meet his niece or nephew. I have no doubt that he’ll be a great uncle.

“He’s my brother too,” he says.

I roll my eyes. My mother made this really weird. We are sharing a bed and a brother.

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Mazwakhe

He decided on the last minute that he was taking the boy with him.

“I will go with him,” he said.

They all looked at him like he was crazy. Ndlela advised him on what to do and how to do it. The boy was supposed to be taken back to Ngudwini after they got Mnotho. He was their connection and assurance that Mnotho would come home alive.

But Mazwakhe was not discussing, he was telling them and once he puts his mind on something nobody tells him otherwise.

The boy was calmed. He takes him out of the car, puts him over his shoulder and enters Moyana’s homestead for the second time in one week.

The woman is sitting outside, under the shade of tree. Today she looks like an old, fragile woman.

Her walking stick is lying next to her, there's a bottle of snuff near her.

"Is Khwezi home?" he asks.

Well, she doesn't talk to boys with no respect. Her eyes are on her grandson.

"Mnotho, is this you? You are home, khehla?"

The boy doesn't say anything, he's just staring at her like he's never seen her before.

Khwezi comes out of the house, she stands with her arms folded and looks at Mazwakhe.

"You need my help?" Her words are accompanied by an underlying attitude, which is unlike her.

"Yes," Mazwakhe says.

She looks at the woman, disappears inside the house and come back with a blanket. She puts it around the woman's shoulders and signals to Mazwakhe that he must follow her inside the house.

"What happened?" she asks.

"Do you know Solomon?" Mazwakhe.

“Yes, he was my husband’s brother and I’m aware of what was done to my son. I know everything,” she says.

“Fuck, and you’re still here?” This girl is bewitched and when Mnotho comes back, he better play far away from her.

“You won’t understand,” she says.

Well, she is right, he won’t understand. Nobody would. Who becomes a willing slave of witchcraft or whatever shady business this family is involved in? She has a chance to leave, the husband died. This wrinkled woman can’t do shit to stop her. But she’s still here, acting like a superwoman.

“Take me to Mkhulu Moyana’s palace, where he initiates people,” he says what he came to say.

“If I go there I won’t come back.”

“Meaning?” he asks.

She doesn’t explain. Her mind is occupied with deep thoughts. She’s in a battle with her heart and mind.

“I will place Mnotho’s documents somewhere safe,



please give me a few minutes,” she says and walks out. Mnotho jumps off Mazwakhe’s arms and runs after her. It’s strange how he’s not showing any excitement seeing his family after being taken by strangers. Not even his mother, he’s been in Mazwakhe’s arms just listening and staring.

Khwezi is also not being a mother. She could’ve ran to them, snatched him from Mazwakhe and hugged him. That would’ve been normal.

“He has to stay,” Khwezi says when they come back. Mnotho walked in with her and went to stand behind Mazwakhe.

“I told you this will be an exchange, nothing has changed. I get my Mnotho, you get yours,” Mazwakhe says.

“You’re making this harder than it will be.”

He shrugs his shoulders and scoops Mnotho to his shoulder. He’s not compromising, this boy is the only assurance he has that his brother is coming back. What if the witch sitting outside hides him when they leave and they don’t find Mnotho when

they get there?

They leave in a van. Kwezi is giving him directions. He expected a scary cave in the middle of nowhere, but they're in a certain quiet village.

She instructs that they leave the car at a distance and continue by foot. It's almost 6 at noon, they have to cross a river and walk through the bush before getting to the big homestead hiding behind tall gumtrees. That's where Mnotho is kept.

“Mama!” the boy screams on Mazwakhe's shoulder. He looks back alarmed because the boy has been quiet the whole journey. Him and Khwezi haven't shared a word since he arrived.

Khwezi is lying on the ground. A snake is coiled around her leg.

“Khwezi!” he yells.

She's not moving, but her eyes are opened.

He puts the boy down and rushes towards her.

“Bhekani, do not come near!” she says before he

reaches to her.

“Bhekani?” He’s forgotten that he told her his name was Bhekani. And why would she continue calling him that, knowing very well that he was lying?

“I did this for Mnotho. Go and get him. And please make sure that he moves on and finds happiness.”

“Khwezi why are you talking like this? I will give you something to kill the snake’s poison.”

“No, Mnotho won’t let me go, as long as I’m breathing. Today or any other day, it will end like this.”

“Mama!” the boy calls. He’s still keeping his distance from her.

She looks at Mazwakhe.

“He will live,” she’s referring to her son. She looks at him, cracks a smile and closes her eyes. The snake slowly untangles itself from her leg and slides through the grass and leaves.

He looks back where they come from, it’s been a long journey. He also promised MaMbonambi that

he was going to come back with her son. He has never been a coward in his life, but fighting with animals is a different battle.

It gets scary and scarier as he approaches his destination.

“Who are you and what do you want?” the voice startles him. He cannot see anyone, but it feels like there are people watching him.

He wraps his arm around the boy.

“I want my brother,” he says.

Silence.

He takes one step forward, the voice comes again.

“We don’t recognize you,” it says.

“Fuck it, I want my brother. Show yourself, I want to talk.”

It goes silent again.

“I have your son, Mnotho, and I want my brother, Mnotho. I know that he’s here,” he says.

“Mnotho?” asks a dwarf man he didn’t see coming. He’s standing in front of him with a confused look on his face.

“Mnotho, Moyana’s son, is here on my arm. Mnotho Mthembu is inside there,” he says.

“If he’s not a Moyana then he’s not allowed to leave this place,” the dwarf man says.

“I will keep this one then,” Mazwakhe says.

“You can’t, he’s a Moyana, he can’t live anywhere else.”

“Really? I’ve had him for a few days and he lived.”

“What???”

The stare battle begins!

Someone is joining them. A man with a normal height, wearing a leopard printed T-shirt and dirty, torn trousers.

He studies Mazwakhe’s daring face and clears his throat.

“What do you have to offer?” he asks.

“Nothing, give me my brother and I’ll give you the boy.”

“We want more than that,” he says.

“What do you want? A bullet?”

Clearly, they won’t reach common grounds. He wants what he wants and they want what they want.

They leave him unattended and disappear behind inside the kraal. He looks around for somewhere to sit and notices something sliding on the ground and making its way to one of the houses. It’s the same snake that bite Khwezi. He lowly mumbles a call to his ancestors.

After a heated argument and position discussion Mnotho is told to go to his brother outside. He’s given clear instructions on the things he should take to the grave with him. A slip of tongue may cost him more than just his life.

“Are you okay?” Mazwakhe asks.

“Yes, I’m okay,” he says, scratching the side of his

neck that is darker than any part of his body.

He sighs out in relief, but concern dawns back on his face when he looks at the boy. They're waiting for him to be handed over, it was a promise.

"Don't think about it," Mnotho warns.

He doesn't respond, he keeps looking at the boy and at the dwarf man waiting to take him.

"Let's leave bafo," Mnotho says.

"No, you go. The car is somewhere along the gravel road."

"This is..." He's shut by a look. A look that says 'this is not up for discussion.'

"Don't use the route crossing the river, go around," he says. He doesn't know what's going to happen to Khwezi's body. It might be there, it might not be there. But he can't take the risk, seeing her dead body might traumatise him more than the news of her death.

"What are you going to do?" Mnotho asks.

"Mnotho you won't interrogate me, I said go."

Uneasily, Mnotho turns around and leaves.

Mnotho is finally in his bedroom, flat asleep like he hasn't slept for days. MaMbonambi is not letting him leave her sight. She's sitting on his bed with her hand tenderly brushing his head.

Mazwakhe in the lounge is surrounded by Ngcwethi, Busikhaya and Mndeni. They're waiting for 'the story' and he's just focused on his phone.

"Are you going to tell us how everything went down or you're just going to sext Vuyiswa the whole night?" Mndeni asks.

"Text, not sext," he says.

"If it's about sex it's called sext."

"Not everything is about sex Mndeni."

He'd take it further and explain how untrue that statement is, because everything boils down to sex in life, but Busikhaya disturbs him.

"What happened? He looks okay, except for that thing on his neck. Was it easy?" he asks.



“No, I couldn’t save the boy,” Mazwakhe says, exhaling a heavy breath.

“I told you to leave him behind,” Busikhaya says.

“Thank you for making me feel better. Khwezi was bitten by snake, so basically I couldn’t save both of them.”

“Is she dead?” Mndeni asks, alarmed.

“Yes and when Mnotho wakes up I have to explain myself.”

“After putting us through this? He’ll have to grow a pair of metal balls because I’m done with his tantrums over Khwezi. At least now she’s really dead.”

Gasps!

“What? He’s an intelligent boy, with a bright future and opportunities to go wherever he wants and do whatever he wants. This mopping around and whining have to come to an end.”

“He’s a child Busikhaya, you forget that,” Ngcwethi says.

Busikhaya clicks his tongue and leaves. He's happy Mnotho is home and safe, but he's also annoyed that they had to go through this because of his stupidity.

"I have to go somewhere. I will come back in the morning," Mazwakhe says.

"Vuyiswa?" Mndeni is curious as usual.

"Yes, I promised her that we'll spend time together once Mnotho comes home," he says.

"Take my car," Ngcwethi tells him.

"No, the van is fine, as long as I get there."

"If you say so, by the way I have some good news to share."

They stare at him.

"Zanamuhla is pregnant," he says.

"And the good news?" Mazwakhe asks.

"That's it," he says.

Mazwakhe pushes his phone in the pocket and makes his way to the door.

He knew it was going to happen at some point, but this is not how he saw his sister ending up. He wanted her to be more than just the wife of a rich man's son. She was destined for great things, outside the village, somewhere in the cities with big shots.

“You’ve been going raw?” Mndeni asks when Mazwakhe disappears.

“I paid cows for it,” Ngcwethi says.

“If she hears you say this, nc nc nc!”

“I’d be dead meat. She’d throw me the whole ‘my body, my rules’ speech.”

They burst into laughter.

[11/19, 09:55] : Chapter Thirty Seven

Mazwakhe

He parks below an old-looking brick house and calls Vuyiswa. She insisted that he comes here instead

of them meeting at the hotel. He doesn't need to guess that this is her parents' house, the question bothering him is, why would she insist on bringing him here?

She tells him to come through the gate and let himself inside, of which he refuses and stays inside the car.

"Seriously?" She's walking towards the van, wearing a fluffly gown and a pissed look on her face.

"Why am I here?" Mazwakhe asks.

"You want to spend money you don't have to some white-owned hotels instead of coming here? Come on, let's go inside," she says. In her mind Mazwakhe is really struggling financially. She has stopped herself from sending him money a couple of times. Her sister would die if she found out that she's blessing men with money, because it should be the other way around.

"So, I'm here because I'm....." She turns around and gives him a look to not even start. He doesn't need to take everything personal and she has made it

clear what she wants from their relationship.

“Who is here?” he asks as he puts the foot on the stoep.

Before he swallows his question there’s a woman standing at the door and staring at him.

Vuyiswa hardly talks about her family, all he knows is that her parents died. How she grew up has never been part of their discussion. He never asked because he also doesn’t talk about his background that much, mainly because he hates visiting the ‘from Ngwane to Mthembu’ story.

“What car is that?” the woman asks.

He thought she’d demand to know him first, a stranger at the door. But no, she wants to know about the car parked outside the gate.

“Mazwakhe’s,” Vuyiswa says.

“Lord!” she says, exhaling out in frustration, and disappears inside the house.

It’s about the car being a van, right?

“Come in,” Vuyiswa says and smiles faintly.

There's another girl, early in her teens, sitting on the couch and watching a sitcom.

"Go to your room Aphiwe," Vuyiswa instructs.

The girl doesn't look happy. She pulls her face, grabs her headsets from the table and disappears.

He's uncomfortable and she can see it. She asks him to sit on the couch and fetches a glass of juice.

"I'm coming back," she says after putting the juice in front of him and disappears in one of the rooms.

There's an argument. It's not about him being in the house, but about the car he came driving being a van. He doesn't mind, until a comment about someone named Nhlaka is mentioned.

"Nhlaka was better than this. Is he a gardener or something?" asks the woman.

"I don't care Ncami, all I'm asking from you is that you don't say anything that will make him uncomfortable," Vuyiswa is begging.

He thinks about leaving, but the little girl walks back

in.

“Can I watch The Good Place?”

He looks at her and finds her staring right at him.

“Yes,” he says because she’s waiting for an answer and he can’t deny her TV in her own home.

“Thank you,” she says sitting on the couch and grabbing the remote. It’s the same thing they found her watching.

When Vuyiswa comes back she finds her sister’s little brat sitting on the couch, watching her silly sitcom on maximum volume. She grabs the remote from her hand and switches it off. She’s pissed.

“Didn’t I say go to your room?” she asks with her hands on the hips.

“I asked and he said I can watch,” Aphiwe says, pointing at Mazwakhe.

“Do not make me angry, go to your room, you have school work to do,” she says with her finger pointing at her.

“This is why I hate being here. Aunt Pinky doesn’t

dictate what I do in my father's house," she says and storms out of the room.

It looks that that's the worst thing she could've said, especially mentioning the Pinky person.

"What did she say?" the voice yells from the other room. In a split second she's in the sitting room. There's a big war coming.

"Aunty Pinky nywe nywe. What is she still doing in that house?" It's Vuyiswa, she's fuming.

They follow each other to the room Aphiwe disappeared to. The noise is loud enough to get neighbours on their fences, but they're now used to it. If it's not Ncamsile fighting with Vuyiswa, it's both of them fighting against someone else. They have learnt not to mind the Ngema's business.

After a lot of shouting and scolding the child Vuyiswa finally walks out of the room.

"I'm going to dish and we'll eat in my bedroom," she says and leaves him alone, again.



Ncami walks out and stands at the passage, staring at Mazwakhe. She doesn't like him, not even one bit. Her sister deserves better, someone driving a nice car, who can take care of her and take her to places. Not this guy wearing a trackpant and cheap T-shirt.

“What do you do for a living?” she asks him.

“I'm a plumber, but I'm not employed at the moment.”

“How are you going to take care of my sister if you're not employed?” she asks.

“I'm a man, I make plans,” he says.

“Make plans to look more decent and change that thing you call a car. Vuyiswa is a beautiful girl, she's way too beautiful to just settle for this,” she says, waving her hand around. She could've pointed directly at him if he didn't look like a serial killer.

Vuyiswa walks in with a plate in her hand. She looks at her sister and at Mazwakhe for the heads-up, but neither of them says anything.

“Is everything alright?” she asks.

“If I’m not back in the morning prepare her school lunch for me and give her R18 for the taxi, I will pay it back,” Ncami says and leaves.

Vuyiswa stares at Mazwakhe, hoping he’ll say something but he doesn’t say anything.

She brought two spoons, hoping they’ll eat together. She is not a great cook but when Mazwakhe called and said he was coming to her, she consulted Google for a few recipes. Her chicken looks delicious but he has no appetite. He just sits on bed and watch her eat.

“What did she say?” she breaks the silence.

“Who?” he asks.

“My sister.”

“Nothing. Why are you asking?”

“You don’t look okay.”

“I’m just tired,” he says.

She plans to confront Ncami when she returns the plate to the kitchen, but she has already left and her phone is ringing unanswered.

She checks on her niece and goes back to her bedroom. Mazwakhe is under covers with his clothes on.

She frowns. What is wrong with him? They talked and agreed. This is the night of promises.

She gets on bed half naked.

“Vuyiswa dress up,” he says.

“For what? I’m sleeping with my boyfriend.”

“You’re going to tempt me and I can’t do anything to you while we’re in your parents’ house.”

“So what? I have brought....” she clears her throat and stops.

“I’m not Nhlaka,” he says.

He heard the conversation, her heart sinks. Maybe the hotel was a good idea.

“Vuyiswa come here,” he says and stretches his

arm. The last thing they both don't want is to fight because of what other people say and think.

"I love you," he says.

There's a 'but', so she waits for him to continue.

"But I cannot stand the insults, either from my family to you or your family to me. I will flip and it won't end well," he says.

She remains still and quiet.

"I want us to take things easy. I don't want you to come at the Mthembus yet. And I don't want to be here," he continues.

"So, we meet at the hotels? Behind trees? And fuck in the car?" she asks, clearly frustrated. Ncami always tells her about difficulties of dating a guy who doesn't have his personal space. She'd use this as the testimony.

"I'm going to make a plan. If it means I have to rent a shack somewhere, I will do it," he says.

"If that's going to make you happy," she says and shrugs her shoulders.

She switches off the lights and lies on her pillow, staring up in the dark.

“Can I get a kiss?” Mazwakhe asks.

“Sleep, you said you’re tired.”

They weren’t on speaking terms when they slept, but when Vuyiswa opens her eyes in the morning she’s wrapped on a hard chest by strong arms.

“What did you see in me?” Is the question waking her up.

She yawns and kisses his cheek.

“Normal people say ‘good morning my love,’ she says.

He just stares at her, she realizes that she’s not going to get a ‘good morning’ and answers his question.

“I saw my end and beginning,” she says.

He exhales and runs his finger over her eyebrows. It’s scary that a girl like this just saw him and fell in

love with him. It's even more scary that she's unapologetic about her love and she'd do anything for him.

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Zanamuhla

We are back in the village. I'll guess that it wasn't too difficult getting Mnotho back. Details of the story are not shared. Mnotho is acting as if nothing happened, so I guess we are just moving on.

Looking after the kids wasn't bad as I thought. Qophelo did all the reprimanding, all I had to do was make food available.

Busikhaya is not at work. Perks of being the head of the family. He's not sick, everyone went to work, including Mnotho, and he's here watching cartoons.

"You watch Lion Guard?" I ask.

“What is that?” He frowns.

“The thing you’re watching,” I say.

“No, I’m just lazy to find the remote and change the channel.”

Lazy to find the remote? I thought I’ve heard it all.

“Have you talked to Mazwakhe?” he asks.

“No,” I say.

“He asked me for the job, I gave him one and he turned it down,” he says.

“Why? He changed his mind?” I ask.

“He doesn’t want an office job. He wants to be in the sun, running after the trucks and getting dirty.” His fancy self is clearly confused by this. I cannot imagine Mazwakhe sitting in the office, drinking coffee and answering business calls.

“Then give him the job he wants,” I say.

“He’s a Mthembu,” he says.

I wasn’t aware that they share the same surname with God. He’s a Mthembu, so what? The world

won't come to an end because one of them is doing the hard work.

I knock at his door for a good while before he opens. He really needs to get busy with something, it's almost 9am and he hasn't even woken up to make his bed.

"How are you?" I ask and make myself comfortable on bed.

"Good," he says and takes his phone out of the charger.

He's going to focus on his phone and ignore me?

"Mazwakhe!"

"What do you want?"

Alright, I did something wrong.

"What did I do?" I ask.

"You are pregnant?"

Oh, that....!



“I’m sorry,” I say.

“Why are you sorry? Was it a mistake?”

“Obviously,” I say and shrug my shoulders.

He puts the phone away and looks at me. I’m a disappointment, it’s written on his face.

“It wasn’t enough, was it?”

I’m not sure what he’s talking about.

“Mom would’ve done a better job. Obviously, my actions didn’t speak enough, you needed real words, someone to sit you down and have the sex talk with you. I was not brave enough to do it.”

“Mazwakhe you raised me well. At school we learnt about things,” I say, hoping it will make him feel better. He did his best. He really did.

“You did, but it wasn’t enough. If it was, you wouldn’t have fallen pregnant before achieving your dreams,” he says.

“I was careless,” I say.

“You wouldn’t have afforded to be careless if you

had your priorities straight,' he says.

I'm officially backing down from this. He's not going to change his mind, if anything he'll change it's my face.

"How is Vuyiswa?" I change the subject.

"She's fine," he says.

Where's the usual smile? His lips visit his ears everytime someone mentions her name.

"Did you guys fight?" I ask.

"No, it's just that I feel like I can never be what she deserves. I cannot give her the world she fits in," he says.

This is the first time he's discussing his private life with me. He's annoyingly private.

"Which world is that? Vuyiswa will go with you wherever you go. The Vuyiswa-world came to an end the day she met you, you're her new beginning."

"Did she tell you this?"

Really? I roll my eyes.

“Some of us were born clever, we see and understand things,” I say.

“You wouldn’t be pregnant if you were clever. He’s in the office, driving expensive cars and living the life of his dreams. You, clever, you’re sitting here with a baby in your stomach, waiting for him to come home and fuck you again.”

Wow!

“Why are you crying? Tears of joy, maybe.”

I don’t respond, I find the way that got me inside and head to Ngcwethi’s house.

“What’s wrong?” Busikhaya asks from the veranda of the main house.

It’s his brothers. Ngcwethi and Mazwakhe.

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Mndeni

He skipped three hours at work and drove to Lakeview Hotel. 5pm would've been too late, he needed Nandi and she needed him. It began with a video-call, she was only in her underwear, the conversation started with the mosquito bites and ended with her stripping naked.

She's lying on bed with her leg thrown over him. He's naked, sweaty and panting. His arm is around her shoulder, he keeps kissing the top of her head and reminding her how much he loves her.

“How long are we going to use the condom?” Her question confuses him. People stop using condoms? The last time he checked she wasn't very sure about their future and her insecurities stemmed from her last relationship.

“What do you mean Nandi?” he asks.

“I want to have a baby with you,” she says.

“A baby???” He would have fainted if he was not on bed. He's too young to become a father and a baby is not something he plans on making anytime soon.

A whole baby!

“Yes, I want to start my own family with you.” She’s serious. She reaches to her bag and takes out the packet of pills.

“I’m getting rid of this,” she says.

“Those are contraceptives?”

“Yes, and we are getting rid of condoms.”

“No, I’m not having a baby and I’m definitely not going raw with you,” he says.

“I don’t understand,” she says. Her lips are quivering, liquid is filling up her eyes.

“I’m not ready to become a father,” he says.

“Why? You’re not going to be pregnant, I will be. I will change the diapers, stay up at night and breastfeed. All you have to do is provide for us and protect us.”

“Still, no,” he says.

“Okay,” she says and grabs her clothes from the floor.

He realizes what's about to happen and jumps off bed to her.

“Nandi I love you,” he says.

“But not enough to have children with me?”

He grabs the clothes from her hands and throws them on the floor.

“I love you enough, come here.” He pulls her back to bed, pushes her to lie down and stands over her. He loves her, in his mind he's sure of that. He can't point at anything and say 'I love her because of this' but that doesn't mean anything. He's keeping her.

“When am I seeing you again? We can conclude this talk then,” he asks.

“I'm free on Sunday,” she says, a bit calm.

“We will talk, okay?” He leans down to her lips and brushes them. “Can I have the last one? J ama is still up.”

“You're trouble,” she says with a smile escaping her lips.

“It's your fault, it's you who's hot.” His hand travels

down to her thighs, it divides them and brushes between her folds.

“Get me water, I’m thirsty,” she says between the kisses.

“Don’t you want to drink.....”

“Mndeni, I’m serious,” she says and laughs.

He chuckles and slides off her. When he disappears she sneaks inside her bag and takes a safety pin. She pokes the condom foil and puts it back where it was.

He comes back with a bottle of water and opens it for her. She takes a small sip and smiles.

“Where were we?” she asks and gets his shaft in her hand.

“We were.....here,” he says and sneaks his finger inside her. She releases a moan and opens her legs wider.

He grabs the condom lying next to her pillow and tears the foil with his teeth.

His phone rings.

Ngcwethi.

Damnit!

[11/19, 09:56] : Chapter Thirty Eight

Mazwakhe

MaMbonambi left early in the morning to do her things. She's no longer the only female figure in the family, Zanamuhla is there and she trusts her with her sons.

The situation between Mazwakhe and Zanamuhla has brought awkwardness to the table. Breakfast is tense.

"I'm going to eat in the bedroom," Zanamuhla says, picking her plate and leaving the table.

They look at Mazwakhe, hoping that he'll say something, his silent treatment is obviously affecting his sister. But he doesn't say anything.

"Did you think about what you want to do?"



Busikhaya asks, redirecting the atmosphere in the room.

“Mndeni said there’s an extra tractor,” Mazwakhe says.

“Driver?” Mnotho asks. He’s back at being himself. They haven’t talked about Khwezi, he hasn’t asked and Mazwakhe hasn’t plucked enough courage to confess.

“Yes, why not?” Mazwakhe says, shrugging his shoulders.

“It’s bad for our image,” Mnotho says.

“I don’t care about images, all I want is money.”

“I will draw up a contract. Are you coming in today?” Busikhaya asks.

“Yes,” he says and nods his head.

One by one, they leave the table. Busikhaya is rushing his kids to school, Mndeni has to pass by Nandi before proceeding to work. Yesterday they were disturbed by Ngcwethi’s call who was threatening to fire Mndeni if he didn’t show up to

their meeting. He had to leave right away, leaving her aroused and pissed.

“And you?” Mnotho asks, looking at Ngcwethi who’s still in his sleeping shorts.

“I’ll be a little bit late,” he says.

“Morning plans with the wife?”

He just shrugs his shoulders. Mnotho leaves without asking any further questions. Mazwakhe is across the table, stirring his tea with his eyes fixed on Ngcwethi.

“Can we talk about this?” Ngcwethi asks.

“About?” He snaps his brows.

“Zanamuhla’s pregnancy. I can see that it’s getting between us. First of all, I love her and I think you know that by now. I’m getting married to this girl, obviously we are intimate and there are chances of a third person popping up.”

He doesn’t say anything. He just dips a piece of bread inside the cup of tea and bites.

“I’m asking you to untie your heart. I don’t want her

to be sad, it's going to affect both her and the baby," Ngcwethi says.

"What exactly do you want me to do? Congratulate her? Brush her tummy and massage her feet?" he asks.

"Untie your heart. I'm not asking this as her 'rich husband who's driving expensive cars and living his dream.' I'm asking as a father to an uncle," Ngcwethi says.

"Mxm!" He clicks his tongue, pushes off the chair and leaves.

Zanamuhla

When I lift up my head he's standing by the door and staring at me. Is he planning to kill me?

"You didn't finish your food?" he asks and walks in.

He's still not ready for work. I ironed his clothes long time ago. His lunch is packed and ready.

“I have the whole day to eat, but you don’t have much time to get dressed and go to work,” I say.

He looks at his clothes, lets out a sigh and lies on bed.

“I talked to Mazwakhe,” he says, staring up at the ceiling.

“You shouldn’t have, you know how he gets.”

I’m trying not to dwell on this, but my heart refuses to let things slide. I want him to talk to me. I don’t want him to look elsewhere everytime our eyes meet.

“Yeah I know,” he says.

“What did he say?” I ask.

“He clicked his tongue and left.”

I nod my head and head to the bathroom. Tears are always on standby, I sink on the floor and let them flow. I feel him walking in and standing beside me, before I can pull myself together he’s pulled me up and scooped me in his arms.

He puts me on bed and lies next to me.

“I don’t want to leave you like this, it will affect me at work,” he says.

“I promise I’ll be fine,” I say.

“But you’ve been crying a lot since yesterday.”

I cup his face in my hands and kiss his lips. He worries too much. He can’t miss work because of my weak emotions. At least Mazwakhe will be at work as well, I won’t be bumping into his icy stares on the yard.

“You feel so warm,” he says. His hand is sliding between my thighs. He has no intentions of going to work.

“Go to work,” I say.

“Give me the energy to go.” He grabs my neck and attack me with a wild kiss. My leg wraps around him, his finger is sliding under my panty.

There’s a knock.....

“Hlahla,” the voice is right outside the door.

I push him off and adjust my dress. He quickly changes to his work clothes and heads out.

“You’re still here?” his voice asks Ngcwethi outside.

“Yeah, should I wait for you?” Ngcwethi.

“No, I will find my way,” he says.

I pull the bed linen, adjust the pillows and check if Ngcwethi didn’t leave his underwear lying on the floor. Clear!

I open the door and find him waiting in a blue overall and his lunchtin wrapped with a plastic. There’s absolutely no reason for him to continue living like this.

“Come in,” I say.

He looks at me like I’ve just insulted his whole existence.

“Inside your bedroom?” he asks with his nose wrinkled.

His issues are too deep for human understanding. It’s not like he’ll find Ngcwethi’s penis lying on the bed.

I step out and follow him to the sitting room.

“I’m going to work at the farm as a tractor’s driver. It’s not a permanent thing, as soon as things come together I’ll look into starting a plumbing company,” he says.

I guess we are good now.

“Congratulations,” I say.

His eyes land on my stomach, even though nothing is showing yet I do regret not wearing a gown. His eyes are like sharp thorns.

“Don’t you get sick?” he asks.

“Sick?” I’m lost.

He sighs and stands up.

“Give me your blessings,” he says.

“All the best, drive carefully,” I say and open my arms. He exhales and makes a face before welcoming my hug.

“Bring me something nice when you come back,” I say.

“Why didn’t you ask uBaba kaSgubhu?”

WTF? He can't call my baby that.

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Mazwakhe

He arrived looking like the rest of them. Wearing a blue overall, hard-boots and carrying a lunchtin in his hand. He could've just put on a suit and went to sit at the offices like his brothers. It's within his privilege, Madoda worked hard for them to live a flashier life than him. There's no doubt that he would've refused to let his eldest son become a driver in his own farm. He worked hard for them to be different from other boys.

Busikhaya knows that, which is why he gave him the job he wanted but made his salary equal to all of them.

He's Mazwakhe, he thinks and does things his own way. He questioned the contract. He said he didn't want favours, but Busikhaya is no different from



him, he stood his ground and forced him to sign.

Most of these people know him as a Ngwane. They had hated him, for killing their boss and causing havoc in the community. But he's never been a people's person, so none of these factors matter to him.

He put his lunch where all of them put theirs and went to his tractor.

“Ndlondlo!” he shouted.

A man ran to him, showed him his work section and introduced him to his co-workers.

They've been working since morning. He doesn't know most of their names, so he calls them Nduna. Because he calls everyone Nduna, they then decided to give him the name. He's also like their chief, everyone moves around whenever he appears. Now he's no longer Mazwakhe or Ngwane or Mthembu. He is Nduna.

He sits under the tree shade with his lunchtin on his lap and calls Vuyiswa.

“Sthandwa sami,” he says when she picks up.

“I thought you’ve dumped me, married some village girl and left the country,” she says.

“All in a space of 5 hours?” His lips stretch into a smile. He’s a different person with her, less harsh and a bit talkative.

“You never know, some women are fast out there. You’d think you still have a man kanti he’s long gone,” she says.

“How can I leave someone who has done the things you’ve done to me?” he asks.

“Oh, what did I do to you?”

He scans his surroundings before responding.

“You swallowed my dick,” he says.

She breaks into laughter.

“That wasn’t even a beginning. I haven’t started with you Mazwi, the day I ride that stubborn dragon you

won't remember even your date of birth.”

“I don't like threats Ms Vuyiswa,” he says.

“Who are you with there?” she asks.

“I'm alone,” he says.

“Sneak your hand inside your boxers and touch him for me.”

“Hhayi-bo Vuyiswa!” he exclaims and chuckles.

“Run your finger over the raphe,” she says.

“Vuyiswa I'm sitting under the tree, what will people think?” He's never been scandalous, he wouldn't touch his front in a public space like this.

“Find a bathroom,” she instructs.

He looks around, people are gathered in groups and having their lunch.

What did he get himself into?

“I'm in the bathroom now,” he whispers on the phone.

“You were made to be inside me, you know. But

you're so far away, I cannot let you rip me apart at the moment." There's a moan. "My body is calling you. Hold him for me and play with him."

"Vuyiswa," he says and a deep breath follows. It takes time for him to get the overall off his upper body. Her moans are filling up his speaker.

"Mazwi, are you there baby?"

"I'm here sthandwa sami."

"I'm wet," she says and moans.

Heavy breath!

"I'm hard," he says.

"Wrap your hand around him and give him slow strokes. Be here with me, I'm lying on bed with my legs open. I want you to have your way with me...deeper...harder...right there...yes baby."

Heavy breaths!

"Vuyis....." His voice breaks into half. There's that sharp teeth-breath intake sound he makes and heavy breaths.

“Are you still on the line?” she asks.

“(sniffs) Yes, I’m here.” He’s standing with his other hand balanced on the wall, his other hand is where she instructed him to wrap it. He’s panting with his mouth widely opened. Her moans finished him. He just couldn’t hold back.

“What were you saying about threats?” she asks. Her phone is pressed against her ear. She’s reading a book she found lying in Ncami’s bedroom, The Harvard Wife, that’s the title. She hasn’t moved one inch since she started on chapter one.

Men take this sex call thing way too serious.

“Oh Lord, Mpumi!” she says and quickly turns to the next page.

“What?” He’s still cleaning himself up inside the bathroom. He has less than 5 minutes to eat his lunch, the break is almost over.

“You won’t believe this book I’m reading. Marriage..or men..I don’t know. This thing of staying in a marriage....”

“Vuyiswa you were reading a book all this time?!”

“I love you Jama kaMnisi,” she says.

He curses and laughs.

She’ll pay for this.

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Mndeni

He left his credit card with Nandi. He didn’t have time to beg, he apologized yesterday and it didn’t work. Giving her money was his last option, and it worked like a charm. She’s been texting and calling the whole day.

After getting everything she wanted, she went to the market and bought amadumbe. Zulu men love them, her ex did. She cooked them, dolled herself up and took a taxi to the Mthembu offices.

It’s exactly 5pm when she arrives. Farm workers are leaving by groups. Company cars are being driven

back and parked in their spaces. Trucks, tractors and excavators have their own fenced space just outside the offices.

Someone she least expected to see jumps off the tractor and bends down to dust his shoes. Her heartbeat is racing, they can't meet, at least not here. Mndeni will...no, she needs to do something. She knows the kind of a person he is, he might get violent with Mndeni.

“Nandi?” Mndeni says with his forehead furrowed. She didn't tell him that she'll come over. And what's that container in her hands?

“I brought you amadumbe,” she says.

His smile is priceless. He takes the container from her hands and leads her inside.

“Who is this?” Ngcwethi asks, stopping dead on his tracks with a huge frown on his face.

“Meet Nandi. Babe, my brother, Ngcwethi.”

She says hello and smiles. Ngcwethi returns the

greeting but he doesn't iron the frown on his face.

"Who is this?" Now it's Mnotho.

They will come one by one, ask who she is and frown.

"Everyone, this is Nandi, the girl I always talk about. Thank you, you may return to your seats," Mndeni announces with his hand waving around, then grabs her hand and pulls her to his office.

They want to know more, so they stand around the reception desk and wait for them to come out. Busikhaya has joined, he wants to know what is inside the container.

He sits behind his desk and asks her to be comfortable on the guest's chair. But she remains on her feet, something is troubling her.

"I saw someone from my past," she tells him.

He puts the container aside and looks at her.

"Explain Nandi," he says.



“He’s one of the employees. I’m so uncomfortable right now. How did you hire him? He’s nothing but bad news.”

He frowns.

They only hire people from the village. He knows all of them, maybe not by names, but their backgrounds are in the computers.

“Who is that?” he asks.

She goes to the window. He follows her and stands behind her. Her eyes are on Mazwakhe who is making his way through the gate.

“That one. You have to fire him, trust me he’s not what you think,” she says.

“Mazwakhe?” he asks.

“Yes,” she says.

He laughs out loud and returns back to his seat.

“I’m serious Mndeni, you need to fire him. I’m sure there’s someone better who can fill his position,” she says.

“Fire him and then go where?” His voice is buried with laughter.

“What do you mean ‘go where?’” she asks.

“That’s my brother. Not just a brother, but my eldest brother.”

“Whaaat?”

“Yes, I can’t fire him, he’s basically the co-owner of this farm.”

She stumbles and finds her way to the chair. She sits like her world just came to an end.

“Are you okay?” he asks.

“Yeah, I’m just feeling hot.”

He gets off the chair and takes the container sitting on the desk.

“Let’s go outside,” he says.

“Noooo!”

“Nandi they won’t do anything to you and Mazwakhe is not crazy,” he says and pulls her up from the chair.

“Mndeni I’m not feeling good, I need a bath....”  
They’re out, there are four men staring at them.

“Mazwakhe you’re scaring my lady,” Mndeni says.  
Mazwakhe is wiping his wet face with a towel. He  
looks at the woman and chuckles.

“Long time, no see,” he says.

They look at him and back at Nandi who look like  
she can faint anytime.

“You know each other?” Mnotho asks.

“Yes, she dumped me in a two-minute call and  
blocked me,” he says, wiping his neck with the towel  
as if everything is normal.

“The Nandi?” Ngcwethi asks.

“Yes,” he says, turns around and heads to the  
bathroom.

They stare at her. Mndeni’s hands are wrapped  
around his neck, dangerous thoughts are racing  
through his mind.

“So, what’s in the container?” Busikhaya asks.

Nobody answers.

He goes to Mndeni and snatches the container from his hand and opens it.

“Madoda, amadumbe,” he says with one already in his hand. He peels it and bites. Mnotho joins him.

Ngcwethi is looking at Mndeni, waiting for his consent but he’s not even looking at his direction.

“Are they nice?” he asks, making his way to them.

“Are they ever not nice?” Busikhaya asks, full-mouthed.

Mazwakhe comes back, scrolling his phone. When he lifts his head up the three is gathered around the container and stuffing themselves with amadumbe.

The couple is still standing where they were.

Mndeni looks at him, he’s in pain.

“Bafo, I’m not standing on your way, if you love her,” he says and shrugs his shoulders.

“Leave,” Mndeni says, glaring at Nandi.

“I can explain,” she says.

“Leave and block my number. We are done.”

She stands with tears in her eyes. He’s not changing his mind, he stands by his word and points her at the gate.

He returns back to his office and slams the door behind.

“Sisi, your container?” Mnotho yells as Nandi walks away.

She leaves it behind and disappears.

[11/19, 09:56] : Chapter Thirty-Nine

Vuyiswa

It’s not healthy to be missing someone like this. Someone who hasn’t done much to get me addicted to him. I mean we’ve hardly spent any quality time together. We almost got there, but the devil outdid himself, MaMbonambi happened. Right now I don’t know when I’ll see him again. He doesn’t want to

come here, thanks to Ncami. And he doesn't want me to go to his home.

There's a knock at the door. I fold the last page and put the book away. My newly found hobby is reading. I don't have much to do around the house and I'm trying to stay away from the streets.

"You're hiding yourself here," she says, letting herself inside my room.

I didn't even know she was back.

"Where are you lost at?" she asks.

"I was just reading a book," I say.

"You're stealing all my books." She's been a reader since her high school years. Funnily, she repeated most classes. It confused the hell out of me, how could someone who always had a book on her lap fail? We all assumed she was a genius, whereas she was just escaping reality with books.

"You have read most of these books, mos," I say.

"I always re-read my favourites. Anyway, why are you reading? 'What's wrong with your life?'" She's

using my words against me. I always annoyed her with this question whenever she was reading.

“I miss him,” I say.

She rolls her eyes and sighs dramatically.

“What do you see in him? Is it something internal? Inside beauty, maybe? Do I need a microscope? Because I don’t see it.”

I have looked at Aphiwe’s father from every possible angle and I don’t know what attracted her to him. They say money changes people. It cleans them, enhances their looks and makes them glow. But not Msweli’s money, his sticks to its job, buying him life. He’s still the same Msweli I saw sneaking out of my sister’s room 13 years ago with two, large front teeth and crossed-eyes. He hasn’t changed his eating style either, he still eats like there’s an army chasing him. Stuffs large chunks of food his mouth can’t handle and sticks his tongue out to lick off what stuck on his lips.

“Really what is it?” She’s still on my case.

“Everything Ncami. I love him, he’s protective of

people he loves, he doesn't fear anything and he gets what he wants."

"Obviously, he's a rural guy, they're narcissistic. What's that thing around his arm? Is he a serial killer?"

"I don't know and I don't care," I say.

She stands up with her arms folded. She is annoyed.

"Maureen is throwing a party tonight. Are you coming or you're now a village wife?" She turns her fat behind and walks towards the door.

"Who's going to look after Aphiwe?" I ask before she exits.

"Her father," she says and disappears.

She's now used to it, living in two different places and the constant arguments. She grew in it. They've been on and off since she was 3 years old. That's when Ms weli started cheating on my sister. From then till now it's been constant fights, with the child at the centre, manhandling and destructive violent tantrums. But they still get back together for those



couple of months and break things up again. It's a rollercoaster.

I haven't gone out in a while. Mazwakhe doesn't have anything to do with that decision, I just chose to have my space and live life according to the book for a while. It's been amazing, I discovered my new interests and became in touch with my spirit. But yeses, I have missed dolling myself up, show-offing my body, that I work hard to keep in shape, wear my curls and bounce them on the dance floor. I have missed this.

"You're still alive?" Maureen asks and engulfs me in a tight hug. She's one of my sister's ride-or-die friends. They have never treated me like a little sister, I was always tagged along, shown places and taught how to be a lady with class. I'm a pet friend of theirs.

"I was busy with exams," I say over her shoulder.

"And the village man," Ncami yells behind me. She's 28 years old for goodness' sake. Can't she act her

age?

“Village boy?” Busi asks, coming behind us with her eyes fixed on me.

“Is it serious? Does he have the ‘boyfriend’ title?”  
Maureen asks.

“Talk,” Busi says impatiently.

“You’ll meet him when the time is right? Where’s my phone? I need to make a call.”

Bui blocks my way.

“You can’t run sweetie. Does Nhlaka know?”

She knows where to push, because really, what has that pig got to do with my life?

“You know he will cause problems when he finds out. Who is this guy? Does he love you?” Concern dims her eyes.

“I think he does,” I say.

“You think?” Three voices ask all at once.

“Yeah, he has hinted a future, me being his wife and all.”

Busi's face melts, but she's not done. The question I've been dreading comes and Ncami's stare won't allow me to lie.

"So, what does he do for a living?" Busi asks.

"He's a plumber," I say and hold my breath for the criticism.

"Not bad, where's his company located?"

Ncami's eyebrow is lifted. She knows this will end up with the army against Mazwakhe. She should know this by now, I'm not breaking up with him, no matter what anyone says. I asked that man out, confessed my feelings and endured harsh rejection. It has taken a lot for me to lay down for a man like that.

Everytime Zanamuhla talked about her protective brother I'd pray to meet him one day. When she talked about him, he was everything a sister could ever ask for, and when I met him, he was everything I needed in a man.

Strange, but I liked how less he smiled, how fearlessly he stared at people and how careless he

was with his words.

He just talks, threatens and curses, and then carry on as if everything is normal.

“He’s currently working as a driver,” I tell them.

“Taxi driver?” Maureen asks. She has a thing against taxi drivers. She thinks there’s HIV lying on the steering wheels of taxis and every driver contacts it. She always highlights how broke they are and their ability to change girls more than they change their underwear.

“He’s driving a tractor, he just started,” I say.

“You’re joking!”

“Vuyi!”

I wave my glass and turn around.

“The night is still young, cheers!”

People are arriving. Maureen is a people’s person and her boyfriend, Sazi, knows people who know people. It’s getting noisy and uncomfortable or

someone who's waiting for a call.

I slowly remove myself from the crowd and isolate myself in the balcony with a glass of champagne and cellphone in my hand.

This man! He said he will call me. It's been hours now.

"Vuyiswa," the voice comes behind me. I feel the bile rising up to my throat. Why is he here?

Okay, Maureen is his cousin. But why did he follow me? I'm tired of insulting him. I've even ran out of words, I've gone all kind of crazy on this person and he's still here, annoying AF.

"What do you want?" I ask.

"Not in a good mood, I see. You look good by the way. I love the dress and the hair," he says.

He's here to provoke me. I shut my lips with sips of champagne and keep my eyes on the phone.

"You fucked up my life, broke my heart into a million pieces and killed my soul. You have hurt me more than anyone, fucking anything with two legs and

wallet in the pocket. But you know what hurts me more than anything?”

Trust me when I say I've heard this a million times. I know where he pauses, where he throws his hands in the hair and what follows after this question. Doesn't he get tired of annoying me? Two years is really a long time.

“Is that you think I'm crazy. That hurts me. You make me feel crazy, you make it seem like everything was my fault. I deserved a chance, you know I would've loved...”

“Nhlakanipho!” I snap and raise my hand. I would like to curse, to insult him using all eleven official languages, but that's not who I am anymore. I'm not in that place. I have a boyfriend and I'm happy.

“Please leave me alone,” I say, calmly.

He's surprised. The Vuyiswa he knows would've thrown this glass on him and called out his grandmother's dead pussy. He would've said more words, just to drive her crazier, he would've pushed her off limits and then watched as she finally broke

down in his arms.

“You’re the mother of me...” Fuck!

I do it, against my strong will of staying calm, the champagne flows from his face down to his neck. He always wins, doesn’t he?

“Call me that again and I will stab you to death.”

“You’re crazy,” he says.

I’m glad he knows and acknowledges that.

“But I love you like this.” He’s on my face, trying to touch my me. I try to stop him but he blocks both my arms and lowers his face to me.

“Son of a bitch!” I bite his lip.

He curses and wipes the blood off his lip.

I need to leave before it gets nastier. I turn to the door, but guess who is standing behind us?

He’s staring at Nhlaka.

The look sends shivers down my spine.

“Mndeni,” I mutter.

His eyes slowly turn to me and I regret opening my mouth when they meet mine.

“Vuyiswa!” he says.

I stand frozen. He’s the last person I expected to see here.

“Why is he calling you crazy?” he asks.

I want to answer that before the fool opens his stinky mouth, but he has 21 questions.

“Does Mazwakhe know that you’re here?”

I think he should calm down now. Since when I have a father named Mazwakhe? Why would I need permission from him? I’ve never asked permission from anyone.

“Who is Mazwakhe?” The fool!

Who permitted him to open his mouth?

“Who is this?” Mndeni asks.

“He’s nothing. I was coming back inside the house,” I say and turn my head to meet the fool’s icy stare.

“I’m nothing to you Vuyiswa? We’ll talk about this



when we get home, for now I want to know who is this person and what are you two talking about?”

When we get home? Is he trying to ruin my life? I don't have a home with him.

The car keys are thrown to me. I catch them and look at him for explanation.

“White Porsche, outside,” he says

“Huh?” I'm lost.

“I will say goodbye to Sazi and come. We are leaving.”

What the heck? He's not even asking, just ordering me.

“Mndeni I didn't come here with.....” Who am I talking to? He has disappeared inside the house.

Hands grab my waist. I turn around with my fist clenched, but stop myself before landing it on his face.

“You're not worth it,” I say before turning away.

I'm inside the car with my ears blocked by loud music. I don't know where I'm being taken to, there's no chance to ask because he wouldn't hear me over this music.

I've been to these streets before.

"What am I doing in Mission Mndeni?" I yell.

He lowers the volume and glances at me once before turning his head to the driveway ahead.

"Were you hoping to go 'home' with that fool?" he asks.

"No, but what am I doing here?"

"This is Ngcwethi's house, he hides himself here when we get too much for his soul."

That doesn't answer my question, does it? My eyes remain on his face.

"Zolwandle also comes here, once in a while," he says as he parks the car in front of the house I can't see clearly.

I follow behind him. He unlocks the door and reaches up to the wall to turn the light on.

“Why am I here?” I ask again.

“Waiting for Mazwakhe.” He snatches a bottle of water out of the fridge and opens it to his throat.

“Did you say something to him? Mndeni I swear, nothing is happening between Nhlaka and I.”

He shrugs his shoulders and presses the remote he just picked.

“Mndeni!” I raise my voice.

“I’m just looking out for the big brother. It’s cold anyway and tomorrow is the weekend.”

So, he brought me here to warm his brother and he has no problem saying it to my face?

His phone rings. Pain flushes across his face as he silences it and throws it to the table.

Trouble in paradise?

“I need a drink,” I say.

“I told you this is Ngcwethi’s house,” he says.

A low grunt escapes my throat.

“What am I supposed to do here? Sit and watch this thing you’re watching?”

“Yes, the highlights of UEFA champion’s league semi-finals.”

“Oh, wow! Sounds interesting, I can’t wait.” I throw myself on the couch and send a quick text to Ncami.

He chuckles at my fake excitement and throws the remote to me. Now we can talk, I turn to e-movies.

“Where is your girlfriend?” I ask. As he said, it’s the weekend tomorrow and the night is really cold.

“I’m still searching,” he says and fixes his eyes on the screen as a hint for me not to take it further.

“What happened to the last one?” I’m not the one to take hints. He was bragging about her not so long ago.

“We ended things,” he says.

“Why? You were happy, weren’t you?”

“I was, but it’s over now.”

He’s hurting. I don’t want to push further I can see

that the pain is still fresh.

“When was the last time you saw J ulani?” I ask.

“Don’t start! Let him stay in whatever hole he is in.”

His mood lightens when he narrates all the J ula episodes he’s had I his life. The table one one takes the cup, I’m no match when it comes to J ula’s confidence.

Mndeni asked me to go to bed when I started dozing off on the couch. I don’t know when Mazwakhe came, when my heavy bladder wakes me up in the morning, he has his erection pressed on my butt and his arms tightly wrapped around me.

He’s asleep. My stomach turns into a knot when I remember how I got here. I have to explain who that fool is. I hate talking about him but the universe has a way of bringing his name everywhere I go. He could’ve disappeared like most ex’s, but no, he’s been on my throat for the past two years. To think I once saw a future with that pig!

I hate waking the handsome king, but I need the bathroom.

“Mazwakhe,” I say and shake his arm.

His eyes open, they’re clear as the sky, like he was never asleep.

“I need the bathroom,” I say.

He’s confused.

I shake his arms off me. He exhales and frees me.

The bathroom window faces the front of the yard. Two cars are parked outside, meaning he’s not the only one in this house.

When I come back he’s sitting up with the duvet held up on his neck. He doesn’t waste time, the talk is happening right here, right now.

He stretches out his arm, I climb on bed and snuggle myself on his chest. He covers me with the duvet and kisses my forehead. I guess we are not in a bad place as I thought.

“I hear you were drunk yesterday,” he says.

I still need to teach him saying ‘good morning.’ He jumps straight into the conversation.

“Really?” I want him to say it. The elephant in the room.

“And there was a man bothering you. Why do you go to those places? Why don’t you buy alcohol and drink at home?” he asks.

The problem with people who don’t drink is that they think it’s all about alcohol.

“Where is the fun in that?” I ask.

“So, the fun is another man kissing you?”

Deep breath!

“No, it would be boring without the crowd.”

“Who is he?” he finally asks.

“An ex from a couple of years ago. Nothing is going on, I’m being honest,” I say.

“I trust you sthandwa sami. So, why did you lie the other day?”

Me? Lying?

“When?” I ask.

“You said you were on bed, wet for me, whereas you were just reading a book,” he says.

I fail to hold myself and burst into laughter.

“I helped you, why is it an issue?” I ask.

“You made me nut in my hand Vuyiswa. I’m not 15 years old, you’re denting my manhood.”

“Where do you nut?” I ask.

He smiles and whispers in my ear. I don’t know whether to be insulted or turned on. There’s something weird about Zulu words and he just called the name as it is.

“Be a bit romantic, you’re killing my vibe,” I tell him.

“That’s its name, what do you want me to say?” His hand is trying to get an access under my panty.

“Ikhekhe? Inkomo? You can even create your own name if you want,” I say.

His hand is finally there. He’s rubbing my folds



tenderly.

“Angifuni amakhekhe nezinkomo. Mina ngifuna i...(strong word)”

I’m a bit annoyed but his hand inside my panty isn’t allowing me to express, instead I’m moaning.

“Mazwakhe uyiqaba yazi,” I say before his lips captures my mouth.

I’m a bit uncomfortable doing this with people in the house. I know myself, I won’t be able to keep it low.

“You have a beautiful body,” he says, his finger unhooking my panty down my legs.

He pulls the T-shirt off his neck and pushes down everything he has down his waist. Jama is very clean. He should hire me as the permanent cleaner of him.

He lies on top of me, puts his arm under my neck and stares down to my lips.

“Ngcwethi and Mnotho are here,” he says and lifts his eyebrow, waiting for my response.

“Be slow then,” I say.

“You don’t deserve that. Not after what you’ve put me through,” he says and bites the side of my neck tenderly.

I cry out like a rained puppy.

“You’re very naughty Vuyiswa. Do you know why?”

I raise my brows in anticipation.

“Urban boys have been tickling her and they didn’t get to that itchy part, because it’s mine to rub and mine alone.”

“Mazwakhe...” Where did my voice go?

“Be still, I will get something that will keep you silent. I don’t want to be a bad example to the boys,” he says and rolls off bed.

He disappears in the bathroom and comes back with a piece of cloth.

“Mazwakhe what are you planning to do?” I’m getting nervous. I don’t like being voiceless. In fact, I hate it.

He wraps the cloth around my neck and leaves it loose under my chin. He turns around and goes to

the door.

He locks it.

My mouth turns dry.

He locks my lips in a kiss that almost takes my breath.

He breaks it and stares at me.

“Are you okay?” he asks

I nod my head. A part of me is okay and another part of me is not. Why is he acting like a village Christian Grey now? I’m the boss here, not him.

He kisses me again, deeply. Then he lifts the cloth over my mouth and tightens the knot behind my neck. My heart pounds when he positions himself between my legs and inserts the condom. I must be looking like a goat seeing the knife that’s going to slaughter it.

He wraps his hand around his giant and brings it closer. His eyes move from my face to the destination of his giant. It dances on my clit. I would’ve let out a scream already, that’s how

dramatic I am. Sometimes I scream before the person even undresses.

I was ready for his grand entrance, but he's not.

"You're so beautiful," he says and cups my breasts. He buries himself between them, his tongue runs from my chest up to the side of my neck.

"Your man loves you," he whispers.

There's that warm feeling I can't explain. It engulfs my heart and moistens my eyes. Sometimes it scares me. There's a high chance that I love this man more than he loves me, and that's a dangerous spot to be on as a woman.

"I will never let you down Vuyiswa." He's staring down at me. Below he's slowly inserting himself in.

"Whatever you go through for loving a man like me, it will blow over. I will be okay, soon. You'll be like other girls too."

I want to snatch the cloth off and tell him that he should stop worrying, I love us as we are. But he sees it coming, he pins my hands down and pushes

his whole shaft in.

“I love you,” he says before the game begins.

Yes, compared to what he’s doing to me, Nhlaka and his crew have been tickling me all these years. I may be paralyzed after this. His thrusts are deep, fast and hard. I cannot keep up with the pace, so now I’m just lying like a Woolworths’ full chicken, and he’s doing as he pleases.

His grip tightens. I look at his face and find it darker with all its muscles scrunched up. Is he really not going to make a single sound throughout the deed? How do you tell a man to moan during sex? He makes me feel like I have a refrigerator down there.

“Vuyiswa!” His voice is alarmed, yet filled with pleasure.

I squeeze him in again.

His head drops on my chest, he quickly latches on my nipple to suppress his sound. What is it that he has against screaming and moaning like a normal person?

I try it one last time. The strong man character flies out of the window, my nipple slides off his mouth and he let out a shallow, husky cry.

“You’re killing me Vuyiswa.”

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It’s awkward wearing a gown in the house full of men. Mndeni could’ve at least thought about driving past my home first so that I could pick up some stuff.

They bought KFC and now they’re watching some boring sport thing. I don’t know why they’re crowded here. Ngcwethi left Zanamuhla and slept here, which is strange. And by the look of things they’re not leaving anytime soon.

I hope they’re not planning to rob a bank. You never know with men.

I’m standing in the kitchen with my arms crossed. I was here to grab a bottle of water, but why not

stand and stare at the walls for a moment? It's not like I have anything to do.

The hair at the back of my neck stand up. It's a heavy presence that needs you to turn your head. I thought I'd be used to it by now, but I'm not, and I might never do.

"Ngcwethi," I say.

He walks in, stands by the sink and looks at me. We are over the undercover friend thing, obviously he's not here for business.

"So, you and my brother are serious?" The look on his face makes me uncomfortable.

"Yes," I say and nod my head.

His eyes shift but their intensity remains on me.

"He's my blood," he says.

I wait for him to speak.

"He's my duty. My business. Do you understand that?"

I don't know where this is going, but I nod my head.

“I will protect him at all costs. And if you’re really a part of him, I will protect you too.”

Again, I nod my head.

“He’s not crazy,” he says.

At first my mind is on Mazwakhe, even though I’ve never said he was crazy. But I’m wrong, he’s not talking about him.

“You don’t owe him anything, that’s fine. But a soul was brought by you, it lied across your womb for weeks, the least you could’ve done was to involve him. It wasn’t your baby alone, the two of you created it together.” His stare start throbbing and piercing through my heart. It shatters me into pieces.

“That boy will never go anywhere in life. Slowly, he’ll lose his sanity. Not because of you, but because the shadow of his child hovers over him.”

The bottle in my hand is slowly slipping off. My palms are sweaty. Nhlaka is a graduate, a whole LLB graduate, but till this day nobody can point at anything and say this is what he’s doing for a living.



“You don’t owe anyone being a mother, but if things like this have happened, if you have seen it fit to terminate life, the least you can do is give that soul a name so that it can rest in peace. I believe you owe the child that, you owe that boy an apology and you owe my brother the truth.”

He releases a sigh and goes to the cupboard. His hand comes back with a packet of chips. He tears it open and throws a few inside his mouth.

His face scrunches up as he chews them. He throws the packet back inside the cupboard and rushes to the tap with a glass.

“You ladies really eat these things?” He takes another sip from the glass. Just like that, he’s back at being Zano’s Ngcwethi.

Mazwakhe walks in, he gives Ngcwethi a look and he leave the room with his hands lifted up in surrender.

“Are you okay?” he asks. My face is cupped in his hands, his concerned eyes are searching into mine.

How do I tell him? Someone like him would never understand, no matter how hard I try to explain, the picture that will remain is that 2 years ago I had an abortion. I might lose his trust forever, if not him as a whole.

[11/19, 09:57] : Chapter Forty

He throws the car keys on top of the table and sits with his phone clasped in his hand and glares at her. The woman who had given him hope in love, he once saw a glimpse of future in her eyes, but now he looks at her with nothing but disgust.

“Mndeni,” she says and clears her throat a number of times. She thought this would be easy, he was never the close-minded person, she hoped that he’d be willing to listen and hear her side of the story. But this look he’s giving her makes her sweat.

“Nandi, I don’t have the whole day,” he says.

She lifts her glass and gulps the contents until she chokes.

“This is a waste of time!” he murmurs and picks his phone from the table and attempts to leave.

She stands and grabs his hand.

He freezes because the restaurant is full of people, and she doesn't have the right to touch him. Not after what she did. After all the lies she fed him!

“I love you Mndeni. I really love you.”

He breathes in and releases the breath with his eyes shut.

“You lied Nandi. What if he wasn't my brother? Would you have cost a man, hustling for his family, the job just to cover up your lies?”

“Can we talk? Please.” Her voice breaks. A twinge of empathy taps on his conscience. His eyes meet the drops of tears running down on her cheeks.

He pulls her arm, drags her to the car and closes the doors. When they're out of everyone's attention he throws her hand away and shakes his head.

“Is this an act Nandi?” he asks.

“No, I really love you,” she says.

“What if I wasn’t a Mthembu?”

“I would’ve still loved you.”

“Really? You dumped my brother after he lost his inheritance.” Maybe if she was only Mazwakhe’s ex he’d find a way to continue with whatever they had. But she dumped him over money. This is what makes him angry. He cannot trust her.

“We weren’t compatible. I was with him because...well, he was a good man to bring home,” she says and holds her breath.

“You never loved him?” Mndeni asks.

“No,” she says.

He chuckles in disbelief and stares at her for a moment.

“So, you’re not what you pretend to be, you’re just a thirsty bitch who chows and passes?” he says.

“Insult me all you want. Don’t give me any money, I’ll get a job and work. I just need us to get back together. I don’t want anything else.”

“What about my brother?” he asks.

“I will apologize to him. I know that I wronged him.”

It doesn't have the effect she was hoping for.

“I won't marry you Nandi and I never will,” he says.

She swallows and nods her head.

“So?” he asks with his eyebrow lifted.

“I want you,” she says.

He chuckles and shakes his head.

“I might find someone along the way. Just so you know.”

Again, she nods her head. She wants to be with him. He made her feel different and she's willing to do just anything to have him back in her life.

“Do you understand me Nandi? You and I cannot be anything, you can only get what's inside these briefs.”

Deep breath! She nods her head. He's angry at her and she doesn't blame him. In time he'll forgive her and everything will go into place.

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Mnotho

He hasn't touched on the events that took place on that day. He has questions but going back to normal was more important. He's been waiting for the right time to get his answers. He had to push everything to the back of his head first, convince MaMbonambi that he was okay and adjust to work.

Mazwakhe is sitting behind the main house, leaning back on the wall with his knees up and a sling in his hand. He keeps aiming at the birds that keep flying to the trees outside the fence. Mndeni calls it cruelty, his habit of killing animals. Fancy, isn't? Animals are meant to be killed and he enjoys doing it. It calms him down.

It's getting chilly, he has to get back inside the house.

Someone stands next to him and releases a breath.

He looks up and finds Mnotho staring into space with his hands tucked inside the pockets of his jacket.

It's the time he wished could be postponed forever. He never thought it would happen, but he's growing protective of them, especially Mnotho. He once wanted this boy dead, he would've killed him if he got the chance to, but now looking at him so close has made him realize just how young he is. Almost Hlahla's age, but he was exposed to so many things that ruined his innocence and youth.

He doesn't want him and Qophelo to turn like Busikhaya, or even worse, turn to be like him.

"What happened to her?" Mnotho asks after a long moment of silence.

"She was bitten by a snake," he says.

"And?"

Deep breath!

"She closed her eyes and asked me to go and rescue you. She asked that I make sure that you

move on and find happiness.”

“And?”

He’s making him uncomfortable with these short questions.

“We left Mnotho. She was lying still with her eyes shut. I had to get you home as I promised MaMbonambi. It was the main priority,” he explains, hoping that his answer will be enough for him to forgive.

“I want to know where she is,” Mnotho says.

“She’s dead. They took their son and I killed that short man.”

He knew it, he could feel it in his bones, her spirit suddenly left that day and surprisingly he isn’t feeling empty as he’s been over the years. But...

“Mazwakhe you killed Sgidi? Do you know who he is?” He gets on his feet and rubs his head in frustration.

“Those people are dangerous. You have to sleep with one eye open because it didn’t end Bafo. Out of



all people, you decided to kill the...”

“Can you sit down? You’re giving me headache with this pacing,” Mazwakhe says, unbothered.

“Do you have any idea who that was? What he’s capable of?” Mnotho. He’s still pacing around, because...wow.

“Do you know who I am and what I’m capable of?” Mazwakhe returns the question.

“Trust me, this will need more than just a gun. If they find you, you’re not the only one who’ll be in danger, but the whole family.”

Mazwakhe stands up and dusts himself.

“If they want revenge they’ll go after Bhekani Ndlovu.”

“How?” Mnotho is confused.

“Khwezi sacrificed her life for you. Stop worrying about things you can’t change, if they decide to come after me I’ll deal with it. Focus on yourself, meet new people and create new memories.”

Mnotho exhales deeply and stands still. Mazwakhe

taps his shoulder and gives him the look of hope, the one saying 'you can do it.'

"You're not a bad person," Mnotho says in awe. Growing up he's always seen this man as a monster. Mazwakhe chuckles.

"I don't fall under any category. I can be bad and I can be good. It depends on who you are," he says and shrugs his shoulders.

"You're even calm than you used to be," Mnotho mocks.

"Meaning?" he asks.

"That someone has tamed you. Vuyiswa. Is it serious?"

"Yes."

"She's not really your type. Are you sure about her?"

"You know my type now?"

Mnotho lifts his hands up in apology and leaves. He goes straight to his bedroom and opens the safe.

He stares at her pictures. He still loves her and he'll

never stop. Not in this life time.

But today her smile brings him warmth, not that hollow gap he's felt for years. It doesn't scream; "Help me Mnotho. Find me!"

She's at peace, wherever she is.

He will find someone to love, if God blesses him with a daughter her name will be Khwezi and he'll love her with everything he has.

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Bhekani Ndlovu

When he hears the knock coming from the door his instincts tell him it's the Mthembu boys. He's been sleeping with one eye open since the night they came to terrorize him. Sadly, he cannot report them to the police, he can't even tell his family that his life is in danger. Because, how would he explain the cause of all this?

He takes his panga and stands behind the door with

his ear pressed against it. He can't hear nor see anything. It must be the youngest one, Mnotho, he has come to abuse him again.

"Who is this?" he asks with his hand on the handle. He'll open and strike before this boy even enters.

"It's us," the voice comes behind him.

The door is closed, it's dark inside the house, how did the person enter? With a trembling hand, he reaches up to the switch and turns on the light.

Two naked, short boys are standing in front of him. They're boys because they have beards, however their bottom-fronts have no specific gender genital. They're just plain.

For a moment he's electric-shocked. Something warm is flowing down his legs. His mind seems to be on pause, he cannot make sense of the creatures in front of him.

It laughs. The one on the left side of the room. Its loud laugh reveals red gums. It doesn't have any teeth.

He sees double of everything in front of him.  
Seconds later his big body collides against the floor.  
Laughter again.

When he wakes up, his bed is soaked in water, he's also dripping wet.

He's scared to even scream. Slowly, he lifts his head and looks around the room. Everything is in its place. Seemingly the windows were washed, they're shining and opened to allow the morning sun rays to fill the room with light.

He drags himself to the door. What is all this? Was he dreaming last night? Everything looks normal.

He needs a glass of sugar-water, maybe it will calm him down. He's not thinking straight.

He pushes the kitchen door and steps in to his pots shining on top of the stove and the dishes stacked neatly on top of the table.

He didn't cook last night. He ate at Khabazela's

house and came straight to bed. Even if he did cook, he'd never cook spinach and pap. Where would he get the spinach in this dry season?

“Bhekani,” he calls his own name and slaps his forehead a number of times. He needs to think straight. Is someone trying to bewitch him? He's losing his mind. Yes, they're trying to kill him, the jealous neighbours.

He locks the doors and heads to Khabazela. He's never been a man who shares his personal issues with people, but some days, everyone needs a shoulder to cry on.

He finds Khabazela surrounded by his dogs under the shade of their peach tree.

“Is everything okay Ndlovu?” asks Khabazela, scanning his friend's face.

“I think someone is bewitching me,” he says.

“Huh? What are you saying Ndlovu?”

“I'm telling you, someone wants me dead. I'm

seeing things that aren't there. It feels like I'm losing my mind."

Khabazela calls for his wife to hurry with the jug of amahewu. His wife being a rural wife that she is, amahewu comes with a tray of food. No guest of hers will leave her house hungrily.

Something heavy sits on his shoulders as he attempts to lift the spoon. His hand shakes and the spoon drop down to the ground.

There's one of them, still naked like last night, it's standing right in front of him but Khabazela can't see it. Today it's angry...it's about food.

"Gatsheni!" Khabazela's voice snaps him.

He jumps up with his eyes bulging out.

"I have to go," he says.

"But you haven't touched your..." He lifts his hand up to silence him and heads back home.

"Is Bhekani really losing his mind?" Khabazela talks alone and shakes his head in disbelief.

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Zanamuhla

I wake up to the empty side of the bed. It's my life. Sometimes he leaves without informing anyone. Nobody questions him. I'm still trying to adjust to it. Sometimes he leaves in the middle of the night. Some days it's his scary nightmare episodes. I didn't think it was this complicated. Being his woman was fun before we started living together. Even more fun when it was forbidden. Now that I'm learning the reality of my future I know that it's not going to be cosy. He's not just mine alone, that I must accept and live with it.

I make the bed and drag myself to the bathroom. Now I'm starting to feel the pregnancy. The nausea in the mornings, elephant bladder and cravings.

Mndeni has already set the table, the kids are eating



on the couches in front of the TV.

“Zolwandle,” he acknowledges me with a smile.

I force my lips to stretch and grab a seat. I don’t want anything on this table, I want amagwinya and hot fries.

“Mazwakhe is at the farm. Busikhaya slept out. You know, new love, new pus..eerh.” He clears his throat. “I think it’s just us and the kids.”

“Where’s Mnotho and MaMbonambi?” I ask.

“Mnotho went to the office. Business-oriented people! And MaMbonambi left early, you know her endless trips.” He waves his hand up and focuses on his food.

I take a slice of bread, swallow a piece and down it with a glass of juice.

“How are you?” I look up and find him staring at me with concern dimming his eyes.

“I was a bit sick earlier, it has worn out,” I say.

“Is it normal or I should take you to the doctor?”

“It’s normal, pregnancy causes it,” I say.

He nods with relief and pushes the plate of eggs to my side. My stomach boils up. The bread I just swallowed shoots up my throat.

I only make it to the bathroom door. Before I get inside everything explodes to the floor. I have emptied almost everything by the time I reach to the toilet seat.

“You should’ve told me, I’m really sorry.”

What is he doing here? I snatch the glass of water he’s handing me.

“Mndeni leave,” I say, almost yelling.

“No, I can’t leave you like this.”

How about I want to pee? He can’t just stand here and look at my disgusting vomit.

“I need to use the toilet,” I say.

He doesn’t move.

“Mndeni!” I snap.

He sighs and walks out.

Fuck! I close the lid and sit on top of the seat. Mazwakhe warned me about lot of things, and this was one of them. But I said I'll handle this love thing. I chose this man, the one who's not here, the one I'm not even sure which part of the world he's in or when he's coming back.

It was okay when it was just me. I was strong, I could handle anything. But now I'm carrying a child, I have to swallow my tears, ignore my cravings so that I don't burden his family, and be my own pillar of strength.

I wash my face and take one last glance at the reflection of my sudden plum cheeks.

And then?

“Mndeni!” I'm shocked.

He's my brother-in-law. He can't clean after me, let alone clean my vomit.

“Give me the mop,” I demand.

“Zolwandle go to the kitchen. I removed the eggs from sight. Make what you want,” he says.

“I can’t. The flour won’t rise.”

“Meaning?”

“I want amagwinya and fries.”

“You’re going to gain weight.”

Oh, I didn’t know he was a dietician. I walk away, leaving him wiping the floor.

Qophelo walks in with a transparent plastic packet of amagwinya. Almost five, and a very wide container of fries. He puts it in front of me and says Mndeni said I must eat.

This is an insult. Am I a pig now? Why so many?

I’m going to kill this stupid brother. Not now though.

I add sauce, extra hot, and enjoy my meal while watching Sango’s cartoons.

“Has anyone seen my phone?”

Just the man I wanted to see!

“Why did you buy so many vetkoeks? For who?” I

ask.

He looks at the plastic packet on the table.

“Who ate them?” he asks.

What kind of a stupid question is this?

“Me,” I say.

“I bought them for you. Didn’t you say you wanted them for breakfast?”

“I did, but you didn’t have to buy so many like I’m a pig or something.”

He frowns.

I pick another one, leaving only two in the bag, they’re so soft and delicious. This is the most amazing breakfast ever. “And where did the chips go?” I ask, looking at the empty container.

Silence.

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Ngcwethi

“How old is she?” he asks the mother.

“Six,” she says and sheds another tear.

“When did it start?” he asks, lifting the child’s swollen foot.

“She was two, but it would come and go. This time has been different, she’s been sick for months and she can’t even walk,” she explains.

He exhales and nods his head. He arrived here by dawn, leaving his pregnant fiancé alone on bed. He’d been having this dream for days but the picture wasn’t too clear. It’s only last night when he saw everything. The child on the death bed, her depressed mother wailing and praying, and the great-grandmother shivering in the cold with nothing covering her body and her wrinkled hands clasped together as if she was begging for something.

“We have to go to your home Mama,” he tells her.

“But we are home,” the woman says, confused.

“These are just walls sheltering you. You have to go back home, where your mother was born, you belong there, not here,” he says.

“But I’m married,” she says.

“You just have a ring decorating your finger. You are not married. Your mother was never married either, you’re both the Sibisi and the grandmother who’s been protecting you is getting tired. You have to go home, KwaSibisi, rebuild that home and give your great-grandmother a place to stay. She’s cold out there.”

“What about my daughter? We have a doctor’s appointment next week. We cannot miss it, EmaMbatheni there aren’t enough doctors.”

This is not what he came here to do, begging an old woman, but he has to stay calm. He’s across the province, he has to take this woman to EmaMbatheni, some village in the north of KZN and help her prepare a place for her great-grandmother to stay and carry out the ceremonies that need to be done. It might take days or a week but he cannot

communicate to the world, especially to Zano, because he'll be distracted. He has to be here, physically, mentally and spiritually.

The young girl needs him.

“You can stay behind if you're that committed to your fake husband, but the child needs to heal and for that to happen she needs to be at the Sibisis,” he says.

Her eyes widen. She can't separate from her daughter. Who'll look after her? If she leaves her husband will be...

“No!” she screams when Ngcwethi walks towards the girl's bed.

He stops and sighs. This is going to be one of those episodes where he wishes he wasn't who he is. It was better when he had no one at home, his family understood, but Zanamuhla won't understand. To make matters worse, she's pregnant with their first child.

Another sigh! He goes against his self-made rules, he takes out his phone and send a text.



\*\*\*I'M AWAY, WORKING, IT MIGHT TAKE A FEW DAYS OR A WEEK. I LOVE YOU ZANAMUHLA, TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF\*\*\*

He shouldn't have waited for the response because he knew it was going to challenge his emotional space, which he can't afford.

But he waits and the response beeps in.

\*\*\*MY BIGGEST MISTAKE WAS FALLING PREGNANT BEFORE UNDERSTANDING THE SACRIFICES I HAVE TO MAKE IN THIS RELATIONSHIP. I REGRET THAT MORE THAN I REGRET DISOBEYING MY BROTHER..I WILL TAKE CARE OF MYSELF\*\*\*

[11/19, 09:57] : Chapter Forty-One

Nontobeko

I didn't think there was a gentleman in him. Not even once. But everyday he surprises me; the gifts, sweet messages and romantic dinners. At first I was uncomfortable, asking myself what if it was just a phase? You know new relationship hype and all, but he's remained the same for months. He's not changing, instead he's getting better everyday.

"Where are you taking me?" I ask, twenty minutes on the drive.

"You'll see," he says.

It's Thursday, tomorrow we both have to go to work, what could it be? It can't be a surprise dinner, he knows his sex drive, we'd both end up not waking up tomorrow.

Okay, we are in the village. Not in the farm, just a few yards away from the gigantic homestead I usually see in the pictures.

"We are here," he says and pulls up.

"What are we doing here?" I ask. I hope he's not

taking me to his mother. I'm not dressed properly and I'm just not ready.

"This is where we are going to live." He points around the open area with trees and grass.

"Busikhaya?" I'm not sure what's going on here.

"Our home will be here. Ngcwethi will be behind those trees. Mndeni will be there," he says and points above the homestead. "If he does stay in the village and not go to the big cities, Mnotho will be there, below Mndeni."

I look like a fool, I'm sure of it. I'm also looking out for snakes, the grass is almost kissing my knees, anything could happen.

"Mazwakhe will be left in his property in peace," he says and chuckles.

"What are you talking about?" I ask.

His arm wraps around my waist. A soft peck lands on the side of my face.

"We can't all squat in there. We have to move out with our wives, only the eldest son has to remain in

Ndaba's house. But we can't move far, our lives are here, MaMbonambi gave us our pieces of land. It's not too small, right? We can have a pool if you want, a play area for the kids here and..."

Whoooah! Who pressed the fast-forward button?

"I'm not your wife Busikhaya," I say in awe.

"But soon you will be," he says and walks around, admiring the nature surrounding us.

This man is not joking. He's serious and scaring the fuck out of me.

"Busikhaya I have a company to run. I can't just move here and become a village housewife," I say.

"So what do you suggest we do? That I leave the village and come to the city and become a city house-husband? Umfazi udela ikhaya nakho konke Nontobeko, not the other way around."

"Are you insane? Are you aware of what you're saying to me right now?" Lord, I cannot believe this.

"When I asked for your love I wasn't just asking for a mutual feeling or for your body. In you I saw

someone I can build a family with, someone I can share my life with, someone who can help me build and expand the Mthembu clan.” He draws a breath and walks back to me. His stare makes me uncomfortable, especially when I know that he’s pissed.

“I’m not leaving the village Ntobe. I’m not leaving my forefather’s land. Are you staying with me or you’re going to leave?”

“You’re asking me to choose already?” I ask in shock. We are not even past our first trimester in a relationship and I already have to let go of my company!

“The hardware is waiting for my call,” he says.

“Meaning?” I ask.

“I ordered the building material.”

This is crazy!

“Say something sthandwa sami.” His voice is now softening.

“What do you want me to say? You have already

decided and I have no say in anything,” I say.

“Is that a yes?” he asks.

I frown.

“A yes?”

“Uzongakhis a umuzi?” (would you help me build a home)

“Well, I can help with the roof tiles and windows.”

He breaks a brief chuckle and pulls me in his arms.

“My uncles will let your family know,” he says.

“Know what?” I ask with my eyebrows furrowed.

He smiles and plants a wet kiss on my cheek.

“That their daughter is about to buy me windows and the roof tiles. The Mthembus are not scammers, everything has to be on the book,” he says.

“Wait...” I push him off and step away. But he's stubborn, he doesn't understand this ‘giving someone space to breathe’ thing, he pulls me back and engulfs me in a tight embrace.

“What does this mean Busikhaya?” I ask.

“It means that in a few years to come this side of the village will have about 5 homesteads of abaThembu. Our kids will grow, take their wives and move out. In three decades we'll be more than just a clan, we're building a nation here.”

Sounds like a wild dream. No kid will want to grow up and spend the rest of his life in the village. Just in case he hasn't noticed, cities create more opportunities for young people.

“Does Zanamuhla know?” I ask. I don't know why I want to know, I'm just curious to know if she's aware of their plans and the fact that she's stuck here for life.

“She thinks they'll be moving to a town house, but Ngcwethi's people could start building any day from now. At least the main house and Ngcwethi's hut should be ready before the wedding.”

I cannot believe this!

“What year do y'all think this is? 1945?” I ask.

He doesn't care. All this is normal to him. He sees nothing wrong with the life they want for us, their partners, and their kids.

“Why is your bonding white here?” He's touching the tail of my weave. Yes he said ‘bonding’, the Brazilian weave I shipped all the way from the US!

“It's blonde, not white,” I say.

“Oh!” He looks confused, but I don't have the strength to be a pre-school teacher right now and teach a grown-ass man about colours. I still need to come to terms with the fact that I'm going to move here, in less than a year, hopefully, and spend the rest of my life here.

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MaMbonambi

He tears the sachet of sugar and pours it into her cup before handing the teaspoon to her.

He waits until she finishes stirring it and sips a few



times because he knows how much she loves her tea.

Then he asks, “How are the kids?”

She sips again, puts the cup on the saucer and smiles.

“Handful, as always,” she says and they both laugh.

“I hope it's not Mndeni again,” he says.

She laughs. Watching her laugh has always been his fascination. Her eyes shut and she always puts her hand across her mouth to cover up. It's crazy that she hasn't changed that much, four kids, two grandchildren, and he still sees her the same way he did twenty-five years ago.

“Not this time. Mazwakhe and Busikhaya are actually more handful than the younger ones,” she says.

“Is he fitting in though?” He's asking about Mazwakhe. Concern dims his eyes.

“He's one of them. They fight like cats, I don't think any of them ever apologizes, you just see them

getting along again. I think he's always fitted, from physique to behaviour, that boy has always been Madoda's, we just couldn't see it.”

“Madoda and I also fought like cats,” he says.

She slightly frowns in disbelief.

“I don't think you were ever aggressive.”

He blushes and hides it by taking a sip of his whisky.

“Really?” His lips curve into a smile.

He has started. He's really 53years old, this thing of him acting like a young, thirsty boy should come to an end some day.

“Don't do that Siyabonga, you know how I mean it,” she says.

“Did I say anything? I just asked a question,” he says and shrugs his shoulders with a smirk on his face.

“You're exclusively aggressive. Not physically like your nephews,” she clarifies, her cheeks heating up.  
Urgh!

He loves it when she's blushing. Things have not been easy and they never will be. Their 'thing' was always strong but complicated at the same time.

As if the universe was implying something, two years after his own wife died in a horrific car accident, her husband died in an attack. Well, he was attacked by the son he never knew he had. Siyabonga was there when the boy's murder was planned by Madoda and his associates. Mazwakhe was becoming a threat to his plans. He was becoming a problem and they had to eliminate him. That's how the world has always been, especially with the powerful people. You stand on their path, you die.

Mazwakhe knew that. Not even once did he doubt the power Madoda had. But he wasn't going to back down. He doesn't do that. He faces his enemies, he fights when he needs to fight and deals with the consequences later.

He was about to deal with the consequences but Ngcwethi fell ill that night. Madoda was ready, his associate was next to his phone, waiting for the call to carry out their plan.

But no, the special son had to play dead. He just laid on bed, as crazy as it may sound but he stopped breathing. Madoda had to put everything on hold. He loved his sons, he'd die for them, and he loved his wife. Maybe not more than he had loved Celiwe, but she gave him a family and supported him through the storms. She was a good wife and he tried to be a good husband. They were happy. She was happy, more happy than he made her, so he thought it was the money and he worked harder everyday.

That day when he died, Ngcwethi could've seen it coming but he only sensed it after it had happened. One of them had to die. It could've been Mazwakhe, but Ngcwethi had one of his worst episodes that night. On the other side Mazwakhe was planning, the man he didn't know loved his mother with every

bone in his body, had killed his mother, or so he believed. He went through what he went through because of him and his stupid farm. Raising a little girl, protecting her against the polygamous family and fighting for survival while his father was cosy on bed with his youngest wife. It was all Madoda's fault.

His mother didn't have much but he had a normal life when she was still alive. He wore his khaki shorts, Toughes and Reebok backpack and followed other kids to school. He had a time to go fishing, to play soccer with his friends and come home to a warm meal.

The day his mother died will always be a clear picture in his head. She cried for hours by the side of the road. He remembers trying to push the wheelbarrow through the bushes with his father watching on top of the hill with his other wives. He remembers getting a call from the driver that the car he had hired was stuck. They had to wait for hours for the mechanic to arrive and fix it. An

ambulance was already not an option. They could only fetch the sick person if she was on the other side of the village; the better side.

Something happened, he had never witnessed it in the past but when it happened, he felt it. His mother's soul leaving her body. Her eyes stayed opened but her body was still and cold. Without Zanamuhla noticing, he pushed down her eyelids with his fingers and pretended as if everything was okay.

Two days later she was asking one question, hundred times a day; "When is mom coming back from the hospital?"

He'd brush her cornrows, trace his finger through the rows and tell her fake hospital stories. Until he was forced to tell her the truth.

His uncle said he must whisper in her ear when she was asleep at night. That's how all kids are informed of their parents' death. But not with Hlahla...

The lights were off. He tiptoed in the dark and stood

next to her bed. She was snoring, or so his ears heard.

“Hlahla...” He took a deep breath and leaned over her ear and just like he was instructed, he whispered.

“Zanamuhla our mother has left the world, she's no longer with us.”

She jumped up. He also jumped away in shock. She was asleep, wasn't she? Her painful scream rang in his ears for years. She cried her lungs out and he just stood there and swallowed back his own tears. Indoda ayithambi njengotamatisi. So, he let her grieve and stayed strong.

Even when he stood face to face with the man he believed was the cause of his mother's death, Hlahla's painful scream motivated him to pull the trigger. Not once, but six times.

Then when he saw him lying on the sand, next to the river, his blood flowing into the river and flushing away, he puts his hands on his knees, took

a deep breath and lets out the painful cry he was never allowed to express. It felt right to cry, like the dead man wasn't judging him for it. Strange, isn't? Finding comfort in a man you just killed? Little did he know that he was comfortable crying in front of him because the blood that was flowing into the river was his own blood.

Madoda's death could've paved a way for a lot of things. And it did; Ngcwethi falling in love with the family's worst enemy's daughter, the new road construction, Mazwakhe being discovered and Mnotho cancelling his flight and staying in the country to find closure.

But Siyabonga and MaMbonambi still can't be together. What would people say? The kids? They're all grown-ups. Busikhaya would do something crazy, they know it. It's just impossible.

“You know my doctor said I must take it easy on the joints and muscles,” he says and winks at her.

“I suggest that you listen to the doctor then,” she



says.

His eyes widen. She laughs because she knows what he's about to say.

“I'd rather die on top of you,” he says.

They both laugh. With the two of them it's always been natural. From those nights when Madoda would disappear for months, leaving her alone with the children. Those forbidden nights where he'd sneak in to their bedroom and keep her warm.

Nothing was ever forced, they just fit like two pieces of the missing puzzle.

She wasn't going to leave her husband for him and he wasn't going to leave his wife for her either. And they were also not going to end it for any reason. Not even for their marriages. They just needed to be careful and they succeeded. Twenty-five years of forbidden love, kept strong and fresh behind the family. Twenty five years! That's how long they've been together, they started just after Mndeni's birth and they both have no regrets. None, whatsoever. Not even their marriages, they loved their partners

and they loved each other. They didn't have to choose, but if they had to, and if the kids weren't involved, they both know that they'd choose each other.

Mnotho was born, by luck he was Madoda's, and years later the grandchildren came and he was still holding her hand behind doors. It's been good, really good.

“How is makoti doing?” he asks after their moment of being love-birds.

“She'll be strong. It's still all new to her and she's carrying a child, but in time she'll adjust.” It sounds more like she's convincing herself more than she's trying to convince him.

“I think she's too young. Ngcwethi is very complicated. Remember what happened when he turned twenty-four.”

She heaves a sigh. That cannot happen again. She's begged the ancestors, they must've listened, her family cannot go through that again. Zanamuhla is too young to handle that. There's a baby on the way,

she'll need Ngcwethi's support more than ever.

“I won't allow that to happen Siyabonga. My son deserves happiness and Zanamuhla is his happiness,” she says.

“You know he's not just your son, he's the servant of the elders. If they call him to Botswana, that's where he will go,” he pauses and reaches to her hand and brushes it tenderly.

“But as you said, makoti will adjust,” he says and comforts her with a smile.

“Oh, umntanabantu!” She exhales deeply and blinks back the tears threatening to shoot out.

He's by her side in the blink of an eye. He pulls her hand up and helps her off the chair. Strong arms embrace her in a tight hug. His beard tickles the side of her neck as he plants a kiss on her skin.

“I'm here Thandazile.”

She pulls herself together and smiles.

“I won't cry, I'm a grown Gogo, 48 years old.”

“And it's not good for your health. The only crying

that's good for you is.....” He pulls her towards the bedroom door. The door closes and locks behind them.

“When you cry on this bed,” he adds and takes his jacket off.

She folds her arms, stands by the wardrobe and watches him strip his clothes off.

She's not about to take her own clothes off. She has never done that in the past. Not with him. It's his job to undress her and lift her to bed.

[11/19, 09:58] : Chapter Forty-Two

Vuyiswa

“Are you going to sulk the whole week?” She throws ice inside her glass and sits on the couch with the remote on her lap.

“He's going to leave me Ncami. It's not funny.” I'm still pacing around, constantly looking outside the window and praying that Mazwakhe comes a bit late. Maybe I would've gathered enough strength by

then.

“So what? Did he feed you ubheka-mina-ngedwa? I wouldn't be surprised if he did. He's creepy.”

She won't relate to my pain because she's blinded by hate and she's disregarding my feelings as she always does.

I wish I can talk to Zanamuhla but she might judge me and her loyalty lies with her brother. He needs to hear this from me, maybe he'll understand if I tell him my reasons. I wasn't fit to be a mother and I wasn't going to mother a child conceived that way. It was going to be hard, like a scar on your flesh that keeps reminding you of the pain you went through.

Bontle will attack me with Bible verses, I won't even start with her.

The car hoot!

Too soon. My mouth turns dry.

“That's your bush-man,” Ncami says.

I let out a deep sigh and collect my jacket from the bedroom and make my way out.

He has to know today, then Ngcwethi can help me with whatever rituals I need to do. I hate talking about Nhlaka, but today it's essential that I touch on that subject, I don't want Mazwakhe to be surprised if they ever happen to meet. Knowing Nhlaka, I don't have any doubts that he'd cause drama and act like a superman.

I thought he was coming alone. Why did he bring his brothers? Busikhaya makes me uncomfortable, to make it worse, he likes staring at people. I have no doubt that he's Judge Judy in his head. He judges and hates people.

“Sanibona,” I try to sound ecstatic.

“Rihanna,” Busikhaya says, lacking the welcoming smile on his face. Judge Judy! I wonder how his girlfriend copes. I don't have a problem with people calling me by any female star's name because they say it in a complimenting way. But he's saying it to criticize my style, I know it.

When my man climbs out of the car in his dungaree and white sneakers, I exhale deeply and smile. I can't help it. I may hate how he always takes out one arm of his top and rolls up one leg of his pant to his knee. But I wouldn't have him any other way. Being like this is what makes him unique and I love that about him. He's unique.

He pulls me behind the car.

“Are you alright?” he asks.

Nope, I'm far from being alright. But I nod my head.

“They're fetching Mndeni's car in town. We'll drop them there and go to Mission,” he explains.

“Okay,” I say.

His stare digs the depths of my soul.

“We'll talk,” he says.

“About?” I ask.

“Whatever that is eating you.”

I want to break the news right now so that he can be angry at once and send me back inside the house.

It's going to be more difficult if he has to spend the whole night with me and drive me back here. I don't want to witness his anger.

“There's something I need to tell you,” I say.

“What is it sthandwa sami?”

“Two years ago I term...”

Hoot!!!!

“Mazwakhe you have the whole night with her!” yells Mndeni inside the car. The devil's PA!

He plants a kiss on my cheek.

“We'll talk,” he says.

I nod my head and follow him.

Before opening the door he glances back at me.

“I love you Vuyiswa,” he says.

“Mazwakhe,” I really don't want to cry. This might end in tears. He might want to take back his words when he finds out what I did.



I sit between him and the icy young brother. You'd swear the guy is mute by disability, whereas he's just mute by pride. I can't believe Zanamuhla once had a crush on this ice-prince. I'm glad she met Ngcwethi, a nice weirdo.

“When is the graduation?” Oh, he does open his mouth when he likes!

“10 October,” I say.

“Congratulations.”

He's awkward. He needs a girlfriend, even a wife, he's grown now. They exclude me and start talking about soccer.

I wonder where Ngcwethi is, he's the only one missing. I haven't talked to Zanamuhla in a while, I've been drowning in my own sorrows.

“Where's Ngcwethi?” I ask Mazwakhe but I'm loud enough to silence everyone and get a few heads turning to my direction.

“He's in the water,” says Mndeni.

The look he gets from Busikhaya could've cremated

me to ashes. I wonder why this is making him angry, Mndeni is always stupid, he lives with them, they should be used to him.

“He's away, working,” Mazwakhe says.

I feel like something is being hidden from me but it's none of my business. I only need to check on my friend later.

Before leaving we have to buy something we'll eat in the house. When he said; “Get something we're going to eat.” He thought I'll go scan green-pepper and pick 10kg maize meal and a sack of potatoes.

“What are we doing here?” he asks when the woman in front of us leaves the queue.

“Getting something to eat later, pizzas,” I say.

“Vuyiswa I don't like these....” The cashier lifts her eyes to us.

“Next!” she yells and I move forward.

He sighs behind me.

I cannot deal with this rural side of him, I'm not going to stir pap and peel potatoes. If we're still going to be together he'll have to get used to fast food.

“Sfebe!” Someone yells at the entrance, grabbing everyone's attention.

“Uzohosha la namhlanje?” (This is where you're prostituting today)

He's approaching me and Mazwakhe. Everything is on a standstill. The slip in my hand is sticking to my sweaty palm. I don't care about the insults, this is not the first time he's publicly embarrassing me. The only difference is that today I'm with Mazwakhe, a man I know for sure that he doesn't like being the center of insults and attention.

“Do you know him?” he asks, calmly.

He's in front of us, scanning Mazwakhe from head to toe like some piece of trash.

“Uthole umthondo omus ha sfebe?” (You found a

new di€k, bit€h)

Deep breath Vuyiswa!

“Nhlaka please leave me alone,” I say.

“I’ll leave you alone the day you give me my child that you aborted, sfebe!”

Gasps!

Busikhaya and Mndeni walk through the entrance with their brows furrowed. It's getting worse, now the whole family is about to know my past mistakes.

“Mazwi let's go,” I say and pull his arm.

He stands still. He's staring at Nhlaka.

“Baby asambe,” I beg.

Nhlaka clicks his tongue.

“Baby? You're now calling grown-ass men your baby, yet you aborted our baby. I loved you Vuyiswa but you disappointed me.” Here it comes! I want to die.

The lady calls out our order number. I drag myself to the counter to receive the pizzas. It feels like I'm

carrying packets of cement. My eyes are blinded by tears but my feet find the way to the parking.

He has ruined everything. I was going to explain to Mazwakhe, privately. I don't know if he would've understood, but he loves me and love forgives, right?

Now it'll be impossible for him to listen and I don't think I'm emotionally fit to explain either.

He parts ways with his brothers and walks towards the car. He unlocks the doors and gets on the driver's seat without looking at me.

He doesn't say anything, neither do I. We drive and reach Mission in total silence.

“Mazwakhe I was going to tell you, today.”

He pours a glass of water and walks to the bedroom and slams the door behind him.

I hug myself on the couch and let out the tears I've been holding for an hour now. I've been with people after Nhlaka and this baby predicament has never surfaced. Things were okay and normal. But now

that I've found a man that I really like, this has to come out. He had to find out in public, in front of his brothers who I think are already judgmental of our relationship.

“Vuyiswa wipe your tears and sit up straight,” he demands, standing next to the couch with his arms folded.

I do as he says and wait for what's coming.

“How many abortions have you done?”

Wow!

“Answer me Vuyiswa.”

“Only one and I had my reasons.”

“Are you going to abort my children too?”

Again, wow!

“Mazwi that's not fair,” I say.

“What is fair? Killing an innocent soul?”

Really? He's now doing Jesus' job.

“You killed your own father!”

Fuck! I shouldn't have said that.

I expected him to be angry but he's not.

“He was going to do the same to me. But if that's your excuse, then fine, we can move on.”

“Mazwakhe I'm sorry, I shouldn't have said that. Can we talk, please? I will tell you why I did it.”

He lifts his hand up and walks to the TV stand and grabs the remote.

“There's no valid reason to kill your own child.”

The fetus vs child struggle is real!

“Really, there isn't. A parent protect, from day one, she doesn't spill blood of her own. No matter how bad the situation is, that's why they're called-bundles of joy. I'll never understand, Qophelo is my world, I cannot imagine...” He stops and looks at me.

“Qophelo?” I ask.

“It's...you won't understand..it's really complicated.”

Is he kidding me? What is going on here? I keep my eyes fixed on him.

“What do you want to watch?” He thinks we're just going to change the subject? He's got it all wrong.

“I hide that I had a fetus two years ago and you've been judging me for solid five minutes. I'm a bad partner who committed the biggest sin on earth, right? But you've been hiding a living child from me? You're a father Mazwakhe?”

He sighs and nods his head.

“Busikhaya and I shared a babymama.”

Shut the front door!!!

“For real?” I ask.

“She was with me before she was with him.”

Thixo onofefe!

“What's the story with your family and sharing? Is Mndeni not sleeping with your ex-girlfriend too?” I ask.

He chuckles and leans back on the couch.

“Insila yethu iyabizana,” he says.

No, he mustn't try to make this sound normal,



because it's not.

“It's actually weird,” I say.

“Not weird as that babydaddy of yours. If I didn't respect the spirit of your child I would've squeeze his balls just a little bit, to teach him a lesson.”

I'm forgiven already? I owe this man a full blow job.

“But if he ever speaks to you like that again I will kill him. I'm the only person who's allowed to make you cry,” he says.

“You're allowed to make me cry?” Shock me again.

“More like he's allowed,” he says and points at his front.

Beautiful bastard! I jump to his lap and suffocate him with a kiss.

“Thank you,” I say.

“For what?” He frowns slightly.

“For accepting my past and mistakes.”

“What did you think?” He's still confused.

“I thought you'll break up with me.”

He breaks into laughter and looks at me in disbelief.

“Hhayi-bo Vuyiswa!” He's still laughing.

“You're ignorant, remember?” I say.

He laughs even more.

Jeez! I love this human being.

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Ngcwethi

He knew this was going to be a challenging task. He had to beg her for two days before she gave in and packed her bags. Things didn't get easy when they arrived, he still had to beg her to do some rituals she thought were ridiculous. If it wasn't for the little girl he would've left. Everytime he thought about leaving he'd see Sangelihle being in the same situation as the girl. He'd want her to get help, right? This is why he has to stay until everything is done.

Hopefully in the next two days he'll be done. He misses the kids, but more than anyone, he misses his fiancée. She's angry, he's sure of that, but when he gets home he'll make up for everything and she'll forgive him. She just needs time to adjust. Things will be okay.

He wraps himself with the duvet and closes his eyes. It's a very cold night but the memories of their time together always keep him warm wherever he is. If he was normal, he'd spend every night with her and bury J ama inside her every chance he gets.

He squeezes the pillow to his chest and lets the thoughts of her drive him to sleep.

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~ She's emotionally drained. Everytime she enters the bathroom, getting out of everyone's sight, she sinks on the floor and cries. Then she washes her face on the sink and walks out with a smile plastered on her face. She regrets not listening to

Mazwakhe, he told her to choose her future but she was adamant on choosing a man. A man who's living his dream, driving fancy cars and spending less time with her. She tries by all means to hide her sadness from him. She hates 'I told you so' moments.

She has a scarf wrapped around her neck. It's very cold, her hands are tucked inside the pockets of her long coat. She walks in to their bedroom and finds Mnotho sitting on bed, reading a magazine he found lying there.

"Mnotho," she says in shock. She didn't expect to find anyone on her bed, they all respect each other's private spaces.

"Zano, I thought you were sleeping out," he says.

She frowns.

He smiles and puts the magazine away.

"Are you cold?" he asks.

"Obviously, God is freezing us today." She takes out

her coat and goes to the wardrobe and puts it on the hanger. Right in front of him, she takes out her dress and gets into her short nightie.

“What are you doing here?” She finally asks.

“I just wanted to check how you're doing. Ngcwethi has been gone for weeks now, I'm sure you need someone to lean on,” he says.

She exhales deeply and shakes her head.

“To be honest, I regret falling in love with your brother. I wasn't living a happy life before him, but it wasn't this complicated,” she tells him. He's just a year older than her, they understand each other more, they relate on many things. It's easy for him to open up to her, she's been there for him throughout the Khwezi thing. She also finds him easy to talk to compared to the other brothers. Their relationship is strong but unrecognizable.

“You don't mean that Zanamuhla,” he says, searching in her eyes.

“I mean it Mnotho. I love him, that's out of question, but I wish he wasn't this complicated. Why couldn't

he be like you?” She climbs on bed and leans against the headboard.

“Because we are different,” he says, shrugging his shoulders.

“I hate that you're different,” she says.

He inhales deeply, climbs on bed with one knee and engulfs her in a warm hug.

“I'm sorry,” he says in a low whisper.

“Thank you,” she says.

He doesn't break the hug. She doesn't push him either. They remain like that, snuggled together. Chest to chest. Face to neck. Heartbeat to heartbeat.

Slowly, he lifts his head to her face and stares into her eyes.

“You're beautiful Zanamuhla. Why didn't I notice this back at school?” he says.

“Funny, I did notice you but I didn't have the guts.”

His face lights up, a smile stretches from his lips.

“Really?” he asks.

“Yeah, I had a crush on you.”

His hand separates her legs, he fits himself in between her and closes the one inch distance left between their faces. Their lips meet. He grabs her face and deepens the kiss.

She breaks the kiss out of breath. She looks shocked, or scared, her eyes are all out.

“Mnotho I'm married to your brother,” she says.

“He's not here and nobody knows when he's coming back. I just want you to feel good, I know that you miss him.”

“This is wrong,” she whispers.

He kisses her again while his hand is lifting up her nightie.

“I will be gentle MaNgwane, nobody has to know about this.” He brushes her thighs, his manhood is hardening against her.

“What if Ngcwethi sees this in his dreams? I cannot lose...” He shushes her with a finger.

“Insila yami neyakhe iyafana. He won't know because he won't be able to tell,” he says.

She's not convinced.

“Please Zolwandle, I just want to keep you warm,” his voice breaks in to her ear and she feels the tingles she hasn't felt in a long time.

“Zolwandle,” he calls softly.

She breathes heavily. Only the Mthembus call her this way and it softens her.

“It's J ama, open for him,” he begs.

Slowly, she widens her legs and lets her back relax on the pillow.

He takes out her underwear and neatly puts it next to her feet. He spits on his fingers and rubs her swollen clit. She's breathing heavily as he circles his finger around it.

“You're flawless,” he admires her body.

“Yeah, right?” Obviously, he's mocking her. She's pregnant, her hips are wider and decorated with stretch marks.



“I mean it, you're juicy and sexy,” he says.

Her blushing-moment is disturbed by the tongue swirling around her opening.

“Mnotho!” she screams with pleasure.

He licks her, sticks his tongue in her opening and sucks her clit. She's screaming in tongues, wrapping her legs tightly around him and pushing his head deeper.

Eventually, he goes up to her lips and kisses her again.

“Please Mnotho,” she says, running her hands all over his back.

He smiles, proudly.

“Please what?” he asks.

“Please keep me warm,” she says.

“Okay MaNgwane.” He directs his tip to her cookie and rubs her clit. She's panting and begging him to enter.

His mouth shapes an ‘O’ as he pushes himself

inside her warm flesh. He rocks up her hips to welcome him and he releases his first moan.

“Fuck!” His head drops over her neck. He puts more pressure in his thrusts and lifts her leg up. He's hitting it in every corner and she's enjoying every bit of it.

“I love you Zanamuhla,” words escape his lips.

She thinks it's his di€k talking, but he pauses his thrusts and says it again.

“I really love you,” he tells her.

“Mnotho I want to cum,” she says, dismissing his stupidity.

He smiles. His sweat drops to her nose as he kisses her lips.

“Okay but you have to turn around first,” he says.

Her eyes widen. He smiles and pulls out.

“On your knees Zolwandle,” he says and spanks her thigh.

She giggles and turns on her knees and holds on

the pillow.

He grabs her buttocks apart and inserts himself again.

“I love you babe,” he says.

“I love you too...” ~

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The little girl hears the scream and wakes up her mother who's fast asleep on the sponge.

“Sleep, Balungile,” the mother scolds with her eyes closed.

“It's Malume,” she says.

“Huh?” She opens her eyes and hears loud screams coming where Mthembu is sleeping.

She tells her daughter not to move and rushes out to check what's eating the young man.

He's on bed with his eyes closed. He's tearing the pillows in his hands and screaming; “Zanamuhla! Zanamuhla! No! No! No!”

In her time the most effective strategy of waking someone up was a bucket of cold water.

He gasps for air as the water flows down his face and jumps up with his eyes widely opened.

“What's wrong?” the woman asks.

“The grime.....” He slides down on the floor and starts groaning like a wild animal.

[11/19, 09:58] : Chapter Forty-Three

Zanamuhla

The hardest thing is to put on a brave face while inside you're shattered in pieces. I don't want it to get to ‘I told you so’ moment with Mazwakhe. He begged me to go another route and I said I want to be here. I said I could handle the heat, so it shall be.

It's Qophelo's turn to wash the dishes. Mazwakhe stays behind and helps him, which raises my eyebrows because Mazwakhe doesn't even wipe his own spoon. I guess he's using any opportunity to get close to his son.

“Why don't you sleep here?” MaMbonambi asks, referring to the bedrooms inside the main house.

“No, I'm fine Ma,” I say. I feel safe in Ngcwethi's bedroom and I feel stupidly closer to him when I'm there. And besides, I don't want to be woken up by Sango's loud cartoons early in the morning. I sleep peacefully on my absent fiancée's bed.

I soak myself in the bath and think about everything we've been through together. The storms and the good times. I remember the road construction, he turned against his family for me, dishonored his father's wishes just to be with me.

This anger is not good for the baby and it's not good for him. I just didn't expect things to be this way, but still, I should open my heart and free him to do whatever he's doing and succeed. We will talk when he gets here. I will be angry at him all I want. But right now I need to let him be.

I put his T-shirt on and sit on the chair with the

packet of chips Mndeni brought me earlier. He says the baby will look like him because I hate him. I'm always ready to twist his words and bite his head off. Even with this packet of chips that I never asked for, I drilled him with ridiculous questions until he apologized. I have no idea why I did that because I'm enjoying them and he chose my flavor.

There's a knock on the door. I hope it's not Sango because I've heard enough stories for the day.

Luckily, it's Mnotho.

"I misplaced my charger," he says, scratching his head and looking around.

"Take that one lying on top of the shelf. I don't know if it's working, you'll have to test it," I say.

He takes it and plugs it. The light flashes, he connects his phone and waits.

"Yeah, it's working," he says.

We haven't talked that much lately. It's more like he's been avoiding me.

“How are you?” I ask.

“Just hanging in there. And you?”

“I think I'm fine,” I say.

He narrows his eye.

“I'm being honest, I knew who Ngcwethi was, I was just freaked out by the disappearances. But I think I'm fine now, he'll come back when he's completed his task,” I say.

“I hope it's soon, hey. It's boring without him,” he says.

“You just don't have a girlfriend Mnotho and everyone does and they're crazy in love,” I say.

He chuckles and sits opposite me.

“I think I'm ready to move on.”

He mustn't joke like that, I'm pregnant and fragile.

“Don't play with me,” I say in disbelief.

“I'm not. I think seeing her again and going through what I went through gave me the closure I needed,” he says.

I have more things to smile about tonight. People are finding love; Busikhaya and Mazwakhe. Now the young brother is ready to pick up his life. The good can outweigh the bad, I just need to channel my emotions to the happy places.

“What are you looking for in a woman?” I ask, just like those people on Date My Family.

“An open-minded person, someone who loves challenges. She must be educated and know her self-worthy. I love a confident woman, she must know what she wants in life and fights to get it.”

“Do you think you'll find her?” I ask, his expectations are too much. Who's not scared of challenges? We all want to live a stress-free life.

“I'm not in a rush, I will find her,” he says.

“Why don't you sign up in those dating sites and explore?”

He bursts into laughter. I'm dead serious, Vuyiswa once showed me wedding pictures of people that met on some dating website.



“No ways Zano! Everyone is single on the internet, even you,” he says.

I'm single? Where? He narrows his eye at me and I burst into laughter as I remember my last Facebook post.

“I was joking,” I say.

“Does my brother know that you're Trevor Noah there on Facebook streets?”

I roll my eyes. Does he need to know everything? I deserve a piece of my life to be about me.

He gets off the chair and unplugs the charger.

“If Ngcwethi asks about it tell him you didn't see it,” he says.

“You're asking me to lie? What if he dreams about this?” He'd be angry if he heard me say this; “Don't mock my ancestors Zanamuhla.” I'm not allowed to joke about his gift of foreseeing things. He gets angry.

The door bursts open. We both turn to the door in

shock. Who kicks the door like an Apartheid police officer?

Ngcwethi???

Oh my gosh!

“Babe,” I scream in disbelief.

He charges towards Mnotho and grabs him by the collar. What the fuck is wrong with him?

“What are you doing inside my room?” he asks.

Mnotho is confused, so am I.

“I came to borrow the charger,” he says.

It's not the answer he wanted, he pushes him against the wall and grabs his neck. I've never seen him this angry.

“Mnotho what are you doing nomfazi wami?”

“I came to borrow the charger,” his voice is shaking and he's trying to free himself from his grip. Fear is written all over his eyes.

“Mnotho I'm going to ask you one last time. What are you doing in my room, in my absence?”

“I came to borrow the charger...I didn't know that you don't want me to come if you're not here.”

He rolls his fist. I scream in fear. He stops and aggressively pulls his arm towards the door.

“Here is the charger sisi,” Mnotho throws the charger back to me. His phone drops and cracks on the floor. What is happening? What did Mnotho do? Did I miss something? Maybe it's work related or one of those annoying sibling-fights.

He looked scared. I should go to Busikhaya's room and alert him before Ngcwethi hurts him.

I'm not knocking, but banging his door with my fists.

“Who is it?” he asks.

“Zanamuhla, please come and find Ngcwethi and Mnotho.”

The door opens. He steps out half naked.

“What is happening?” he asks.

This is why I'm waking him up, I want to know

what's happening too.

“I don't know, he just grabbed him out.”

“Okay, go to bed, I will find them.”

How am I supposed to sleep? I deserve an explanation of all this. This person has been gone for the whole week and the first thing he does when he comes back is attack his little brother?

He rushes towards Mnotho's rondavel. I follow behind him and stand a few feet away from the door.

Someone is bleeding, Busikhaya is screaming and demanding answers.

“Ngcwethi?” -Busikhaya.

“He was in my room with Zanamuhla.”

Okay this weird and for some reasons my blood is boiling.

“And?” -Busikhaya.

Silence.

“Ngcwethi why are you hitting Mnotho? What did he do?” His voice is firmer. Deputy parenting must be exhausting.

There's no answer.

“Mnotho go to my room,” Busikhaya says.

The door swings open. Mnotho walks out with his hand covering his nose. My heart sinks. I want to follow him and ask if he's okay. But I don't want to worsen whatever situation it is.

“Bafo what's wrong?” Busikhaya asks, a bit calm.

“History will repeat itself,” Ngcwethi says.

“What history?” Busikhaya asks what I'm also curious to know.

“The triangle that happened between you and Mazwakhe. Mazwakhe and Mndeni. Ndaba and Bab' Bonga. Mnotho will do the same thing to...” He's interrupted by Busikhaya's sudden question.

“What happened between Ndaba and Bab' Bonga?”

“Mnotho and Zanamuhla are going to betray me. I don't know how many times he's been with her while I

wasn't there and I don't know..." What the fuck is this? Is this a joke?

The door almost slams Busikhaya as I forcefully pushes it. I don't care that I was eavesdropping, how dare he speaks like this of me and his own brother!

"Repeat what you just said," I say, glaring at him.

"Zanamuhla, how long have you been standing here?" Busikhaya asks. His brother is standing against the wall like a rained chicken. It's too early for him to be like this, he was Batista just a minute ago.

"Long enough to hear what he was saying about me," I say.

He looks at Ngcwethi and exhales deeply.

"The same man I'm carrying a child for. The one who disappears without letting me know for weeks. The one I hug myself to sleep in his T-shirts every night and lights his stupid candles every afternoon. He's standing here today and accusing me of seducing his little brother."

He steps towards me, shaking his head in disagreement. Yey, he mustn't think about touching me because yey!

“That's not what I meant. The dream freaked me out and I found Mnotho there.” He brushes his face, somehow hoping that what he's saying will make sense. It doesn't, he's crazy.

“I don't care about you not trusting me, but your own brother Ngcwethi? How can you think of such? After everything he's been through, you're doing this to him?” I ask.

“Zano....” I lift my eyebrow and wait. He doesn't know what to say. He just stands in front of me and begs for mercy with his eyes.

“You think I'm sleeping with Mnotho?” Tears escape and flow down my face. Is this how he thinks of me when he's away? Why is he still with me if he doesn't trust me around his brothers?

“It was just a dream and I acted stupid.” It sounds more like he's convincing himself.

I nod my head and turn back to the door.

“What happened between Ndaba and Bab’ Bonga?” Busikhaya asks as I go through the door. He gets no response.

Heavy footsteps are thudding behind me. I walk as fast as my feet can carry me. I grab anything that belongs to me and throw it inside the suitcase.

“Zanamuhla I can explain this,” he says out of breath and blocks my hand from zipping up the suitcase.

“I want to leave,” I say.

“Where will you go?” he asks.

“Home,” I say and tears immediately flow out heavily. Who am I kidding? Which home? I don't have a home anymore. It collapsed the day we found out Mazwakhe's real identity. He's in his rondavel sleeping peacefully. He's home, they all are, except me. I have no where to go, Mamkhulu would host a braai if I go back home.

“It always happens Zanamuhla. It's not that I don't



trust you, I'm just scared. I don't want to lose you to someone I share the blood with," he says.

I climb on bed defeated. He doesn't know when to stop with his crazy accusations. Can't he see that he's breaking me?

"You had a crush on him?" I don't know if it's a question or revelation.

"So what?" My voice is faint, I can hardly hear it myself. If I had a mother this would be the moment I pick up the phone and cry to her. But I only have a brother, he's one of them and he told me so many times not to be here.

"I know you don't understand me and I don't blame you. But please know that I love you. If the ancestors can't prevent this thing from coming to me and Mnotho, then I'd rather lose my life than to watch my brother snacking on my wife."

"Are you being serious right now?" I want to scream so loud. He's apologizing and insisting on the same bullshit under that same breath.

"I'm sorry," he says.

“Please go back to where you're coming from. I want to sleep,” I say.

“Zano...”

“Ngcwethi!”

He takes a deep breath and turns to the door.

He stops and looks back at me.

“I love you Zolwandle.”

I pull the duvet over my head and close my teary eyes. Wow!

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Ngcwethi

He didn't sleep a wink. It wasn't just Zanamuhla's anger that kept him turning and tossing on bed, but the picture of his little brother's frightened face as well. It haunted him the whole night. He knows Mnotho, he's his brother and they've lived together since he was born, last night he was really scared.

He shouldn't have acted that way. That was immature of him.

And this thing of Ndaba and Bab' Bonga, Busikhaya won't let go until he explains what he really meant. But he can't tell them, it's not his place.

He didn't dream about that one, he saw it with the naked eye. His uncle pumping on his mother on Ndaba's bed. He was 17 and as a boy, his loyalties immediately lied with his father. He was going to tell him everything.

His father was working hard everyday, travelling around the country and making enemies along the way. He did it for them, so that they could have the best of everything.

He was angry at his uncle more than he was angry at his mother, because how do you betray your own brother? Your own blood? Didn't he learn from their fathers? He should've known better.

He was at the door of Ndaba's office with his hand clutched on the handle. He was going to tell him

right away. But he wasn't alone...he had a company of two naked women. One had his private part inside her mouth, his fingers were inserted under the second woman's G-string. It was traumatizing to see and right there, he knew it was a fucked up situation, from both sides. What comforted him was the fact that they were both happy when they were together. They grew up in a warm home, apart from what he knew; their dark secrets, they were love-birds and they raised them with love. He really didn't have to butt in their sexual affairs.

Busikhaya is the last person who should find out about this. He'll fight and that may affect their mother's health.

Mazwakhe walks in. He sees Ngcwethi wrapped on the couch and frowns. He didn't know he was back and why did he sleep here?

“Are you good?” he asks.

“Yeah,” Ngcwethi says. He can't tell Mazwakhe about his problems, otherwise he'll have to deal

with both the brother and sister.

After a moment MaMbonambi walks out of her bedroom wearing her gown and the doek wrapped on her head. She greets Mazwakhe and disappears in the kitchen without looking at Ngcwethi's direction.

She's never cared what the fights are about or who started first, if her youngest son is involved she takes his side with no questions asked. Nobody touches her Mnotho. Even Madoda was not allowed to touch him.

“Is Mnotho still asleep?” Ngcwethi asks, testing the water behind the counter.

“Why do you ask? You want to finish him off?” Her response silences him.

“I expected you to protect him. He's your baby brother, but no, you're turning him into your punching bag. Why don't you fight your peers?”

He exhales deeply.

“I had a dream MaMbonambi.”

She puts her hand up, she's not interested.

“You're scared of your wife but with my son you're John Cena.” She slams the fridge and goes to the boiling kettle. She's tempted to break the cup of his head. He pisses her off, but with Ngcwethi you tread carefully. She hasn't touched him in years, the last time was bad.

Ngcwethi whispers his apology and returns to the living room. His eyes are on the door, he's hoping that Zanamuhla would walk in and give him a chance to speak. But she's not coming, the table is laid for breakfast and everyone joins, except for her.

“Where's Zolwandle?” Mndeni asks.

“Ask that wrestler-husband of hers,” MaMbonambi says, pointing at Ngcwethi.

Mazwakhe turns to him, his face cold as an ice.

“Where is Hlahla?” he asks.

No response.

He pushes the chair and leaves the table to search for his sister. Hell will break loose if Ngcwethi

touched her.

“J ama,” Ngcwethi says, looking at Mnotho who hasn't looked at his direction since he joined the table.

“I'm sorry Bafo, I shouldn't have acted that way with you,” he says.

“Which way?” Mndeni asks, looking at both of them curiously.

Nobody answers him.

Ngcwethi stands up. He taps Mnotho's shoulders and asks him aside. They both disappear to Qophelo's room.

“Did they fight?” Mndeni asks.

“Sakhumndeni eat your food,” MaMbonambi orders and everyone goes silent.

Ngcwethi sits on Qophelo's bed and rubs his hands together. Mnotho stands by the door and stares at

him.

“You think I'd do that to you Ngcwethi?” He's still in disbelief.

Ngcwethi breathes out heavily and lifts his eyes to him.

“Now it's just you and I,” he says.

Obviously, Mnotho is lost. He's been thinking about this the whole night and he fails to understand why would his own brother accuse him of wanting his wife. He's never looked at any of their girlfriends that way and he'd never do such thing.

“We are the remaining two,” he explains.

“Remaining from what?” Mnotho frowns.

He takes another deep breath. The only way his brother is going to understand and forgive him is if he tells him the truth.

“Do you remember Gog' Nomalanga?” he asks.

Nobody can forget their own grandmother.

“Yes,” Mnotho says.



“Who was her husband?”

“Mkhulu,” he says.

“Is that all you remember about her?” Ngcwethi asks.

“Ngcwethi I don't care about the grandparents' triangles. Mkhul'omncane was a backstabber, why are we talking about them?” Mnotho says and shrugs his shoulders. He's not interested in old stories and they're none of his business.

“Do you know that MaMbonambi and Bab' Bonga are seeing each other?”

What? No! Ngcwethi is mad.

“Busikhaya took Nombuso from Mazwakhe. You still remember that?” he continues.

Everyone remembers, Qophelo is the reminder. Why is he trying to change the subject? Mnotho is only interested in Siyabonga and his mother. How can that be possible? His father's body has not even decomposed under the ground and his uncle is already warming his bed?

“Mndeni also found his way to Nandi,” Ngcwethi continues.

“Just go to the point and explain this Bab’ Bonga thing? What are you telling me Ngcwethi?” Mnotho is getting impatient.

“The question mark remains on two people,” Ngcwethi says, ignoring his curious questions.

“Me and you?” Mnotho asks with a frown on his face.

“Yes.” He nods his head.

“But I’ll never do that to you. What the fuck Bafo? I’d never do such a thing. I don’t even see Zanamuhla that way.”

“It has everything to do with the grime, not the feelings.”

He shakes his head. Grime or whatever, he’d never do such thing to his own brother. He’s nothing like....no, he’s a Mthembu, he’s like the rest of them.

“This has to be a curse. It doesn’t make any sense,” he says in defeat.

“We have to move past there, just like everyone,”  
Ngcwethi says.

Mnotho frowns. He's getting more confused.

“Meaning?” he asks.

“We have to find someone.”

“What???”

“You can't have Zanamuhla. It has to be someone  
else.”

Jesus Christ! Is this what this has boiled down to?  
This is ridiculous.

“Is it compulsory? What about Zanamuhla? Did you  
consider her feelings?” Mnotho asks.

No, he didn't. He only considered his feelings. The  
only thing he can't allow to happen is to have his  
own brother sleeping with his woman. His heart  
can't take that. Never!

“I'm older, it has to be you after me.” His voice  
shatters. He never thought he'd betray Zanamuhla.  
He's never looked at any woman after her. She's  
everything to him.

“Ngcwethi I'm not doing this,” Mnotho says and shakes his head.

“You think I want to do it? I love Zanamuhla, I only crave for her and she satisfies me in...”

“Jeez! Okay, spare me the details. Where are we going to find a woman? What are we going to say to her; “Hey we need a pu\$\$y to share, there's a grime curse in our family, our di€ks call one another?””  
He's pissed.

Ngcwethi ignores his tantrum and exhales deeply.

“It has to be someone from another province. If Zanamuhla ever finds out she'll leave me. I can't have that,” he says.

“I have a business trip to Johannesburg. You'll come along, I want to do this and get over with it. Think about what you're going to tell Zanamuhla at the moment, you haven't been home the whole week and Monday you have to leave again,” Mnotho says and walks out.

Ngcwethi buries his head in his hands and exhales. She's pregnant with their first child, she doesn't

deserve this. But he doesn't have a choice, this thing is too strong, there's no way him and Mnotho are going to be special and dodge it.

He shuts his eyes as he tries to imagine her face when he tells her that he's going to Johannesburg on Monday.

[11/19, 09:58] : Chapter Forty-Four

Zanamuhla

“Hlahla,” he yells somewhere in the living room.

I put my gown on and heads to the direction of his voice. He never enters here unless if it's important.

“Are you okay?” he asks as soon as his eyes land on me.

I brush my face, hoping there is no trace of last night's heavy tears, and nod my head.

My nod isn't enough to convince him of my words.

“Why didn't you come to the breakfast table?” he asks, still scanning me with his eyes.

“I'm not hungry,” I say.

He narrows his eyes.

Deep breath Zanamuhla! Brave face on!

“I'm not hungry, I'll eat later,” I say.

“You've been crying?” he asks.

I bite my lip and shake my head. The last thing I want to do is breaking down in front of him.

“Come here,” he says and opens his arm.

I bury my head on his chest, he covers me with his arms and asks me to talk to him. Words fail to come out and I just break down and cry.

“Did he hit you?” he asks.

I shake my head.

He releases a sigh of relief and keeps me in his embrace.

“I know it's not easy, you're pregnant and alone. But you're strong Hlahla and now you have to be even more strong for the baby,” he says.

I never thought I'd hear these words from him. I expected him to shout like he always does.

“Thank you,” I say and wipe my face.

“Qophelo will bring your breakfast here, you have to eat for the baby,” he says.

“You care?” I ask.

“You're my annoying sister, of course I care, and Sgubhu is umshana,” he says.

Urgh! I hate this name, it makes me feel like I'm carrying an ugly baby. Sgubhu? No, my baby will have a fancy name. I'm thinking of an English one so that I can look modest when I reprimand him or her in the mall.

Qophelo brings my food and I feel a bit better after eating. I change into my skirt and T-shirt and pack the clothes back to the wardrobe.

I feel him standing by the door, but I don't turn my head. I keep my attention on the pile of clothes in front of me.

“How was your night?” he asks.

No, I'm not going to be dramatic today, I'll surprise him with calmness.

“Good, and yours?” I ask.

“Not good,” he says and walks in.

He stands heavily behind me and stays silent for a few minutes. Then he clears his throat and sneaks his arms around my waist.

“Please look at me,” he says in a low whisper.

Deep breath! I let go of the dress I was holding and turn around to face him.

“First, I would like to apologize about last night. Things shouldn't have happened that way, sometimes I believe too much in the dreams and allow them to freak me out. I know you'll never do something like that, I was wrong on so many levels and I'm sorry,” he says.

His apology is heartfelt but it's too early for me to let things go. It will take time, I'm scared to even go out and face Mnotho. He really embarrassed me.



“I know that I'm not here as much as I should be and I'm not supporting you enough because of my duties. I apologize for that as well, you don't deserve it,” he says.

I open my mouth to speak but he shushes me and shakes his head. He's not done talking.

“I'm sorry I have this gift and you have to compete with it. I'm sorry I was born this complicated and I fell in love with you and trapped you in this complicated life.” He pulls me to his chest and wraps his arms around me. He's hurting, I can feel it.

“I was scared,” he says behind my neck.

I push his shoulders and cup his face in my hands.

“Ngcwethi I love you. No matter how long you're gone, I will wait for you. I'll never seek comfort elsewhere, let alone from your brother,” I say.

“I know sthandwa sami and I'm willing to do anything to show you how sorry I am,” he says.

“Anything?” He better think this through.

“Anything,” he repeats.

Oh boy, you're going to regret this.

“I will tell you later, don't go back on your word.”

He smiles and pecks my lips.

“I promise..I have missed you baby,” he says.

“Really?” I ask.

He bites his lip and looks at my lips with a naughty grin.

“Let's lock the doors,” he says.

I climb on bed and wait as he goes out to lock the front door. They'll think we're still trying to sort out our issues. I just hope Sangelihle doesn't come and demand to be let in.

“I was so cold without you,” he says and climbs on bed. I'm just lying on bed like a slaughtered chicken. He takes his clothes off and undresses me. I haven't seen a naked man in a long time, I run my hands over his chest and feel thousand butterflies in my tummy.

“My child is growing.” He brushes my tummy.

“How's she treating you?” he asks.

“Bad,” I say.

He kisses my lips and goes down to my navel and plants a soft kiss.

“I love the two of you more than I love myself,” he says and looks up to see my reaction.

“I know Ngcwethi, I've never doubted your love,” I say.

“Thank you..how did this one treat you? I hope she didn't miss me too much.” His hand is rubbing my mound. I was too angry to think about sex, but now that I see Jama here looking like an angry monster, I think I missed him and I can't wait for him to be inside me.

“I missed you,” I say.

He kisses me deeply and rubs my clit with more pressure. My body is heating up, I want him and I want him now.

“Ngcwethi please fuck me,” I'm begging.

He breaks the kiss and slides down to the floor.  
What now? We are way past the condom phase.

He pulls my legs and lifts them over his shoulders.  
His head is between my thighs, I'm already panting  
like I've just ran a long marathon. He spreads my  
folds and sweeps his tongue across my wet flesh.

His name escapes my lips. His tongue is untying  
every knots in my body, I'm riding through the  
waves of pleasure. He presses my clit with his  
tongue and digs my inside flesh with his fingers.

The wave breaks from my spinal cord and rides  
through my veins, all the way to my toes.

I'm snapped out of the cloud by his hard thrusts.  
He's staring at me with a still face, like he's  
recording every crazy facial expression that I make.

"I love you," I whisper.

He smiles and pulls out.

"Ngcwethi?" He mustn't dare, this is my di€k!

"Get down and hold on to the bed," he says.

"Huh?" I'm lost.

He pulls me off bed and turns me down on my stomach against it.

He pulls my legs apart and inserts himself from behind.

I'm the one moaning deeply like a man and he's screaming like a lady. Change of roles!

He pounds harder and cries louder.

“Zano please don't do this to me.”

I'm not really doing anything to him, I'm just lying on my stomach and giving him my behind. He's the one doing things to himself.

“Please baby!” He slams on me harder. I lose my grip and lie flatly on the bed. He freezes on my back and lets out a groan.

I let him spread it all inside and then remove myself before I throw up everything I ate earlier.

He gets on bed and buries his face on my arm, collecting his breath.

“What did you do to me?” he murmurs with his face turned down.

“You did everything to yourself,” I say.

He chuckles and looks up. He looks like a sexy mess. He's officially out of the game. Right now I'd say jump and he'd ask- how high boss lady.

“You'll kill your own husband one day,” he says.

“Husband?” I lift my eyebrow.

“Yes, wifey.”

I roll my eyes and laugh.

“Sthandwa sami,” he says in a different tone.

I just stare at him and wait for what's coming.

“Mnotho is meeting up with some farmers in Caltorn Centre.” He links his hand on mine and casts his eyes down to my chest.

“He's leaving Monday and coming back on Wednesday. I would like to go with him and support him. Only if it's okay with you, I know that I haven't been around in...” I smile and lift his chin up. I want him and Mnotho to work things out and I know some time together would be a perfect chance for them to reconnect.

“You can go,” I say.

He frowns.

“You won't be angry?”

“Yes,” I say.

“Why this good mood?” He smirks and brushes my thigh.

“Well fed children are the happiest,” I say.

He bursts into laughter.

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\*\*\*Sunnyside Park Hotel\*\*\*

Mnotho

He understands his brother's fear, Zanamuhla means everything to him and if doing this is going to put him at ease, then he'll gladly do it. But it's not his responsibility to make sure that their plan

comes together.

He leaves his bag on the floor of his hotel room and goes to the balcony to find Ngcwethi. He said someone who knows someone had promised to find the girl. It'll be easy, they're miles away from home, their paths will never cross with this girl, she'll name her price and they'll all go their separate ways.

“She's on her way,” Ngcwethi says and sighs heavily.

For a moment Mnotho worries. Ngcwethi has always made it clear what sex means to him. It's more than just a physical interaction, from the young age, before he even discovered his gift, he never fooled around with girls.

“Do you think you can do it?” Mnotho asks.

“I have to do it,” he says and shrugs his shoulders.

“Is she clean?” Mnotho asks. They have to go flesh to flesh with this person, he doesn't take chances with his health.



“Yes, they did all the tests,” he says. He already feels terrible about what they're about to do to her and how he might do it.

“I'm going to grab a few things, I'll come back later. Tell her to wait in my room when you're done,” Mnotho says. The last thing he wants to witness is his brother having sex with the prostitute or whatever she's labelled as.

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Ngcwethi

He's standing next to the bed with his hands tucked inside his pockets. His stare is intimidating but she goes ahead and strips her clothes off.

“Lie on bed,” he orders and unbuttons his shirt. He doesn't want to do this. Why did she agree? She's making him betray his wife. He's angry and for the wrong reasons he's angry at her.

She climbs on bed and lies on her back. He stands

where he was standing and massages his shaft with his eyes closed.

This is not what she expected. They said some people needed a girl for the night, two rich people who can make her dreams come true, and she thought she was coming to satisfy their needs. But it doesn't look like this man here has any sort of need for her body.

His shaft springs out and hardens. He gets on bed and kneels between her legs. He pours lube on his hand and rubs on her vulva.

He buries his head over her neck and fingers her. She feels the heat and brushes his back. He freezes and looks up to her.

She stops immediately. Nobody explained the do's and don's to her. She thought it would be normal sex, but it's not.

He inserts himself slowly and lifts his brown eyes to

her face. When she flinches, he pauses until her body relaxes again, then he pushes in until he completely fits in.

She's tight and warm. Moaning on top of her was not in his plans but he can't help it. The least he could do right now is to not kiss her. That would be way too intimate. So, he bites the side of her neck and thrusts as fast as he can.

“Zano...” He groans and explodes inside her.

Silence.

“Can I go drink water?” she asks after an awkward moment of silence.

He rolls to the other side and releases a sigh.

“Room 102, he'll find you there,” he tells her.

She hesitantly nods her head and walks away.

After a moment of exercising his breaths he finally gets off bed. He takes his phone and drags himself to the bathroom.

It rings three times before she answers.

“Mmmm!”

“Are you eating?” he asks.

“Hmmm,” she says.

He smiles and stand in front of the mirror. When his eyes meet the reflection of his naked body his smile disappears.

“I’ll never love anyone the way I love you my Zano,” he says.

She swallows whatever she had in her mouth and asks if he's okay.

“I will see you tomorrow,” he says.

“Tomorrow?” She expected him home on Thursday or Friday morning.

“Yes, I’m coming back to you.”

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Mnotho

He goes to Ngcwethi's room to check on him and finds him lying on his back and staring up at the ceiling.

“Did she arrive?” he asks.

“She's waiting for you.”

He wants to ask how it went but looking at his face he can tell that he's drowning in sorrow.

“I will leave in the morning,” Ngcwethi says before he walks out.

He just nods his head and walks out. He expected this, Ngcwethi wasn't going to handle what he proposed and if he continues like this Zanamuhla will find out.

He pushes the door of his room and walks in with his jacket in his hands.

The girl is lying on the bed with her face down.

A frown grows on his face. He hasn't seen her face

but she's definitely not what he had in mind. He thought of some urban sl¥t with a Peruvian weave, long nails and thick mud of make-up on her face. Someone slim and tall. Maybe a bit lighter in complexion.

He stands by the bed and clears his throat.

“Hello there,” he says.

She was just dozing off, when she hears the strange voice she jumps up and falls off bed. She bumps her hips against the floor and groans in pain.

“Are you okay?” he asks and rushes to her.

She dusts herself up and nods her head to put him at ease.

“Are you tired already?” he asks, playfully.

She nervously lifts her beady eyes to him. His world halts to a stop. He blinks a numerous times and looks at her again. This can't be a human being! No one can be this beautiful.

His brain eventually unfreezes, his senses crawl back in and untie his tongue.

“What's your name?” he asks.

“Khuthadzo,” she says.

He frowns. What kind of name is that?

“Khuthazo?” he pronounces it in his Zulu accent.

She smiles, revealing a set of white teeth that have a narrow gap at the front. One dimple crinkles on her cheeks and she rubs her thick lips to refrain from her childish grin.

“Just say Khuthi,” she says.

He nods his head and inhales a silent breath. He wants to touch her dark-chocolate skin to feel if what he sees is real but he doesn't have the guts.

Damn, where are his manners?

“I'm Mnotho Mthembu,” he says and pulls out his hand for a handshake.

He shouldn't have! She just touched his hand and he's not breathing. Her soft skin rubbing against his has sent a trail of tingles throughout his body.

“Khuthi,” her name escapes his lips and he freezes

when she lifts her eyes to him.

He clears his dry throat.

“What do you want us to do?”

Her thin eyebrows snap together. What kind of a question is this? He knows exactly what they have to do.

“I don't want to waste your time,” she says.

Oh snap! What the fuck is wrong with him?

“Should I get you something to drink first?” he asks.

“If you don't mind,” she says, a bit confused.

He rushes out and comes back with two glasses of wine.

She's more confused as he sits on bed with the glass in his hand and stares at her like she's a foreign creature that dropped from Mars.

“How old are you?” he asks.

She didn't expect this question.



“Ummm..21,” she says and looks at him, waiting for the next question that's rising from his frown.

“So young...” he says that and stops. She already knows what he's thinking and she wishes to explain to him that she's not what he's thinking. But why does it matter? He's just a stranger looking for a hole to release himself into for the night. He'll go back to his flashy life and forget about the Vhenda poor girl he fucked once.

“My brother is leaving tomorrow. Do you mind fitting me in your schedule and accompanying me to the event on Wednesday night?” he asks.

She chokes on her drink. Did he say event? An event of people like him? That's not happening.

“Khuthazo please,” he says and his accent sends her into a fit of laughter.

“Khuthi, please stick to that,” she says, shaking her head.

“I'm Zulu and I don't have the gap to help me pronounce- dzo,” he says.

“Are you serious?” She covers her mouth and giggles.

He watches her with the corners of his lips curving up. Ngcwethi may leave but he's not going anywhere. Not even on Thursday. He'll stay here until he learns to pronounce her name properly. Of course, that's just his lame excuse, when he leaves the place his heart will stay behind and he wants to make sure that it'll be safe with her.

[11/19, 09:59] : Chapter Forty Five

Nontobeko

I bite my finger and look at the table I just laid. The napkins shouldn't be folded this way. I also need to change the jug and wipe these chairs one more time.

I feel him walking behind me. He stops a few feet away from me and I know that he's laughing. That's what he's been doing the whole evening. He thinks

that I'm crazy and dramatic.

“They're just kids, you know,” he says.

“Mshibe leave me alone,” I say and walk around the table to fix the cloth. They could be here any minute from now. From what I've heard the daughter is very demanding and she gets everything that she wants. And the son is awkwardly quiet and he's living with the void of his mother. I don't want them to think that I'm trying to replace her. I know how kids can be.

“They won't even notice these new plates,” he says.

He wasn't this annoying when he was still living with me. It must be those shots he kept drinking earlier. He's acting a bit funny, laughing at everything and openly talking about his siblings.

“When are you bringing the girls over?” I ask.

“Not anytime soon, I don't want you to break your back trying to please them,” he says.

I roll my eyes and carry on with my arrangements. He's been here since yesterday, he says he got a

day off. I don't even know where he works or lives, and I think not knowing is good for my mental health. Whatever shit he's involved in is shady and he's too young for it. Busikhaya laughed when I proposed that we take him to university.

There's a car pulling up outside. It must be them. Mshibe grabs the bottle from the bar fridge and disappears. I go to the door and open.

He's walking at the front with his princess holding his hand. The boy is following behind them, occupied by something in his hand. I stand on the same spot with my hand on the handle. I don't want to be too forward.

He smiles, grabs my waist and pulls me inside.

“You look beautiful,” he compliments and kisses the side of my face. Someone clears his throat behind us. His son.

He turns his head to him with a wide grin plastered on his face.

“What did I tell you?” he asks. I'm so curious to find out what they talked about.

“Baba you need to act your age,” the son says and laughs.

“I'm acting my age.” He joins into the laughter. I guess it's the father&son inside joke, whatever they're laughing at.

The girl sits next to him. The boy sits on my side. He pours a glass of juice and passes it to her. Should I pour for the boy as well? I've never been a parent in my life.

“Where's Mshibe?” he asks, scanning the room with his eyes.

“Somewhere, drinking,” I say.

He nods his head and looks at both his children. Introduction time! I silently take in a deep breath and wait for him to speak.

“Qophelo..Sangelihle..meet Nontobeko Maseko...” He's not done but the princess lifts her eyes to me.

“Ya Nontobeko Maseko.”

He clears his throat and brushes her head. Bathong, this child just broke the biggest rule of a black society and he's just brushing her head like he broke the ice-cream cone.

“You won't call her by name Sangelihle, but if someone asks you who your mother is, you'll tell them that your mother is Nontobeko Maseko and the other one is with the angels. But you'll refer to her as Ma. Understand?”

She nods her head and rephrases her greeting.

“Hello Mama,” she says.

Now this is my girl. She's so cute by the way, my ovaries are dancing. If I ever get a child may it be a girl.

He pecks her cheek and turns his attention to Qophelo who's already helping himself with the meat.

“Won't you greet Jama?” he asks.

He swallows fast and lifts his head to me. I can't help the smile breaking from my face. These little

human beings are his world and for me to perfectly fit into it I have to accept and love them as if they're my own.

“Hello Ma,” he says and wipes his mouth with the back of his hand.

“Use the napkin, Qophelo!” I say in awe.

Busikhaya shakes his head and gives me a funny look.

“He loves food. I don't know who he took after.”

“It's weird of you not to know,” I say.

“Meaning?” he asks with a slight frown.

“Must I dish?”

His eyes immediately go over the dishes and I know that he wants every damn thing that's on this table. I'm yet to officially meet Mazwakhe, but this should answer who Qophelo took after with his big appetite.

I freaked out for nothing. Ms hibe was right, these are just kids and by the look of things, Qophelo

already knew about me and accepted that I'm in his father's life. The princess is not bothered, she's now watching cartoons as if she's been here before.

“I didn't know this soft side of yours,” I say as I join him on the balcony. He puffs his cigarette for the last time and then throws the remaining piece on the floor and steps on it with his foot. We always fight about this but today I let it slide. I'm in a good mood.

“Sometimes they drive me crazy but every moment with them is a blessing,” he says.

“Baby girls are cute,” words escape my mouth.

The naughty smile on his face! He mustn't dare.

“Not now Busikhaya hawu! In future I want to have a daughter who'll look like me,” I say before ideas start filling his head.

“I always open my eyes, you know that,” he says and smirks.

He's really too young to believe in those things.

“So, I talked to my elders,” he says and steals a



glance at my confused face.

“They’ll come after Ngcwethi’s wedding.”

What?! That’s in less than a month.

“So soon Busikhaya?” I ask.

“I need you home Ntobe.”

“What about my company? My life is...” He pulls me into his arms and shuts me up with a sloppy kiss.

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Zanamuhla

When I turn to the other side my face bumps on a hard body. With my eyes closed, I lift my hand up and it touches a human. My eyes open immediately, my nerves settle back into places when I meet his stare widely fixed on me.

“Ngcwethi?” I rub my eyes and look at him carefully. I thought he was no longer coming.

“When did you get home?” I ask.

“Around 23h15,” he says.

I nod my head and keep my eyes on him. Yes, I hear that he arrived when I was already asleep and he did himself a favour by not waking me up. But why is he up, with the lights on, and staring at me?

“Is everything okay?” I ask.

“I love you Zanamuhla.”

That's not what I asked but I smile and wrap my arms around him. He's tense. I hope nothing happened between him and Mnotho in Johannesburg.

“It's 3am now,” he says.

“Really? I should get more sleep.”

“No. I want us to go somewhere.”

“At this time?” I ask with my eyes widened. He just said it himself that it's still at night; 3am.

“Yes, please,” he says.

I hate how creepy he is. Johannesburg has changed him already. He didn't even spend two full days there and he's already dodgy.

“Okay fine, but before we go...” I climb on top of him and lie on his chest. I don't know when he'll leave again and for how long, every minute that we spend together should count.

“Zanamuhla wait,” he says and tenderly puts me at the side of the bed. Is he rejecting me? The whole me!

“What's going on?” I can't control how bruised my voice sounds.

“I'm just tired sthandwa sami.”

“Oh, okay.”

He places his hand on my cheek. I put a fake smile on and look into his haunted eyes. I know him like the back of my hand, something is bothering him. He doesn't confide in me that much and I understand because he's who he is. Some things

have to stay between him and his soul. I just hope it's not something that can end up spiritually destroying him. I hate to see him sad.

“I love you Ngcwethi,” I say.

He shuts his eyes as if my words bring him intense pain and drops his head on my chest. I kiss the top of his head and wrap my arms around his shoulders.

“I'm so sorry,” he says, his voice almost inaudible.

“I understand babe. It's fine.”

He lifts his head up slowly and looks at me. His teeth have captured his quivering lower lip, but nothing can capture nor prevent his eyes from tearing.

“I'm sorry,” he whispers before he drops his head on my chest again. Then his chest starts bouncing and I realize that something more, way too deep for me, is eating him up.

“Ngcwethi what's going on?” My own voice is breaking. Before I even know his pain I'm able to share it with him. My nightie is soaked on my chest,

now he's crying openly, even though his head is still pressed against my chest.

Forty minutes later, he comes out of the bathroom and puts his jacket on. I haven't been told where we are going so early in the morning or the reason of his earlier breakdown. All that matters is that his mood has improved a little bit. He's able to look at me and smile genuinely.

“Are you not going to tell me where we are going?” I ask as we join the highway.

“We're going to Durban,” he says.

“For what?” My eyes widen. That's miles away, and why wasn't I told earlier? I would've carried some money to buy R7 Denim jeans and R2.50 Nike sneakers there.

“For breakfast.”

Get out of here! We are travelling all this distance to go and eat?

“Ngcwethi I'm serious. Why are we going to Durban

at this time?” I ask.

He glances at me with the ghost of a smile and focuses on the road without answering. I let out a sigh and lean back on my seat.

Maybe I would've enjoyed this trip if he gave me the morning glory. But right now I'm salty, anxious and for some reasons, still horny.

“What are you doing?” His eyes are fixed on the road, how did he see me?

“I ust fixing my skirt,” I say.

“By squeezing your thighs like that? And you're doing it in front of me to punish me.”

“You said you were tired, what's your problem with me helping myself?” I snap.

“I can't do anything to you. I'm undergoing a certain...” Oh gosh! I forget his terms and conditions. Now I feel bad for holding a grudge against his di€k. But he should've told me earlier.

“I'm sorry,” I mumble under my breath.

He doesn't say anything. I let a few minutes pass and then do it again. It feels really good, almost as good as him. However I don't reach the breaking point, he keeps stealing glances at me and I have to sit properly when he does.

Why are we parked here, by the sea? I hope he didn't bring me here to drown me. It's so early and freezing cold. Only white people enjoy these type of conditions. They're already up and down in their shorts and vests.

“Where are we? And what are we doing here?” I ask.

“Durban harbour, for the sunrise cruise. It's only for thirty minutes then we'll head to our destination.”

Bathong! I thought this was our destination. Why is he speaking like we're in this together? I have no freakin' clue what's going on here.

“I want to stay a few minutes in the water before the boat sails off,” he says and strips his t-shirt off. Am I crazy for feeling cold? Or maybe my skin is weak. How is it possible for someone to think about

swimming in this condition?

He takes something out of his trouser pocket and rubs it on his palms. He looks at me, as if to memorize my spot, and then rushes towards the water. Do even people swim here? I don't think it's allowed.

He dives into the water right in front of my eyes and disappears under the waves. I'm trying not to panic, Ngcwethi is not a child, he knows how to swim, right? But minutes pass and he's nowhere on the surface. People who saw him are starting to gather in circles and discussing it under their breaths.

He wouldn't drown and leave me here! I start pacing around and reciting a silent prayer.

I hear murmurs and lift my head up. It's him walking towards me, his wet feet socked up with sand and his yummy body dripping in water.

“You look...” Fuck him. I look like what? He scared the crap out of me!

“Are we going to the boat or what?” I snap.



Instead of answering me the idiot lifts me up and spins me around. I cannot keep up with his mood. One moment he's drowning in sorrow and next, he's over the moon like Donald.

“You'll see the sun rising while you're in the ocean. It's the most beautiful thing ever, I want us to stand bla bla bla...” I don't care about the rising sun and oceans. It doesn't tickle my fancy, I'm only doing this because he's already booked it and he didn't give me much of a choice.

“As long as there's enough food,” I say.

“I wouldn't starve my child,” he says.

I turn and look at him with my eyebrows lifted.

“And you'd starve me?” I ask. I cannot believe that I'm competing with an unborn child. I'm definitely not matured enough for motherhood.

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I enjoyed the boat cruise thing, even though it was a bit cold for me and I kept thinking about the Titanic

saga. The South African version one, me being Rose and him being Jack and drowning while trying to save me. Oh gosh, it would've been a disaster.

Now we're in a car dealership; Toyota Durban. I'm trying not to make this trip be about me eating everything that my cravings drool on, but wow, the thought of fresh mutton pie.

“Babe, why don't you drive me to Pie-City and then you do your things here while I'm waiting there?” I ask.

“You're hungry again?”

What does he mean ‘again’? What is ‘again’ doing in his sentence? Is he trying to insult me?

“No, you can't Zano. You have to...we'll go after we're done here. I swear it'll be fast,” he says.

Sigh!

A white man welcomes us from the entrance. By the look of things him and Ngcwethi know each other

very well. I follow behind them, minding my own business. I really don't care about cars, they're too expensive, as if they drive themselves and they don't need petrol.

“Babe,” he calls and taps my shoulder.

Yawn!

“Huh?”

He frowns. I hate this and he knows it.

“What?” I snap and the white man chuckles.

“In front of us,” he says.

I follow his eyes and see a white Toyota Rav4 with my name, the Mndeni one, written on the plate:  
Zolwandle-ZN

“Why does it have my name?” I ask him.

“Because it's yours,” he says and pops his joints with his lip tightly pressed between his teeth.

“It's mine?” I ask. Why on earth would I have a car? Don't they need licence in South Africa nowadays? If I have my own car who's going to bother people

for lifts and shout for her change in the taxis?

“I know that no material and no amount of money can measure the love that I have for you. I didn't buy you this car because I can, I bought it because everything I do is for you. I wake up everyday and go to work for you and my family. You're the reason why I wake up wearing a smile everyday,” he says.

I'm not a witness of that smile. Maybe it's an internal one. Most of the times I wake up next to a bomb waiting to explode.

“I don't know how to drive,” I say.

“That's not a problem. You cannot drive while you're pregnant anyway. You'll have a driver and when you're back to normal you'll go to the driving school.”

Oh, I'm not normal now?

“Maybe you need to step closer mam, it's your car,” the white man breaks our stare.

My car? Oh, yes. I need to check it out. Imagine not being able to recognize your own car in the parking

lot.

“The keys,” Ngcwethi says behind me.

I turn back to them. The white man hands them over with a smirk on his face.

I press the button and there's a beep sound. I let out a scream as it starts to sink in that me, Zanamuhla Ngwane, owns a whole damn car.

The leather inside smells new and fresh. I need those shady taxi stickers; “I Like Your Perm But Not On My Window.” Passengers are exhausting, honestly I can't deal with them.

I roll down the window. He's standing where I left him with his hands tucked in his pocket and a huge smile plastering his face.

“Do you want a lift?” I ask.

“Where are we going?”

Really? He knows that I can't drive.

“No where,” I say.

He walks towards the car and turns to the passenger's front door.

“At the back,” I yell.

He shakes his head and goes to the back and hops inside.

“Put a seatbelt on, please,” I say.

“Lord, I'm going to regret this,” he mumbles while fastening the belt. He's going to get out if he disrespects me in my own car.

“Okay, we're leaving,” I say and turn the key. The engine comes alive. My feet should be pressed somewhere on these pedals under here.

“Zanamuhla! No! No! No!”

[11/19, 09:59] : Ngcwethi Her Warrior

Chapter Forty Six

Zanamuhla

I got a call from Vuyiswa telling me that Nkanyiso has gone AWOL on her. The dude was supposed to go with her to Durban to buy the blankets for umabo. Now I have to call that dark man who never smiles that Ngcwethi hired to drive me and ask him to drive me to the Ngwanes.

By now I should be home and making sure that everything is ready for the wedding, we are only three weeks away, but Ngcwethi is not taking chances with his baby. Even Mazwakhe advised me to only go there a few days before the wedding. It's too risky for a pregnant woman to be around people who shamelessly want her dead. Honestly I cannot wait to be a Mthembu by law. God knows that I'll never set my foot on their premises again.

Ngcwethi's car pulls up below the yard as I dress up to go to the Ngwanes. He's starting to overdo this husbanding thing. He walks in and throws gift bags on the bed. He passes a bunch of flowers to me and

like those women on *Bold & The Beautiful*, I smell them with my eyes closed and then kiss his cheek.

“Thank you sthandwa sami. I couldn't have asked for a better man,” I say.

“That's because you're an amazing woman. Why are you dressing up? Where are you taking me?”

You know, I've never taken him anywhere. Before I leave for the Ngwanes, before the wedding, I should organize a little romantic getaway with his money and pamper him. I have to ask the busy Vuyiswa to book me into one of those expensive restaurants she goes to and then we'll go to a spa later. I'm not sure if he'll understand the massage things but if I put my foot down he'll do it. I also want those extravagant happy couple pictures on my phone.

“Nkanyiso switched off his phone. He was supposed to go with Vuyiswa to Durban to buy the blankets for umabo,” I say.

“Why don't they buy them in the free-market here in our town?” he asks.

“Because they're cheap in Durban,” I say. It seems



like he forgets how many ancestors of his family I'm expected to buy blankets for. Even his grandmother's great-grandmother was on the list. Then there's that grandfather's brother who had three wives and each wife had her own brood of children. And the endless list of cousins! I have to give it to Nkanyiso, he did well by requesting a crazy amount of lobola. However, he needs to put that amount into good use. As it is his duty, I want everything done properly for my wedding.

“Are you going to leave without saying goodbye?” He's staring at me through the reflection on the mirror. I tie the scarf around my head and turn to him.

“What do you mean? I'm coming back before the day even ends,” I say.

“Open the bag and see what I got you.”

Oh! I'm not being ungrateful or anything, but lately it's been gifts everyday and I've eventually grown out of the “yeey” phase.

I open the first bag and find a neck piece. It's

weighs a bit heavy so I guess it's made of real diamonds.

“Thank you J ama, I love it,” I say and go to the next bag. He's staring at me with his arms folded. It must be nice being a provider, slash surpriser.

“And then?” It's a box written Spanx.

He breaks a brief chuckle and steps closer to me.

“You bought this?” I ask in awe. It's a bit weird, he bought me a set of underwear.

“You'll put them on for me tonight,” I'm not sure if he's telling me or asking.

“Tonight?” I ask.

“We're going somewhere private. It would be just you and I, and our little one..the whole night.”

Gosh, the price is ridiculous. Will the panty take itself off when I pee and wipe me afterwards? This man is suddenly careless with the money.

“How much are you willing to spend on me?” I ask. It's been one thing after another. If he continues like this we'll turn poor before we even go to our

honeymoon.

Honeymoon? He has never mentioned it.

“Every cent that I have. Which panty are you wearing today?” I push his hands off me and move far from him. I don't want this thing of us shagging during the day, with people scattered on the yard, to become a habit.

“I'm in a hurry Ngcwethi,” I say.

“I only want to look. I swear I won't touch,” he says and licks his lower lip.

“You're lying,” I say and grab my handbag from the bedside pedestal and hurry towards the door.

He grabs my arm just as I'm about to walk out through the front door. Mazwakhe is standing with Mnotho next to the van parked in the yard. They're with two other men that I assume work at the farm.

I catch a glimpse of Mazwakhe's furrowed face before I'm snatched back inside the house. He shuts the door and pins me against the wall.

“Why are you running?” he asks and unzips my

jacket and runs his hands over my swollen boobs.

“Ngcwethi I have to go and find Nkanyiso. Vuyiswa is waiting for him,” I say and try to push him off.

What is wrong with him? What worries me the most is the fact that my brother has a clear understanding of what's happening inside this house. Knowing how he is, I'm sure that he's about to throw up where he is. It's okay for him to give Vuyiswa orgasms, but my cookie should be sealed regardless of the fact that I'm about to get married.

“I'll transfer her the money for the blankets, you don't have to go there,” he says.

“Oh, because you're rich?” I ask, a bit warmed up. What makes him think it's okay to throw his money to save every situation? Money is not everything, sometimes it's about allowing people to take responsibility for their actions. I can't let Nkanyiso get away with this.

“No, because I want to spend this time with you,” he says and rubs his lips together anxiously.

“I want to confront him babe, he can't accept my

lobola and then hide from the responsibilities that come with it.”

“We'll go there...” His hungry eyes search mine. I'm slowly giving in to his demands. “Please take care of me first. I haven't touched MaNgwane since...” My eyes widen.

“Since when?” I ask. He mustn't dare pretend as if I starve him. This whole week has been about him and his greedy sexual needs.

He chuckles and links his forehead on mine.

“Okay, since this morning. But I can't get enough of you sthandwa sami. Umnandi kanjani nje.”

I roll my eyes first and then kiss him. He strips his shirt off and pulls me towards the bedroom. His energy says it all, I'm about to be ripped apart again.

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We are at the Ngwanes. It's around six at noon and all the lights are turned off. It's cloudy today, it turned dark as soon as the sun set.

“Is anybody home?” I yell in front of Mamkhulu’s rondavel.

There's some movement inside. Ngcwethi steps back, I guess he's not going inside.

“Who is that?” The door opens. It's actually bright inside the house, the TV is playing.

“It's me, Zanamuhla,” I say.

“Oh, come in.”

That was a bit strange. She didn't even ask what I want. The Mamkhulu I know would've kept me outside in the cold for solid five minutes just to grill me with unnecessary questions.

SABC 1? I thought they were now fans of Mzansi Magic and channels like that.

“Sanibona,” I ask and look around for a spot to sit.

“Zanamuhla,” – is the acknowledgement that I get.

Nothing has changed that much in their attitude.

“Where is Nkanyiso?” I ask.

“He didn't come back from work,” Mamkhulu replies.

I didn't know that he finally realized his age and looked for a job like his peers. Bravo, father's son!

“Where does he work?” I ask.

“He went to fix Nxumalo's kraal.”

Errr? The whole Nkanyiso Ngwane goes around, fixing people's kraals. Where did money go? And where is Zandile's weave? Why is she so quiet today? DSTV? Why do I see that cheap, rusty areal sitting on top of the TV? Don't they connect the decoder and punch that lovely, tall remote?

“He was supposed to take Vuyiswa to Durban to buy blankets for umabo,” I say and wait for the answer as they start looking at each other.

“I also sent him a quote for the kist and he never responded,” I say.

Finally, Mamkhulu clears her throat and looks at my direction. I don't see the bossy-ass first wife in her.

“Zanamuhla the truth is, we sold most of the cows and renewed the furniture. You know how people

gossip around here, we were tired of being a laughing stock. Zandile also wanted to get her drivers license, it wasn't easy as we thought. She kept failing her learner's test and Khethile was also trying to pursue her computer studies. The money ran out before we could save enough for your wedding.”

Is this a joke? They could've done anything they wanted with the money, but only AFTER the wedding preparations were done and dusted.

“What about inkomo yomqhoyiso?” I ask.

Noooo! They mustn't dare look at each other like that!

“Mamkhulu?” I raise my voice and snap her attention immediately.

“Nkanyiso was meant to replace it but things are not coming together,” she says.

I feel something warm running down my cheeks. How can they do this to me? I would've let Ngcwethi buy the blankets and maybe I would've managed to buy the kist myself. But the cow should come from



them. It should be a Ngwane cow, slaughtered to marry off a Ngwane daughter. Ngcwethi cannot help, and if Nkanyiso's job is fixing people's kraals, he won't afford a cow in a space of three weeks.

I don't know when Ngcwethi walked in. I have my face buried in my hands when his voice breaks in.

“Mbuyazi,” he greets.

Because of the sticky circumstances they greet him back and offer him a chair to sit. But he remains on his feet and calls my name.

“Let's go,” he says.

I drag myself up and walk out.

He follows behind me silently and opens the car door for me.

“What did they do?” he asks once he's seated.

“They spent all the money and sold all the cows. Even the cow to marry me off, everything Ngcwethi!”

“Don't cry sthandwa sami,” he says, pulling my hand.

“How Ngcwethi? They keep ruining my life!”

“Calm down, I'll talk to Mazwakhe. He's your brother, it wouldn't be a problem if he bought the cow. We're getting married Zanamuhla, come hell or high water, you'll be Mrs Mthembu.”

“What if Mazwakhe can't afford it? He just started working,” I ask.

“He's Madoda's son, ‘can't afford’- doesn't exist in his vocabulary.”

Really now? He's going to brag about his father's money. But I'm grateful to that hot-headed, corrupt black farmer.

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Ngcwethi

Mazwakhe wasn't going to let his sister's wedding be postponed. He went to one of the farmers in

association with Jama's and bought the fattest cow in the farm.

His heart was a bit broken when he saw the condition the Ngwanes were living under. But they had made it clear to him that he belonged where his blood ran. So, he delivered the cow and had a few words with Nkanyiso, who he still considers as a little brother deep down in his heart, and then left.

It's five days away from the wedding and Zanamuhla is leaving soon. Ngcwethi knows that she doesn't really believe in traditional medicines and stuff like that, even though she supports him in everything he does. But this time there's his baby involved, he cannot let her go to those people without any protection.

He kicks off his shoes in front a door with a huge black cross drawn on it.

“Ngena,” a frail voice calls from the inside.

He crawls in with his knees and his hands clasped together and sits with his legs crossed on the small

reedmat laid on the floor.

“Mkhulu,” he chants and bows his head.

The man chuckles and lights the candles in front of him.

“Is it the wife already?” he asks after lighting the last one and looks up at Ngcwethi.

“Yes, it's hard staying away from her.” He's grinning from ear to ear at the mention of his Zanamuhla.

The man shakes his head with a smile on his face.

“So, what do you want?” he asks.

“Something to keep her safe while she's away. I didn't want to give her something from my own pot, you know what they say,” Ngcwethi says and they both share a chuckle.

Then the man throws his stones in front of the lit candles, the mood immediately intensifies.

“Your grandmother is still isolated from the family,” he says.

Ngcwethi takes a deep breath. This is not what he

came here for. Those issues are too deep for any of them. He has ignored them this long and he is not willing to touch them.

“There's a cleansing that needs to be done. Lokhu kungcola has passed down to two more generations and your grandfather is pissed. And he cannot do anything to save this family from breaking apart, because this family owes him an apology,” the man says.

Ngcwethi shakes his head. He can't do this. Not before his wedding. This is too complicated for him, even his father never bothered to solve it. It's not his place.

“Mkhulu can we talk about this later?” he asks.

“Why later? You want the family to tear apart first before you fix things. Even this boy...” The man points at the tiny stone peaking between bigger ones. It must be Qophelo. “This one will suffer the doings of his fathers and mother. That child your wife is carrying will turn against your youngest brother's children and it will be a massacre.”

Mnotho's children and his child? No, he cannot allow that to happen. They're doing all this; working hard, taking wives and building their houses in the village, so that they can build a close-knit Mthembu clan.

“What should I do?” he asks.

“Every woman that has had a private encounter with more than one man in the family should bring a white goat at the presence of the Mthembu elders and appease.”

It's not complicated as he thought, except that he has to burst MaMbonambi's secrets. But he's not compromising with the next generation of the Mthembus. She'll have to take responsibility of her actions as everybody else.

“What about those who have passed on?” he asks

“Their families will stand in for them,” the man says.

He nods his head and watches as his 'Mkhulu' pokes the stones with a wide grin on his face.

“What do you see?” he asks.

“The tough times and good times lying ahead. This child has no sense of timing at all,” the man says, still grinning like a Cheshire cat.

Whatever he sees there Ngcwethi doesn't want to find out. The only thing he needs to do is to go home, call an urgent family meeting with only his brothers and mother, and break the news to them.

This cleansing ceremony has to be done before his wedding. Nombuso's family have to stand in for her and bring the requested white goat. His uncle will know where to find their grandmother's relatives and they'll do the same.

Nandi? Mndeni has to make up his mind, if he's going to have a future with her she'll also need to take part in the ceremony.

And then his mother, hopefully Busikhaya won't kill anyone when he finds out.

But then, there might be a fifth person to bring...

[11/19, 09:59] : Ngcwethi Her Warrior

## Chapter Forty Seven

Everyone has gathered in the lounge to honour Ngcwethi's urgent call of a family meeting. Well, except for Mnotho who's still absorbed in a phonecall outside. Zanamuhla was booked into a spa with Vuyiswa and she's expected home after the meeting has been adjourned. As much as she's already like family to everyone, some things still need to be kept from her ears.

The kids were sent to Ntobe. She'll have to adjust very fast to this family because once you get involved with one of them their problems partially become your own.

“Can someone call Mnotho in? I left so many things undone at home,” the uncle, Siyabonga, says.

Before anyone goes out Mnotho walks in with his eyes glued on his phone. He's in the world of his own, he's been glowing and smiling alone since he came back from Johannesburg. And those long-ass



calls that he makes with his voice kept at its lowest. Something is definitely up, something they all motivated him to do.

His eyes land on his uncle and then he looks at Ngcwethi who's squatting on the floor. Alright, something is definitely not right and he needs to sit next to his mother before this meeting starts. Yes, he knows what she's been up to, it started before he was even born, but he's not going to let his brothers grill her if that's what they're here for.

“Why are we here?” Busikhaya asks. He's sitting on the two-seater couch with Mndeni. Mazwakhe is sitting on the chair behind them and he looks bored already.

“Gog' Nomalanga is still isolated from the family,” Ngcwethi.

Most of them here already know that. Even Madoda knew that before he died and it's not something he worried himself about. Why would Ngcwethi bring it up?

“Our kids are in danger,” he says and looks at

Qophelo's fathers, Busikhaya and Mazwakhe, and then glances over at Mnotho.

“I don't have kids,” Mnotho defends himself.

“You'll have them one day and they'll be in danger,” Ngcwethi says.

They all stare at him. He needs to explain.

“After grandfather every man in this family has slept with someone he shouldn't have slept with. You have all betrayed each other, am I lying?”

Busikhaya glances behind his shoulder at Mazwakhe and then takes a deep breath.

Mndeni knows exactly what Ngcwethi is talking about, his eyes have dropped to his feet.

“Am I lying Baba?” Ngcwethi stares at Siyabonga.

He clears his throat and wipes his forehead with a face-cloth. He's suddenly feeling warm.

“Yes, our fathers fought over our mother. And that thing between Busikhaya and Mazwakhe over Qophelo's mother,” he says and then looks at Mndeni briefly. “And him and Mazwakhe's ex-

fiance.”

Ngcwethi nods his head and keeps his stare glued at him. MaMbonambi reaches for a glass of water and gulps it down.

“How about you betraying my father for twenty-five years?” Ngcwethi asks.

The room goes dead quiet. All eyes are on Siyabonga and he looks like he just swallowed a hot potato.

“What are you talking about Ngcwethi?” Busikhaya asks when neither of them talk further.

“Ask MaMbonambi,” Ngcwethi says.

Busikhaya stares at his mother. He doesn't want to assume things, this is his mother and he respects her.

“Your mother is innocent in all this. I'm the one who went after her,” Siyabonga says.

“Meaning?” Busikhaya is already on his feet.

Mnotho rises up and stands in front of MaMbonambi.

Busikhaya breaks a brief chuckle. What makes his young brother think he'd put his hands on his mother?

“Explain Siyabonga!” he roars.

He swallows and glances at his brother's wife-slash-his sidechick. He never wanted to put her in this position. How Ngcwethi found out remains a mystery in his head.

“Your mother and I have been seeing each other,” he says faintly and drops his eyes on the floor.

“Ma is this true? Ndaba's body has not even decomposed underground and you're already involved with his brother?”

Ngcwethi clears his throat. As much as he feels sorry for his mother but she is not a saint in this.

“It started way before Ndaba even died. Before there was even a ranch house,” he says.

“What???” voices ask simultaneously.

Busikhaya charges towards his uncle and grabs him by his collar. Before he throws him against the

wall stronger hands grab his shoulders.

“Sit down bafo,” Mazwakhe says.

He tries to push past him but his firm grip on his arm pins him down on the couch.

“I’m going to kill you wena nja. Watch over your shoulders everywhere you go!” His finger is trembling as it points at his uncle's face. Oh his poor father! How can they betray him like this? He can’t even bring himself to look at his mother right now. She disgusts him.

“Ndaba had other women too. A lot of them,” Ngcwethi comments and the attention shifts from Siyabonga to him.

“What do you mean?” Mnotho asks with a frown on his face. What is wrong with this family? Everyone seems to have skeletons.

“I caught him in his office with two naked women.”

“Hhayi bo! A threesome?” Mndeni.

Everyone look at him. This is not the time to be stupid. He clears his throat and keeps his mouth

shut.

“MaMbonambi you need to own up to your...ummm...you have apologize with a white goat. Bab’ Bonga will take the bile of that goat and own up to his mistakes to Ndaba in his grave,” he says and looks at his two old brothers with uneasiness. He knows this will be a sensitive subject to both of them, but they have to confront this truth for their son's sake.

“You two also need to cleanse. Nombuso’s family has to bring the goat on her behalf. This can't be allowed to continue and affect our children,” he says.

They have already talked about many things and forgiven each other. But this is too hard.

“Qophelo will know then,” Mndeni says in deep thoughts.

Ngcwethi heaves a sigh.

“Unfortunately, yes. Busikhaya needs to tell him the truth before he finds out on his own.”

EVERY secrets should be out before the wedding.  
Before this breeds to the next generation.

“Baba you'll have to find your mother's relatives or buy the goat on her behalf. We'll burn impepho and talk to both grandfathers and beg for her to be allowed inside the family,” Ngcwethi says.

“When is this thing happening?” Busikhaya asks. He's not ready to tell his son the truth. He wanted him to be 16 or 18 or even 25 before telling him. This will confuse him completely.

“Tomorrow evening.”

Everyone gasps. It's too soon; they're expected to arrange the goats and contact the partners' families in 24 hours.

“Mndeni what's the story with Nandi? If you see a future with her she has to partake in this,” Ngcwethi asks.

Mndeni laughs. He's the only one not emotionally affected by this. Yes, he didn't know some of these things and they're shocking, but life doesn't stop because of them.

“No, that one can chill this one out,” he says. Even if he was willing to forgive Nandi for her lies and overlook the fact that she knows the goods behind his big brother's briefs, it would be hard for other female members in the family to accept her.

Zanamuhla still hates her for breaking Mazwakhe's heart and Vuyiswa is too dramatic to live in the same yard with her man's ex-girlfriend. He'll find someone else and he is in no rush to do so.

“That's all BoJ ama,” Ngcwethi adjourns the meeting.

When Siyabonga walks out with his head shoved down to his feet Busikhaya stands up and follows him. Mazwakhe realizes what might happen outside and runs after them.

Mndeni disappears to the kitchen. Mnotho remains behind for a few minutes, he has something to tell Ngcwethi but he realizes that MaMbonambi also needs a moment with him and excuses himself.



Ngcwethi sums up the courage and looks up at his mother.

“How did you know?” she opens her mouth for the first time in thirty minutes. His gift can be both good and bad. The last thing she needed was her children to know the life her and their father lived. No matter what was going on between them they never showed it to their boys. They protected them at all costs.

“I was 17, I got sick and came back from school. Ndaba was away and Bab’ Bonga was on bed with you,” Ngcwethi says.

She shuts her eyes and prays for the floor to open up and swallow her. It would've been better if he saw this in his dreams. What a trauma she put her son through! She thought they were always careful.

“I'm so sorry mfana wami,” she says with tears pouring down on her cheeks. Ngcwethi gets off the floor and sits next to her.

“It's okay. I know that you're a good mother and you were a good wife to him even though this thing

happened.”

“But still, you shouldn't have seen that,” she says.

Ngcwethi wraps his arms around her and calms her down. He doesn't think less of her, he never did except in those few days of anger, she's his mother and he worships the rain that waters the grass growing on the grounds that she walks on.

“I will get that motherfucker!” Busikhaya's voice roars outside the door. He's arguing with Mazwakhe.

“Don't stress yourself about him. You know how he always takes things with his left brain,” Ngcwethi says, hoping to calm his mother down.

The noise outside dies. MaMbonambi goes to her room to change to more decent clothes as she's about to embark on a journey to Nkulisa to let her family know what she has done.

Mnotho finally gets the chance to see Ngcwethi alone. He has made the call and booked a flight for her to KZN. Things were not supposed to be like

this and he fears that this whole thing might scare her. They just met, it took a lot of convincing for her to go with him to the function and weeks for her to realize that he meant what he said and he was willing to do just anything to prove his love for her.

Khuthi may have witnessed her parents' brutal death, persevered severe abuse from her aunt growing up in Tshilungoma village and survived harsh conditions in Johannesburg to make ends-meets and took risks to afford a shelter over her head. But she's still a Vhenda princess and when she wants to know something she pushes until she gets it. He knows that when she lands in KZN he'll have to tell her why she is here. All this will be overwhelming for someone who comes from another tribe, someone who already fears anything that has to do with Zulu men.

He sits on the chair that was occupied by Mazwakhe earlier and rubs his palms together. He's

about to complicate the situation further more. Sadly, it is what it is. He loves her as much as Ngcwethi loves Zanamuhla. They'll both have to deal with consequences of their actions.

“Remember what happened in Sunnyside Park hotel?” he asks and Ngcwethi looks up with a frown on his face. Why would Mnotho bring that up?

“It ended there Mnotho.” His tone carries a heavy warning.

Mnotho shifts uncomfortably and clears his throat.

“She needs to be here as well,” he says.

What the hell?!

“No, she doesn't,” Ngcwethi objects firmly.

“I'm in love with her.”

His world stops for a moment. Whaaat? He can't do this to him. They had a deal; to find one strange girl from a different province and do what they were indebted to do and leave. If she comes here Zano will...no, just no!

“Mnotho get over it. I'm not losing Zanamuhla over

a prostitute. What the hell are you thinking? You can get any girl you want but you..." Busikhaya walks in and stares at both of them.

"He's dating?" he asks.

Nobody answers. They just glare at each.

"Who is she?" He sits comfortably on the couch and waits. Mnotho stutters, Ngcwethi's look is murdering him.

"What's going on here?" Busikhaya asks.

Mnotho pulls himself together.

"Ngcwethi knew about this curse or whatever is it a while ago. He had a dream the night before he came to attack me and then we decided to prevent it before it happened."

Busikhaya cocks his head to the side and narrows his eyes.

"He didn't want it to be Zanamuhla, so we had to find a girl, a strange one from a different province. We did it, him first and then me lastly," Mnotho continues.

“You cheated?” Busikhaya turns to Ngcwethi in total disbelief. They better make sure that this never comes out.

Oh no, there's more...

“I fell in love with her and we're in a relationship. For the first time after Khwezi I can see my future with someone else. I love her, bafo, and if I'm going to have children it'll be with her, eventually she'll be Mrs Mthembu and I want her to do this goat thing with others.”

“That's not happening!” Ngcwethi rises from the couch with a daring look on his face. He can't let him ruin his life like this. They had a damn deal! He wasn't supposed to fall in love with her.

“Why Ngcwethi? You proposed this whole thing. Everyone is taking responsibility for their actions. Tonight I'm going to look at my son's eyes and tell him that I'm not his father. You're going to own your shit as well. Mnotho is not going to stop loving a girl to accommodate your infidelity,” Busikhaya says.

“But Zanamuhla is going to leave me. I can't...” He

gags on his words and falls back on the couch with his hands on his forehead. He can't lose her! He wouldn't do anything to hurt her, he acted out of fear and he regrets it.

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Ngcwethi

He didn't sleep a wink. He kept turning and tossing the whole night. It could've been their last night together and this thought kills him.

Well, everyone is on Mnotho's side and it kind of makes sense. However, he still feels betrayed by his own brother. He has to live his whole life looking at the girl he cheated on Zanamuhla with. The girl who's about to cost him the woman of his dreams.

Mndeni was willing to make the sacrifice for Mazwakhe and Vuyiswa's sake. Why can't Mnotho do the same for him?

Mazwakhe hasn't commented on the situation even though he found out before going to bed. Ngcwethi knows that he can't really count on him because out of them all, Mazwakhe has never been a brother to him. He treats him as his sister's boyfriend that he sometimes hates.

Zanamuhla knows about the ceremony that's taking place later on the day and she has postponed going home against everyone's request to do so. Vuyiswa and Ntobe are coming over for the girlfriend duties in the kitchen; MaMbonambi doesn't know about them yet, as far as she knows they're just Zanamuhla's friends and it will stay that way until after Ngcwethi's wedding.

Ngcwethi is already feeling sick. His whole body is heavy and he's sneezing non-stop. When MaMbonambi arrived with her drunkard cousin, she quickly mixed lemon and warm water and forced him to drink. But it'll take more than a flu remedy for him to be okay. He's emotionally unwell more than he's physically unwell.



Zanamuhla walks in. She's wearing an apron and sweating from the kitchen heat. When she sees him looking frail on bed she panics and rushes to him.

“Sthandwa sami are you okay?” she asks with her hand feeling every side of his head.

There's a car pulling up outside. It must be them, they were the only ones who hadn't arrived.

He stares at Zanamuhla, one tear rolls down his face, she's definitely going to leave him.

“I love you Zolwandle,” he whispers and wipes his cheek with the back of his hand.

“You're scaring me. Are you okay? They're about to start, everyone is here.”

“I'm just scared, that's all.”

She decides not to grill him with further questions and just pull him up and covers his shoulders with his jacket. She'll take care of him later.

Everyone gathers below the yard. There are four white goats and a lot of unfamiliar faces. The tall man with Sango in his arms must be Nombuso's relative. There's another woman in mourning black clothes, she arrived with two grey-haired men. They must be the grandmother's family because Siyabonga has been with them since they got here.

Oh, and that beer-drinking woman who criticizes everything they're doing in the kitchen.

MaMbonambi thinks Ntobe and Vuyiswa are Zanamuhla's friends, but the cousin didn't need to ask to know who they really are.

And there's a young dark-beauty, she must be in her early twenties and she looks lost everytime someone opens their mouth and talk.

She must be one of the relatives.

“Do we really need to see this?” Vuyiswa whispers when the man they assume is the coordinator of all this brings a lid of burning impepho to the first goat's face.

“I want to watch Ngcwethi, he's not well,” Zanamuhla says. She's dead worried about Ngcwethi's flue. Maybe she has to force him to go to the doctor before leaving.

“Is Busikhaya not well too?” Vuyiswa looks at Ntobe.

She shrugs her shoulders and they both return to the kitchen. The pots are burning and this whole thing of killing goats for human's wrongdoings is cruel and scary.

After MaMbonambi's confession, Busikhaya and Mazwakhe step forward. The tall man who had Sango in his arms pulls the goat and kneels in front of them. The coordinator joins with his burning lid and they all keep their voices low as they exchange apologies.

There's only one goat to go and they'll all go inside to slaughter them.

That girl...who is she standing in for? Mndeni ruled

out his relationship with Nandi and this girl is not Nandi.

Someone has to pull the goat for her because she's too classy and she looks frightened by all this.

Mnotho steps forward. Zanamuhla is the only one looking lost. Mazwakhe stands next to her and squeezes her hand.

“Let's go inside, I want to show you something,” he whispers to her. But she stands still, something just doesn't feel right.

Ngcwethi looks at her direction with bloodshot eyes and then slowly steps forward the girl and Mnotho. The coordinator joins them with his lid.

“Ngcwethi what are you doing? Why are you there? Who is that?” A firm grip holds her arm as she attempts to run to Ngcwethi.

“He'll explain Hlahla,” Mazwakhe says.

“Explain what? What is going on here? Mnotho who is that and why is my man performing this fuck-triangle apology thing?” She's screaming and

Ngcwethi's heart is beating drums. Everyone is staring at this crazy, pregnant woman who's making noise during such an important process.

“Ngcwethi answer me!” She's struggling to breathe properly, her vision is blinded by tears.

“I made a mistake...”

It all feels like a bad dream and she wants to wake up so badly. Her Ngcwethi? Her warrior? How can he do this to her?

[11/19, 10:00] : Ngcwethi Her Warrior

## Chapter Forty Eight

Ngcwethi's words fall on deaf ears. Maybe if they had a fight before his Johannesburg trip she would've understood, but they were more than good. That very same morning they had a mind-blowing glory, she ironed his shirt and packed his bag for him. He watched her do all that, drove to the airport and took a flight to fuck someone in Johannesburg.

In those long hours he didn't think about her, not even once. He never considered her feelings, all that mattered to him was sharing a girl with his young brother. What makes her even more angry is the fact that he's still trying to shift the blame to Mnotho whereas he initiated this whole madness.

“Did you use protection?” she asks with her hand on the zipped suitcase on top of the bed. Whatever answers he gives right now change nothing, she just wants closure.

He pops his finger joints and chews his bottom lip. This is what he's been doing everytime she asks him a question he can't answer.

“Did you enjoy it?” She swallows and fights back the tears.

“No,” he says, hoping it'll grant him some mercy. But it doesn't, nothing at this point will make her forgive.

“Pity! We're breaking up over something you didn't even enjoy,” she says and pulls the suitcase off bed. There's a down-pulling feeling on his shoulders and he feels an urgent need to sit down. But he can't

afford to sit and watch the love of his life walk away from him.

“Zolwandle you're leaving me? It was my first and last time making this kind of mistake. Are you really going to leave me like this?” he asks in a strained voice. His joints are getting weaker and weaker.

“I'm going home,” she says and ignores the painful grimace on his face.

The door opens and Mazwakhe lets himself inside their bedroom for the first time. He glances at Ngcwethi once and goes over his sister.

“Hlahla,” he says and envelopes her in a big hug.

“You were right, I wish I had listened to you.”

He brushes her back and lifts her face up. It hurts him seeing his sister like this, he's been fighting the urge to punch Ngcwethi's face since yesterday.

“Vuyiswa will go with you,” he tells her.

She nods her head and pulls her suitcase out of the door. Mnotho's car is still parked outside, which means that Khuthi is still around. She understands

her innocence, this had nothing to do with her, she owed her no loyalty. It's all Ngcwethi's doing, but still, she feels some resentment towards her.

MaMbonambi just gives her a pity look and a weak smile. She's also going through her own shit and even if she wasn't, her daughter-in-law's pain is understandable, she cannot stop her.

Ngcwethi wanted to go after her despite his weak joints but Mazwakhe blocked his way. Now they're both glaring at each other. Both angry at each other for different reasons. Obviously, Mazwakhe is angry because Ngcwethi has broken his precious sister's heart. But Ngcwethi's anger rises from a different place.

“It's funny how you were able to look over everybody's wrongdoing, forgive them and actually be a big brother to them, except for me.”

“Don't even start!” Mazwakhe says angrily. This blame-game is becoming annoying.

“You've never stood up for me. Whoever I'm against,



I always know that you'll pick their side. This is not even about Hlahla because I know that you're her brother more than you'll ever be a brother to me.”

“What do you want me to do? Clap hands for you like everybody else,” Mazwakhe asks.

“Maybe try not to sideline me. Try not to be biased about everything that includes me. You're also dating someone's sister, the same way Ncami feels about you is the same way you feel about me and you give me the same unkind treatment. It needs to stop because you know how much I love Zanamuhla,” he says.

“Is that all?” Mazwakhe asks.

“Yes, I want to sleep.” He crawls on bed, lies on his stomach and shuts his eyes. MaMbonambi said he was coming up with flu but knowing how he is, this might be more than just a flu.

He looks frail and his words cut deeply in Mazwakhe's heart. He loves Mnotho; he'd do anything for him, even taking a life. Him and Hlahla occupy the same soft spot in his heart.

Then there's Busikhaya, the second bull in the kraal. He hates and loves him. They always fight but they have each other's backs. Last night also proved that Busikhaya is just a big scary teddybear with a soft heart for those close to him. He made sure that neither Mazwakhe nor Nombuso looked bad to Qophelo. He made him understand that Mazwakhe loves him as much as he loves him. Both of them are his fathers and they'll co-parent very well.

Mndeni was the first brother to warm up to him and make sure that he felt at home. Yes, he's annoying AF but he wouldn't trade him for anything.

Ngcwethi? He never grasped the idea of them being brothers. Yes, maybe he has never stood up for him. Even when he went away for a whole week, it never bothered him where he was or if he was okay.

Now he's torn between his two half-siblings. He has to feel Zanamuhla's pain and also put himself in Ngcwethi's shoes. If fucking some random chick was going to prevent someone from sleeping with his Vuyiswa, he'd do it too. Because in this world men always put their own feelings first. Ngcwethi is

unique but he's no different species, he's a man and he wants Zano all to himself. He doesn't mind if he sacrifices his own pureness along the way.

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Vuyiswa

Things are tense. I've never seen Zano so broken. If it wasn't for me being pain in her arse and forcing food down her throat she'd be starving herself to death.

She hasn't said anything about the wedding. It doesn't look like she'll be marrying Ngcwethi anymore. The Mthembus have also paused the preparations to nurse Ngcwethi who has suddenly fell horribly sick.

His sickness weighs down heavily on Mazwakhe, I don't know why he would feel responsible for it. If he's sick because of his break-up from Zano then he brought it upon himself.

He parks outside the Ngwane homestead and calls me. I asked that he take me home so that I can get some clothes. I don't know how long Zano is going to stay here, and for Mazwakhe's sake I have to be here and look after her.

As I make my way towards the car I notice that he's with someone. The devil's PA; Mamkhulu.

What is she doing with him and why is he entertaining her?

Before I could reach the car she leaves with something in her hand. She's actually smiling. What's going on here?

“Vuyiswa,” she acknowledges me and walks past.

I don't even have the time to appreciate that he came driving a Mercedes Viano, I'm eager to know what that woman wanted. She chased him like a dog.

“What did she want?” I ask as soon as I settle on my

seat.

“They're struggling Vuyiswa.”

So are other million of South Africans. Struggling isn't something new, most families are going through the same thing and they didn't blow up any inheritance.

“You gave her the money?” I ask.

“They have kids, young kids who still think I'm their big brother. Also, Ngwane raised me,” he says and shrugs his shoulders.

“Does Zanamuhla know this?” I ask.

“It was just this once,” he says.

I really don't have words for him. What if she buys poison to kill Zanamuhla and I with the money he gave her? I'm coming back to haunt him everyday in his sleep.

“Whose car is this?” I change the subject because arguing with him is the last thing I want to do and I also don't want to control the way he spends his money.

“My father’s,” he says.

Did he just say that? He smiles back at me and starts the car.

“You just called him your father?” I ask in awe.

“Yes, I’m done living in the past...we have to find someone else to perform the naming ritual for your baby, I don’t think Ngcwethi is fit enough to do anything right now.”

Oh, that! He’s overwhelmingly supportive. I didn’t expect this relationship to be anything close to perfection. I wish Ncami can realize this and learn to accept our relationship. It’s sad that I can’t even take Aphiwe out with us because he hasn’t been properly introduced to the family.

“Do you think he’ll be alright?” I ask.

“Who? Ngcwethi? I hope so,” he says.

“Why is he sick?” I ask.

He sighs heavily.

“Ngcwethi is unique. If he stresses too much those who protect him leave because they only stay in a

pure place. If they leave it takes a toll on his health.”

I'm glad he's not Ngcwethi, because e wow!

“What if he doesn't stop stressing?” I ask.

“He'll die,” he says.

I don't wish to be Zanamuhla right now. This man is obviously connected to her in more than one way and if she decides not to go back to him his death will be on her.

He decides to stay in the car to avoid dealing with Ncami, and today it looks like all the girls are here. I hope he'll be patient enough because they won't let me go easily.

“Look who's back?” Maureen screams when she sees me.

I roll my eyes and hug her. Where are they planning to go? I know that they don't lay the make-up sets on the table like this for nothing.

“Where have you been?” Ncami asks.

“With Zanamuhla,” I say and pick the glass of wine on the table. I know there's an interrogation coming.

“All these days?” Maureen asks.

“I was at the Mthembus earlier in a week and then I went to Zano's home,” I say.

“At the Mthembus?”

“Mazwakhe's brother was supposed to get married. So much happened, Zano left and and and. Where are you all going?” I ask, picking up the lipstick. I haven't done my face in a long time, I've been too absorbed in the Mthembu drama.

“His brother?” Maureen frowns.

“Ngcwethi Mthembu. You know them mos, Mndeni was at the party in your house.”

What up with that frozen face? She knows everyone in South Africa, I'm sure she also knows Ngcwethi.

“You're dating Mndeni's brother?” Ncami seems shocked as well. I didn't know that she also knows people from the village.

“Yes, Mazwakhe is his eldest brother,” I say.



The moment is broken by Busi's high-pitched voice. The attention moves from me and the Mthembu brothers to her. Did she see a ghost or something?

"Who's parked outside the gate?" Whatever she saw must've been traumatizing. Her eyes are popping out.

"It's Mazwakhe. Why?" I ask.

She looks at me as if I'm crazy.

"What do you mean- 'why'? He's driving a damn Mercedes Viano."

Oh, this is what it is all about? A car.

"Yes, it was his father's," I say and turn back to the table.

Ncami has her hand on her forehead like something huge just crawled into her mind.

"Why didn't you tell me before?" she asks.

"Tell you what?" I'm lost.

"That he's Madoda's son. My gosh, Maureen go call him inside. I can't believe this!"

I don't know what's going on. I know how things roll here, your pocket earns you respect, but this whole commotion is unnecessary. I made it clear to them that in Mazwakhe I'm not looking for a meal ticket or a sponsor.

“I'm so sorry about the things I said to you that day. Vuyi is my little sister and I'm always extra protective of her.” Maureen appears with a glass of Oros juice and Ncami's eye is enough to send her to the morgue. “Get a real juice Maureen,” she says firmly.

Since when Oros is considered as ‘unreal’ juice in this house? We even steal Aphiwe's. Mazwakhe doesn't even care about juices.

His new calm nature sends a trail of tingles all over my body. He doesn't bring back what she said, he just focuses on Aphiwe and drinks their juice. The Mazwakhe I know would've spoiled this little introduction party and told everyone to fuck off.

“Are we invited to the wedding?” Busi is way too

forward. Nobody is sure if the wedding is still happening and I don't want them to cause drama there.

“Everyone is invited,” he says.

I don't know how long I can put this fake grin plastered on my face.

“We need to leave,” I tell him and turn to Aphiwe. I miss my baby girl, the princess of tantrums.

“Do you have plans for the next Saturday?” I ask her.

“Nope,” she says, shaking her head.

“Good, I will take you out.”

“What about us?” Three sexual active women ask me. It's their job to take me out, not the other way around. I'm the youngest.

“I love you guys,” I kiss their cheeks and leave with my man.

He fastens the seatbelt and looks at me with a frown.

“What was that about?” he asks.

“The car and the fact that you're your father's son,” I say.

He frowns even more but he doesn't say anything further. They have finally managed to embarrass me. Now we look like a family of gold-diggers.

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Today was supposed to be Ngcwethi and Zanamuhla's white wedding day. On Sunday morning it would've been the ancestors matrimony and their Zulu traditional wedding in the afternoon. And then on Monday icece was going to take place.

Everyone has gone to sleep. The clock ticks exactly at 3:35am. Zanamuhla wakes everyone up; the impatient Nkanyiso and her suddenly-too-kind mothers.

“What's going on?” Vuyiswa asks, yawning.

“I’m leaving,” she says.

“Leaving?” Everyone is lost.

“I’m getting married. Where is my phone, Vuyiswa?”

The cows were not slaughtered. No meat was sent to the Mthembus and they have no idea what is going on. Everyone assumed that the wedding was called off.

“But nothing was done. The Mthembus don't even know that you're still getting married to their son,” Mamkhulu says. Everyone is confused. This doesn't make any sense.

“The white wedding isn't registered as a wedding at the Mthembus. They call it a court's wedding, so the real wedding is on Sunday, that's when the cows will be slaughtered and the mother-in-laws' parts will be exchanged,” she says.

Vuyiswa reluctantly hands the phone to her. She grabs it and dials Busikhaya's number. It rings a couple of times before he answers.

“Who is this?” He didn't even check the number. The

call just woke him from a deep sleep and he's pissed.

“Now the bride carries her own kist?” she asks.

“Zanamuhla?” Now he's wide awake.

“It's almost 4am and I haven't been fetched.”

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\*\*\*AT THE MTHEMBU HOMESTEAD\*\*\*

Everyone is getting up. If you don't you get a pillow slapped across your face. The outside lights are on, the main house's door is widely opened and some cars are speeding off.

“Yeyi! I won't stand for this!” Mndeni drags himself inside the lounge where everyone was woken up to. This is not the life he got out of MaMbonambi's womb for.

“Shut up and dress properly. We have to fetch the bride,” Busikhaya says.

“The bride?” Everyone is confused. The wedding was called off, wasn't? And Ngcwethi is sick.

“Yes, MaNgwane...hurry guys, it's almost 4am..someone must go and wake Siyabonga up.” Now he calls him by name, just to disrespect him. He throws instructions and threatening looks to everyone. They need to fuckin' move!

There's no time. They wash their faces, brush their teeth, change into warm clothes and jump into the cars.

When they arrive at the Ngwanes the lights are on, everyone is up and down on the yard. Nothing seem to have been planned properly.

They announce the wedding at the gate and leave with their bride. Right now calls are being made, favours are being asked and Vuyiswa is trying her best to get the venue ready for 12:00pm. Luckily Zanamuhla had fitted her dress three days before finding out about Ngcwethi's infidelity. Everything is moving at a strident speed.

“Vuyiswa call Mnotho and tell him to invite Khuthi to

the wedding,” Zano says as they reach Mkhongi's homestead.

“Whaaat? Are you crazy Zano?” Maybe she has lost the marbles. Why on earth would she want the girl that slept with Ngcwethi at their wedding?

“I want her there.” This is a different Zanamuhla. Who would want something like this on her wedding day?

Vuyiswa makes the call. Mnotho refuses but she makes it clear that he doesn't have a choice, unless if Khuthi won't be part of the family. They need to face their shit as from this day.

It's just after 11am and Mndeni is dressed to kill. You'd swear he is the groom. Only God knows how he got this perfect suit whereas everyone is scuffling through their wardrobes trying to find something decent to wear. They didn't fetch the suits because nobody told them to.



“I thought you were sick,” Mazwakhe says, walking inside Ngcwethi's room.

He's suddenly able to stand up and move swiftly around his room. When Busikhaya woke him up and told him that Zanamuhla was on her way he jumped up to his feet as if the Ngcwethi who's been a potato the whole week was his twin.

“Physically I'm still sick but emotionally I'm better. Way much better,” he says and buttons up his shirt. Zanamuhla will hate him for ruining their wedding pictures with his dodgy jean and shirt, but the wedding can't stop because of a suit.

“Here!” Mazwakhe throws a suit cover on his bed.

He's confused. How did he get it? At what time?

“Dress up before she changes her mind,” Mazwakhe says and sits on the bed. It feels awkward that this is the same bed his sister sleeps on with a man, but if he can sit on Busikhaya's bed, why not Ngcwethi's? Hopefully they don't leave their underwear lying around. Gosh, that would be traumatic.

“How do I look?” Ngcwethi asks.

He frowns. WTF!

“Don't you have a mirror?” he asks.

“You're my mirror. How do I look?” Ngcwethi insists.

“You look beautiful man. I love your hair. Where did you get that watch? It is to die-for,” he steals Vuyiswa's general compliments to other women and they both break into a fit of laughter.

“Thanks man for this. I appreciate it,” Ngcwethi says, looking at his perfect reflection one more time.

This was Mazwakhe's : ‘I'm your brother too and I'm sorry if I resented and neglected you.’

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Finally they're here. Nobody knew and nobody could've predicted things turning out this way. But they're all grateful, things could've gotten worse for Ngcwethi.

Even though he's still weak, the grey suit makes him look good. He stands nervously next to his brothers. She refused to see him before the wedding. He

knows better than to push her, this may be not how he wanted his wedding to be; the tense mood and floating unresolved issues, but he's getting married to the love of his life and that matters more than anything.

The mermaid white gown hugs her body all the way down. Her bump is bigger and she's glowing regardless of what she's been through the past few days that felt like the longest days of her life. Her eyes are glued on Ngcwethi who's walking towards her and Mazwakhe with a nervous look on his face. There's a scraping of chairs as the elders get up for the standing ovation.

After taking a deep breath Mazwakhe hugs his sister and puts her hand on Ngcwethi's. Then they share a look and shake hands.

"I'm not scared of you," he tells him before letting go of his hand. A strange way of wishing your half-brother who's getting married the best of luck!

They share an intense look. There's so much to say, so much anger bottled up, but nothing has changed in their hearts.

“Thank you for coming. I love you Zanamuhla.”

She squeezes his hand.

“I love you too,” she says.

A deep sigh of relief...well, taken too soon, look who's sitting over there next to Ntobe and Vuyiswa in a teal bodycon dress. She looks very young, something he didn't care to notice that day. His palms start sweating. What if Zanamuhla stops the wedding when she sees her here? His breath is held up in his throat.

[11/19, 10:00] : Ngcwethi Her Warrior

Chapter Forty Nine

Zanamuhla

I don't see my Ngcwethi in front of me, the seer who's always right and on top of things. Not knowing why everything changed so suddenly, why I decided to show up in the early hours of morning and get everyone running around like headless chickens, baffles him. It unsettles him and HER presence affects him even more.

I have said my vows, whatever the pastor said I repeated after him and then slipped a ring on his finger. Yes, I'm marrying him because a huge part of me loves him and I don't think I'd be able to love someone else. But today wasn't supposed to happen. The wedding was going to happen somewhere in the future when I have healed and wrapped my head around the fact that he's capable of leaving me at home and travel to another province just to smash a different pu\$\$y. But it would've come at a price; a price that neither me or him were going to pay, but the child SHE is carrying. I wasn't going to let Mnotho suffer again. He's gone through so much and he has already lost someone who meant the world to him.

Because this man is still wiping his sweaty forehead, let me fill you in briefly about what went down after Ngcwethi turned twenty-four...

He was done. With the ancestors, his gift, helping people and all that shit. He was leaving it all behind because he wanted to live a normal life. And that's his nature, he thinks when the ancestors don't channel things the way he wants he's just going to say; "I'm done" and be done. It was just a few days after his birthday, in the wee hours of morning, when something extraordinary happened to him. He woke up with his briefs around his ankles, his manhood hard as a rock and his memory flashing with vivid pictures of the sexual occurrence he had with an animal. Or was it a bizarre female being with a malformed face? Whatever it was, it was scary and it had its way with him the whole night.

Those who protect him had left him. The same way he gave up on them, they gave up on him and the whole family. You scratch my back and I scratch yours- applies everywhere.

He was stripped off his manhood. He'd never engage sexually with a random woman; that's always been his word. Let alone a creature that may have come from a different world! It became hard to even close his eyes and be in the same bedroom. A week later he disappeared and left no single trace behind.

In Esicabazini, at KwaMhlabuyalingana, is where his journey ended. It ended with him being grabbed by a man that wasn't very clear in my last night's dream. But that period of self evaluation, accepting dependency and paying up for the mistakes cost him more than just three months of his life. His young brother lost his virginity to the same strange creature that had visited him before he left the village.

In those three months that he was away, going to sleep was a trauma Mnotho couldn't open up to anyone about. He'd keep the lights on, drink energy drinks and sachets just so he can stay awake. But somewhere in the middle of the night his body would give in to the need of rest and that would be

opening for that “scary female creature” to have its way with him.

When Ngcwethi came back to his senses, accepted that his well-being depended on his gift and those around him, he had to take a long walk to Thukela river where he had been shown the originals of “the strange creature.” What he found there could've been traumatic, only if he was alone, but he was with those who protect him. In that fight he won the round, there wasn't going to be anymore night visits, but his victory came with a loss. Only Mnotho in this family will give birth to a child with the same gift and it'll be his only child. Ngcwethi going to that girl, fuckin' spreading his seeds inside her and leaving her for Mnotho to carry on wasn't for the curse removal. Without knowing It, Khuthi was strengthened to carry Mnotho's one and only special child. It was never going to be Khwezi, she was loved but she was not the one. She wouldn't have been fit enough to carry what Khuthi is carrying. And this child Khuthi is carrying is the Ngcwethi of the next Mthembu generation.



The protector of our children.

I wouldn't have considered doing this if it wasn't for that granny, Nomalanga, who was too jolly after joining the family and decided to visit me in my dreams.

He looks frail; those “creature” nightmares might've come back. Now I know what they're about, I know why sometimes he kicks and screams at night. Pity, someone like him would never agree to counselling because whatever shit happens in his life is for him and his ancestors.

Leaving him wasn't an option anymore, who knows what would've happened this time if he attempted to reject who he is once again. I don't want to raise this baby alone and the last thing I want is for Mnotho to lose his only child because of their “stupidity.” I don't know how I'll look at Khuthi and not think about her spreading her legs for my husband. But this is the family I chose to marry to and sacrifices have to be made...Oh snap, he's

ready with the ring. It's time for his vows!

“Zanamuhla Ngwane,” he says and flashes a weak, nervous smile. Yes, he should be nervous, that little story I just told you doesn't change the fact that I'm going to teach him a lesson he'll never forget.

“This ring is a symbol of my love for you and it embodies my promise that wherever I may go, I will always return home to you still pure as your husband.”

My eyebrow cocks up. I mean, hello!

He grimaces in pain and clears his throat.

“Thank you for looking beyond my imperfections. The past two days have been the hardest days of my life. Living without you is one painful experience I don't wish to ever go through again. You're the essence of who I am. You're my soul, my heart in a human form, my reason for waking up everyday and looking forward to the next day. I remember when you were just a girl I looked at without a single thought running through my mind; before the day

you shouted at me and refused my food. But now I can't even pronounce your name without an abundance of sentiment attached to each letter. I cannot go through a single hour without thinking about you, every love that I had in this world went to you after that day and I'll never love someone else. The only thing better than having you as my wife is my children having you as a mom. Zolwandle, even if death does us apart, I want you to hold high memories of us and that's why from this day going forward I'm going to be the best husband to you.”

Damn! Why am I crying? I can't let one stupid decision ruin what we've been through. Our good and bad times that got us here today. This is our wedding day, the day we're going to hold onto for the rest of our lives.

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Nontobeko

A wedding that takes a whole three days! Why can't

they be normal? I've ran out of things to wear. I don't even know who is who and the man that brought me here has been focused on his brother's wedding and forgot about me. At least Mshibe is here to make me feel a little bit of normalcy.

“Ma, can I watch Masha?” That's Sango. She can see how crowded this place is. I don't even know where the remote is.

“Baby why don't you go play outside? We'll watch a movie together, later on my laptop,” I ask.

She's not impressed with this suggestion.

“And we'll have ice-cream and doughnuts,” I add.

Now she's smiling with her hands over her cheeks. Busikhaya really makes beautiful girls, I can't sit next to her and not kiss her cheek.

“Okay run run!” I clap my hands, she takes off and her pace increases as I clap harder. Kids are just too adorable.

“Ma?” Someone asks behind me.

I turn around and my frown is dispersed by a dry

chest. I don't know why I'm scared of her, I just feel a bit shy around her and the fact that Busikhaya hasn't introduced me makes this even more awkward.

“I knew it. You're the reason why my son walks around like he owns the planet?” I guess the question comes from a good place because she's smiling.

“Ummmm...” I really don't know what to say. I can't introduce myself, it's Busikhaya's duty.

“Relax. Did he tell you to tie your head like this?”

Oh, the scarf!

“Not really,” I say.

“I'm MaMbonambi, his mother. I see, he's still mad at me and too embarrassed to introduce me to his people as his mother.”

“What's the drama for Mrs Mthembu?” It's him walking through the back door. We both turn to him and he walks straight to me and plants a peck on my lips.

“How long were you going to hide her?” she asks him.

“She's here, how am I hiding her? MaMbonambi, this is Nontobeko Maseko, your daughter-in-law.”

“Daughter-in-law?” she narrows her eyes.

“Didn't Siyabonga tell you? Next month we're going to the Masekos. This woman here has agreed to help me move out of your home,” he says and pecks the side of my face. I'm a sucker of affection, but this is just too awkward. His mother may have had a rich husband and have this gigantic homestead and cars, but she's still a rural mother and you know how they understand the word ‘respect’ in their own terms.

“Thank God. I cannot wait!”

I fail to hold myself and laugh. Is Busikhaya that annoying as a son that she can hardly wait for him to move out?

“Me too. You'll stay here with your son, Mazwakhe, and his wife,” he says and smirks.

“I'm sure she'll be amazing as this one.” She picks something from the cupboard and walks out. All this time Busikhaya is laughing at a secret joke.

“What's funny?” I ask.

“She'll be staying with Vuyiswa.”

What a dry joke!

“What's funny about that?” I ask.

“MaMbonambi deserves to live with someone like her. She'll turn her life upside down and maybe she'll teach her new ways of living her life without...” He clears his throat and asks who helped me tie the scarf around my head so beautifully. I wonder what MaMbonambi did that annoys him so much.

“Are they done outside?” I ask.

“Yeap, now it's just them alone with Mkhulu Khumalo.”

“The sangoma that was here earlier?” I ask.

“Yes.” He nods his head.

That old man is weird, and so is Ngcwethi.

“Why did he scare Khuthi with that tail of his?” I ask. I'm sure the poor girl is still traumatized where she is. First of all, she's never been in the Zululand before and she cannot hear us when we speak, unless if we use English. And then a creepy man was brushing an ox's tail all over her. She probably thinks everyone this side is creepy, I mean it's been drama after drama.

“I don't know. Maybe he was welcoming her to the family. How do you find her?” he asks.

“She's a young, good girl. I like her,” I say.

“And Vuyiswa?”

“Crazy, but I like her.”

“Zanamuhla?”

Oh, well. That one.

“She's unpredictable. I don't know if it's the pregnancy or her nature.”

He nods his head slowly. I hope this doesn't give him another picture of me. Of course, I'd never



judge his family, I've never lived a day in Zanamuhla's life and I don't know what makes her clock tick. And besides, we haven't really spent much time together for me to figure her out.

“Let's go hide somewhere, I haven't been able to spend time with you ever since this wedding began.” He wraps his arm around my waist and kisses the side of my cheek.

“Did you miss me?” I ask.

“I missed myself. You know that you're me, right? And being away from you is like leaving a whole me somewhere else.”

“Okay Mr Me, let's go.”

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Khuthi

I keep asking myself; what am I doing here? Yes, he has explained some things, which I can't say made any sense, but I really don't understand anything.

Buying the goats? Going to that site outside the homestead? His brother's wife leaving because of me? Well, I do understand that part and I really felt sorry for her. But their rituals, traditions and attitude towards each other! Where am I? It's like I'm in a different world where everything happens in a split second, before you can even register what's going on there's something else happening.

He walks in as I attempt to close my eyes on bed. It's been the craziest six days of my life. When I see him I sit up, we have a lot to talk about. He also needs to tell me when am I going back to Johannesburg.

“Sthandwa,” he says and leans over and kisses my forehead. Sometimes I have to pinch myself to feel if this is really me. I mean, why would someone like him fall in love with me knowing exactly the kind of life I live? I've had my breath held up, thinking he'll change his mind or I'll find out that he has someone who deserves him and he was just fooling around with me. But the guy really loves me and it scares

the fuck out of me.

“Mnotho when am I leaving?” I ask.

He's taking his T-shirt off, when I ask the question he pauses with it over his shoulders.

“Leaving to where?” I don't know if he's trying to crack a joke or what? What kind of question is this?

“I don't live here Mnotho,” I say.

“You do now,” he says.

Maybe I'm not making myself clear here.

“Mnotho when am I going back to my life?”

“What life?”

Owkaaaay. Slowly, Khuthi!

“Please book my ticket for Thursday evening.” If I stay here another week I'll go crazy. I'm also not ready to be confronted by that woman. I didn't even know who the man was and I didn't know he had a pregnant wife at home. I only went to the hotel for money.

He climbs on bed and puts his arm under my neck.

The loud exhalation unsettles me. He needs to book my flight, what's exhausting about that?

“I don't want to freak you out,” he says and I freak out right away. What has happened again?!

“You can go back, only for a few weeks. To wrap things up that side and maybe contact your aunt.”

“Are you telling me how to live my life now, Mnotho?” I ask in awe.

“You're pregnant Khuthi.”

Whaaat? That's not true. It can't be!

“Don't freak out. I didn't do it on purpose.”

He's serious. Jesus Christ!

“How do you know?” My whole body is shaking. I cannot afford to have a baby, let alone with a Zulu guy from a big dodgy family that I've only known for a month.

“Mkhulu Khumalo told me,” he says.

I assume it's that old man who was chasing me with a wild animal's smelly tail.

“That day I..I..you and...” He squeezes my shoulder and releases a deep breath. What have I gotten myself into? I had an injection a month before that. What happened? How did it not work?

“It's mine. Ngcwethi can only have children with Zanamuhla. I'm really sorry about this. I didn't mean to complicate your life like this.”

It doesn't matter. My life is complicated. I don't even know how I'm going to say this to my excuse of a family. And how am I going to co-parent a child with someone who is in a different province? Gosh, just the thought of carrying a human being inside me scares me.

There's a knock. He deeply kisses me and wipes my tears before asking who it is.

“UNgcwethi, vula,” the voice says.

Why is he here? I don't want to see neither him nor his wife.

“Ngiyeza,” Mnotho says.

He looks at me and gives me a brief smile. If it was meant to give me some sort of comfort, well it didn't work.

He opens the door and when he walks in he's not alone. He's with her. She's wearing a red cloak matching the doek on her hand and fresh goatskin wrist-bangles lining up her left hand. Her diamond rock is gorgeous!!!

“I hope we're not disturbing anything,” she says and looks around. When she doesn't see what she's looking for she walks to the bed and sits. My heart is about to leap out of my throat. I hate confrontations.

“Not really,” Mnotho says and remains standing next to his brother who hasn't looked at my face directly since I got here. I know he resents me. My arrival here nearly cost him his wife.

“Hello,” she says and looks at me.

I clear my throat for an unnecessary number of times and nod my head. I really don't trust my voice at the moment.

“How old are you?”

My age? Where's this going?

“21,” I say.

“Ngcwethi!” Her tone isn't friendly. She's glaring at him as if my age worsens the current situation in some way.

He pops his finger joints and looks at her. He's not looking at her because he wants to but because he doesn't have much of a choice.

“Are we ever going to deal with this shit again?” she asks.

“No,” they both say.

“Good! Because I'm not staying if something like this happens again. I'm not staying Ngcwethi, you'll die if you die.” Her face verifies her words. She means what she's saying and he's shaking in his boots.

“Thank you. From now on, I will run everything past you and we'll make decisions together. I promise.”

He's really different with her. However, it doesn't

erase the picture of him that I already have. I wasn't looking for romance or anything, it was strictly about the money, but wow! This man treated me like trash as if I was forcing him to do what he did.

“No more secrets?” she asks.

“Yes babe, I promise.”

She turns her face to Mnotho.

“No secrets Zano, relax,” he says.

She takes a deep breath and looks at me. This time her expression isn't deadly, something else is going on.

“What are these sites being prepared by tractors around here? What's going on? Ngcwethi when are we moving to our house in town?”

They look at each other. Lord, what have they done again?

[11/19, 10:01] : Ngcwethi Her Warrior

Chapter Fifty



## Zanamuhla

It's been five years since I tied my life to this man. I can't say things have been smooth, but if you can't change life you adjust to it. A lot has changed, except the fact that Mndeni is still unmarried and fucking around. Vuyiswa is the newest bride in the family, she just got married two months ago and she's a mother of handsome twin boys, Mngqobi and Ngcebo. I think they're two years and a half now. They're a two-in-one bundle of trouble. Mazwakhe remained with MaMbonambi at the Mthembu main homestead while other brothers moved out and built their own houses. Mndeni lives anywhere he likes. He calls himself a 'freelancer tenant.'

Nontobeko married six months after me and Khuthi followed her after a year. It would've been sooner if things went the way Mnotho wanted but her aunt put her foot down. A lot happened around her

wedding process, she was the hardest bride to get. But they were willing to do just anything to bring Mphilisi's mother home.

About my town house, it was bought but we only go there to escape the village for a few days. All of us live here in the village, including Ntobe, we are just a few yards apart. Qophelo is now grown and his behaviour has started to change over the years. He lives with Mazwakhe most of the times because he's still trying to make up for the years he wasn't in his life and he lets him get away with everything. Busikhaya is still Busikhaya, the belt plays its role when he gets out of hand. Him and Ntobe are still trying for a second child, Mazisi didn't turn out to be Ntobe's everyday dream of a girl child, but she's still a best mother any child could ask for. She's obsessed with girls and that has worked well on Sango's favour. She has everyone wrapped around her finger.

Then there's me, a woman whose mouth is always widely open and shouting. Now I just say; "Yeyi wena!" whenever there's a noise I don't understand and he'd end it immediately. This child is showing me flames. Not only did he decide to be born at the parking lot, he's still turning my life upside down even today. I was still three weeks away and all I felt was a sharp pain in my abdomen. A few steps away from the car I felt something shifting and I couldn't walk anymore. That was it, two female security guards helped me push the head out and that was Mafu's dramatic arrival.

"Where's Paki?" That's Mazwakhe walking in. I have made peace with this name. I don't know what makes him think it's okay to call my child after his place of birth. He was also born outside the kraal, who's calling him Sibayeni? What worries me even more is the fact that everyone calls my son by this name. At school, in the village, here at home and at the farm. I'm the only one who calls him Mafu, and Ngcwethi too if I'm around.

"He's in his room," I say.

“Qophelo is taking them out. Get him ready.”

“Qophelo? Where is he taking them?” That child is too scandalous, I don't trust anything associated with him. Teenagehood really changes kids. I'm not ready for my Mafu to reach that stage, I'll probably go crazy.

“Yes, they're just going to the supermarket,” he says.

“How are they going there?”

“I gave him my car.”

Oh J esus Christ, have mercy!

“You're giving him your car again? He doesn't even have the licence,” I ask.

“He knows how to drive Hlahla. Where's your husband?”

I give up! Why is Busikhaya not showing up and putting an end to this nonsense. Qophelo will drive around the whole village with the kids and lifts girls inside.

“He's watching some stupid soccer game,” I say.

“Supersport United and Celtic? It has started already?”

I don't know and I don't have time to watch old men running after a ball. There are so many interesting things to watch, like *The Real Housewives Of Atlanta*. Why can't men be normal?

I get his nephew ready. Spending time with the big brother, Qophelo, means that they'll do anything they like and shout as high as they want when having a decent conversation with each other. He's way too excited, he keeps telling me to hurry up.

“Paki!” That would be Mndeni arriving. I guess they're all watching this match here and they'll be requesting food and drinks from me. I need to miss one of the wives and pay a visit.

“Babaaa!” He runs off with his one shoe untied. This is my everyday life; I have to follow behind him and beg to tie that shoe because if he falls it'll hurt me as well. This motherhood thing changes your whole life. Some days I beg a human being to eat so that he won't go to bed hungry. He'd refuse and I'd start

promising him every toy there's on earth. Eventually he'd do me a huge favour and eat (for his own stomach) and I'd be obliged to keep my promises.

His father still does what he does. He still leaves, goes around the country helping people and sometimes getting his nightmares. But he's stood by his vows and he's the best husband I could've ever asked for. Unfortunately, he had to swallow his shame and get close to Khuthi because only him in this family understands Mphilisi. Him and Mazwakhe are also in a great place right now. Their relationship improved after we got married.

I have accepted that he's not just my husband, he's also married to the ancestors and he's obliged to follow his dreams, wherever they're leading him. Over the years I also started getting clarification dreams and whenever he's doing his rituals I have to partake in them. The only thing better than having him as my husband is Mafu having him as a father. He loves his son to death.

Speaking about the devil, here he comes.

“Where is Paki?” he always asks about his son before noticing his wife.

“Who is that?” He knows that we call him by his name here.

He grins and walks to me.

“My wife!” He engulfs me in a tight hug and kisses my lips.

“He's gone with Qophelo to the shops,” I say as I break from his hug.

“This one always leaves his father alone. It's time we make a new one, maybe a little girl who'll be beautiful like you.”

“Sounds convincing but I think Khune just scored a goal.”

“Khune?” He bursts into laughter and pulls me into his arms again. I'm really not trying to make a baby in this heat.

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Vuyiswa

The twins are almost three now. They're the best gift Mazwakhe has ever given me beside the Michael Kors bag he bought for me last week. When I first heard that I was going to marry to this family, stay in the village for the rest of my life and remain in the main homestead with MaMbonambi whereas everyone moves out to their own houses, I nearly left. She didn't like me before the twins and Mazwakhe knew that. I didn't understand why he would put me in a situation like that. His words were; "You'll both learn to like each other."

The first years were bad. MaMbonambi wanted to change me. She wanted me to be another version of her beloved Nontobeko and Zanamuhla. The same way I made it clear to Mazwakhe that I wasn't changing who I am for anyone, I made it clear to her as well. When the twins arrived she accepted that I



wasn't going anywhere. And she's the best grandmother to have around, except that she thinks they're her kids and controls how I mother them.

Oh, Siyabonga is officially her husband. Busikhaya fought with everything he had but the finally decision was made that he was taking over his brother's role in MaMbonambi as of the culture. But they're not welcomed to be lovey-dovey here because of “umuzi kababa this, umuzi kababa that.” They do whatever they do in Siyabonga's house. At least I don't deal with a salty mother-in-law.

Oh, Mamkhulu passed on a year ago. MHS RIP. Mazwakhe got his Ngwane brothers jobs in the farm and we visit the Ngwanes from time to time. Even after everything that happened between him and that family he still holds them in high regard because they raised him and Mlungisi treated him as his son until the last day.

Khethile stays with the father of her child who hasn't paid even a chicken and she only comes home when there's a ceremony or when someone is dead. Zandile is the aunt that burns impepho. That

woman is not planning to go anywhere, she's not married and she's not working. Her job is to burn impepho and be the boss in the family meetings. Nkanyiso has three kids now from different women. There's a crazy one who often brings the baby to the farm and screams at him in front of everyone for the "pampers" and money.

"Mama where are you?" The match ended too soon, this man is back already!

"In the bedroom," I yell and hear his footsteps coming.

Ngcebo is asleep and Mngqobi left with Qophelo. I don't get this peaceful time very often.

He takes off his shoes and climbs on bed. He's still the same Mazwakhe, just that he doesn't like shaving his beard very much. If I didn't gain weight after the pregnancy he'd look like my father with all this beard.

"These kids are not back?" he asks.

“I called Qophelo a few minutes ago and they're with Mndeni at the farm,” I say.

“I thought he went to his girlfriends.” He grabs my phone and puts it on the pedestal next to the bed.

“Your man needs your attention,” he says.

I roll my eyes and turn to my right side to face him.

“Why do you look so beautiful?” This what he needs the attention for? To ask me this question he asks me everyday.

“Because I had time to put on the make-up. Your sperm-blossoms gave me some Me-time today,” I say.

“Sperm-blossoms? Are you missing the sperms?” he asks.

Yes, he's still like this. He doesn't romanticize his words and I've stopped fighting him about it in the bedroom. I just let him be.

“No, I didn't say that,” I say.

“But I want to spread them inside you. When was the last time I saw the clit during broad daylight?”

Let me see it.”

My little fight goes in vain. He closes the door and strips his clothes off. He knows what I do when he rubs his face between my boobs; I spread my legs, that's all it takes.

“Mamaaaaaa,”

Oh Lord! What did I do so wrong? Wasn't this human being sleeping? Don't I deserve good things in my life?

“Boy, go fetch your R5 from Bab' Ngcwethi,” Mazwakhe yells. He's kneeling between my legs with his hand wrapped over his shaft. Veins are thrusting all over his arms, his eyes are almost shutting, if he doesn't release himself he'll probably faint.

“The money?” Ngcebo asks outside the door. His voice is already filled with excitement. Promise them R5 and give them 50cents and they'll love you the whole day.

“Yes, imali yakho boy,” he says and we hear him running off. If Ngcwethi doesn't give him his money

he'll have something else to deal with and hopefully we'll be done by then.

“Sharing you is hard, but at least I'm not sharing the pu\$\$y with anyone,” he says and positions his tip over my clit.

“Who told you that?” I ask and release a moan as he rubs it on me.

“You told me last night, you said it all belongs to me and you'll say it again today,” he says.

“What does that mean?” I ask.

He slides in, slowly. I wrap my arms around his waist and throw my head back. He's going in circles while rolling my nipple in his fingers. It seems like I will repeat those words because this thing he's doing to me is too good and my mouth is just rambling out.

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Nontobeko

Zanamuhla escaped the soccer match gathering in her house and came here. We have all learnt to just accept each other as we are and raise our kids and these men hand-in-hand. Her and Khuthi are in a good place now. She maturely didn't have any problem with her, she's one confident woman. If it was me I would've probably died from the insecurities. It was Khuthi who was a bit reserved when it came to her and Ngcwethi. But as time went by she realized that it was no use, she'll spend the rest of her life with these people.

I have a glass of wine and she's drinking lemon water.

“I was thinking here. We can't sit like this and do nothing for the rest of our lives,” she says.

“I know but what can we do?” I ask.

“They have their farm. Why don't we open our own cosmetic shop? Look at how many young women are in this village and looking ugly.”

I narrow my eyes and she bursts into laughter.

“I’m kidding, but I think they need a cosmetic shop close by. Some even give money to their relatives in town before they get a mere lipstick. We can even extend it with a salon.”

Wow! I haven't thought about it. This could work, the only thing they have in this village is the farm and tuck-shops that sell expired breads.

“That's a good idea but what if they can't afford them? It's not like we're going to stock fake Kylie Cosmetics and Chinese lipsticks. I hate ama-FongKongs,” I say.

“These people have husbands and boyfriends who send them money every month,” she says.

“I'm in babe!” I raise my glass and click it on hers.

“Great, we'll tell Vuyiswa and Khuthi then call these men to the meeting. You will break the news to them.”

What? No, this is her idea.

“No, you're the one who'll break the news,” I say.

“You're the senior wife Ntobe,” she says.

“No, Vuyiswa is the senior wife,” I say.

She sighs and sips her water.

“Okay, we'll all speak at the same time and not give them any chance to object.”

“That could work,” I say, laughing.

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Khuthi

I don't know why everyone chose me to host this dinner. The twins don't eat beef, Paki hates the pasta and Mazi doesn't want onions in his food. I had to start cooking as early as 13h00 and I'm only finishing now. I have to take a bath quickly and dress up, they'll be here in no time.

“Sthandwa have you seen my navy socks?” That's my first born, Mnotho. I don't know which navy socks he's talking about, he has so many pairs of navy socks.



“Did you check in the drawers?” I ask.

“No,” he says.

Sigh! I turn back to the closet and get one pair of navy socks. Beside that he's lazy, he's a great husband and father. Everyone had doubts about a 25-year-old husband who wears push-ons and socks. But when the relationship is built on a strong foundation of love everything else falls into place.

“Here,” I say and throw them to him.

“You're a God-sent. I've looked everywhere for them.”

“Really? Where did you look?” I ask.

“I walked in and looked around, they were nowhere.”

Lord, why did I marry this handsome idiot?

“Mnotho things won't run to you when you need them. You need to search and find them. What are you wearing?” I ask.

He's in his shorts and I know that he might not change.

“Wearing to where?” he asks.

“For dinner, in the house,” I say.

“But you're saying it's here in my house. Why should I dress up as if I'm going somewhere? I'm not a guest and besides, if you look beautiful I also look beautiful.”

Okay, I need to bath and dress up. This one is going to waste my time.

Vuyiswa has dished for the kids and sent them outside. These men think we called them here just to feed them delicious food and look beautiful for them.

“Pass the salad,” Mndeni says.

“Who?” Busikhaya looks up with his eyes narrowed.

“Someone sitting behind you. No, you idiot.”

“Get a wife who'll pass things to you.”

Gosh, is this even necessary?

“I'm already a husband to four beautiful wives and a

father to seven children. What more could I ask from God?" Mndeni says.

He has no intentions of settling down, they just need to make peace with it.

"We have a request to make," Zanamuhla starts.

Heads rise up, eyebrows are lifted and frowns are furrowed.

"We're listening," Mndeni. This dude cracks me up. He never takes anything seriously.

"We want a cosmetic shop," Ntobe says.

They look lost.

"Here in the village, with a salon at the side," Vuyiswa says.

Now they get it but they're still confused, their wives are meant to stay at home and make a call whenever they need something.

"And we'll personally manage it," I add.

Mndeni raises his glass up.

"Phambili mbokodo!"

He gets dead stares.

“Why?” Ngcwethi asks, looking at his wife.

“What do you mean “why”? We want a cosmetic shop and we want to run it. We can't spend the rest of our lives sitting at home like this and doing nothing. Your children will drive us crazy,” she says.

“But...” Ntobe silences Busikhaya with one look. There's no but here and by the look of things Mnotho has no problem with this idea. It's better than me whining about Johannesburg every night, right?

“Beer, anyone?” Vuyiswa asks.

Deep sighs! We have reached the end of this discussion and we're all in agreement, aren't we?

It's been a long journey. Good and bad things happened along the way, but at the end of the day we're all one big family and we have each other's backs. The most important thing is that we're raising a pure generation, our children won't have to go through what their fathers went through. It took tough decisions, risks and sacrifices.

(It's been a good journey warriors. Thank you so much for engaging with me on this imagination. Taking your precious time to share the story with your friends, commenting and liking. I had a great time writing this one, you're one great audience and I hope we'll always have this good relationship. Keep in mind that this page's name will change to my name; Nelly Page and by 13h00 we'll have a new profile picture and the prologue of our next story. I love you so so much )